

Selected Issues for Short Term Observers of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections

9 April 2026

1. Introduction

The 2026 parliamentary elections in Hungary are taking place in a highly polarised political environment. While the technical administration of elections is generally assessed as professional and capable,¹ a range of structural and contextual factors shape the conditions under which electoral competition takes place.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM) has noted that election preparations are proceeding in line with legal requirements and that stakeholders generally express confidence in the technical capacity of the election administration.² At the same time, longstanding and recurring concerns relate to the broader campaign environment, including the separation between state and party, campaign finance transparency, and media conditions.³

In this context, observers may encounter an electoral process in which formal procedures are largely followed, while key challenges relate to the broader framework within which the process unfolds.

2. Structural Context

2.1 Blurring of state and party functions

Concerns regarding the overlap between state activities and the ruling party's campaign have been consistently raised by ODIHR and other stakeholders. According to the ODIHR EOM, many interlocutors pointed to a "lack of separation between state messages, activities, and resources, and the ruling party's campaign," with government communications coinciding with campaign messaging.⁴

This dynamic reflects a broader pattern identified in previous elections, where the distinction between public information and partisan communication has been blurred.

2.2 Campaign finance and third-party activity

Recent legislative changes, including the removal of campaign spending limits, have further altered the campaign finance framework.⁵ At the same time, longstanding shortcomings remain, including the

¹ OSCE ODIHR EOM Interim Report, 27 March 2026 [ODIHR Interim Report], https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/HUN%20Parliamentary%20Elections%202026%20-%20Interim%20Report_27.03.2026.pdf, [ODIHR Interim Report] p.1.

² ODIHR Interim Report, p. 1.

³ ODIHR Interim Report, pp. 1-2., also HHC. *Threat Assessment of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections*. https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/12/2026_HU_Elections_Threat_Assessment_final_15122025.pdf [Threat Assessment], p. 3.

⁴ ODIHR Interim Report, p. 2., also HHC. *Flash Report: Key developments ahead of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections*., https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/04/HHC_FlashReport_01042026.pdf, [Flash Report] pp. 2-4.

⁵ Threat Assessment, p. 8., also Interim Report, pp. 2, 10-11.

absence of requirements to report campaign finances before election day and the lack of effective sanctions, which together limit transparency and lead to further distortion of the uneven playing field.

2.3 Media and information environment

The media landscape is characterised by structural imbalances, including concentration of ownership, the role of state advertising, and the lack of balanced, impartial reporting of public service media.⁶

Independent and critical media (mainly online) operate alongside a significantly larger pro-government media sector, resulting in an uneven distribution of reach, visibility, and resources. Interlocutors reported to ODIHR uneven access to information and local media environments often dominated by pro-government narratives.⁷

2.4 Oversight bodies and legal remedies

Election-related complaints and appeals are formally available within a structured legal framework. However, concerns have been raised regarding their practical effectiveness. The National Election Commission (NEC) plays a key role in resolving election-related disputes. It is the sole legal forum for appeals and for complaints (objections) in cases concerning more than one single-member constituency. Decisions made by the NEC may be challenged through applications for judicial review before the Kúria (Supreme Court). Kúria judgments can be brought to the Constitutional Court.⁸

As a body that is fully politically appointed, the NEC even supports and enforces the disappearing line between the state, the government, and the party. Government-leaning NEC members are always in majority, leading to an emptying out of the decision process. This is exacerbated by the fact that the NEC members themselves do not formulate the decisions and their reasonings. Members of the NEC who are delegated by parties standing for election without a current parliamentary group do not have the right to vote. Decisions on complaints regarding violations during the campaign period, on Election Day and regarding the results are made without their votes. National minority self-governments lost their right to delegate members to the NEC.

The NEC issues non-binding guidelines to promote a uniform understanding of the legislation among all election commissions. However, the NEC's own practices are often inconsistent, showing a loose interpretation of the law when high-level national cases are at stake and favouring the government.⁹

A significant proportion of complaints submitted to the NEC have been rejected on formal grounds, and that sanctions have not been applied in a dissuasive manner.¹⁰ Regarding a motion to put on the agenda of the NEC that it seizes the relevant authorities to examine credible reports of malign foreign interference in the election process, a 5 to 5 tied vote was broke by the President of the NEC voting against the motion.¹¹

⁶ ODIHR Interim Report, pp. 11-12, also Threat Assessment, pp. 9-12. For in-depth analysis, see the work of Mérték Média Monitor at <https://mertek.eu/en/>.

⁷ ODIHR Interim Report, p. 12.

⁸ See examples of the resulting ping-pong between the Kúria and the Constitutional Court in Flash Report, p. 4.

⁹ HHC. *The case of the National Election Commission*. https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/12/National-election-commission_12122025.pdf.

¹⁰ ODIHR Interim Report, p. 2.

¹¹ HHC. *Foreign Interference Risks and Institutional Responses Ahead of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections*. <https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/03/Foreign-interference-and-institutional-responses.pdf>, [Foreign Interference], p. 2.

3. Selected Issues Relevant for Observation

3.1 Use of administrative resources

The use of public resources and official functions in the context of electoral campaigning has been identified as a key concern. ODIHR interlocutors have highlighted the absence of explicit legal restrictions on campaigning by public officials and the lack of prohibitions on the use of administrative resources.¹²

The campaign period has provided extreme examples of using state resources to advance the political interests of the governing majority, including a reporting by Direkt36 on covert intelligence operation directed at the largest opposition party.¹³ Since the publication of the investigative report on 24 March, a victim of the operation has also gone public, and further information on the involvement of Constitution Protection Office, Hungary's domestic security intelligence agency.

3.2 Third-party and non-transparent campaigning structures

The role of actors formally outside political parties has become increasingly prominent. The absence of clear regulatory frameworks for third-party campaigning, including online activity, contributes to limited transparency regarding the origin, coordination, and financing of campaign activities.

In its 2022 audit of campaign financing, the Hungarian State Audit Office (SAO) set out a methodology for assessing third-party involvement in election campaigns. According to this framework, activities by third-party actors may constitute prohibited in-kind support where they occur during the campaign period, are capable of influencing voter choice, directly benefit a political party, and relieve that party of campaign-related expenditure.

Recent developments raise questions regarding the consistent application of these standards. The Digital Civic Circles (DCC), a network initiated and promoted by senior government and ruling party figures, has organised large-scale political events aligned with the governing Fidesz–KDNP alliance. These events have featured party leaders and candidates, explicit electoral messaging, and voter mobilisation, including during the official campaign period.

A public interest disclosure submitted by the HHC to the SAO argued that such activities may meet the criteria for third-party campaign expenditure in direct support of a political party. The SAO partially dismissed the submission, referring to a December 2025 amendment to party financing rules, which it interpreted as not prohibiting this form of financing.¹⁴

3.3 Foreign interference and institutional responses

Since early March 2026, investigative reporting has raised concerns about potential foreign influence operations targeting the elections. These reports have referred to warnings from European intelligence sources and alleged links to Russian political influence structures.

¹² ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report on the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/01/HUN%20parliamentary%202026_NAM%20report_21.01.2026.pdf, [ODIHR NAM] p. 2.

¹³ Flash Report, p.2.

¹⁴ Flash Report, pp. 3-4.

Institutional responses to these reports have been limited. For example, the National Election Commission rejected a proposal to formally engage competent national security bodies in relation to the allegations, and subsequent discussions in parliamentary oversight structures have not resulted in public clarification.

On 9 March 2026, the parliamentary National Security Committee reportedly discussed the issue of Russian interference at a closed session. Press reports citing a committee member indicated that Hungarian intelligence services had indeed been warned by a foreign partner agency that Russian individuals would enter Hungary in order to interfere in the election. According to the same reports, Hungarian intelligence authorities stated that, after reviewing the information, the individuals named in the warning were not present in Hungary.¹⁵

3.4 Local-level dynamics

At the local level, stakeholders have raised concerns about pressure on voters, including in relation to employment, access to services, or local authority structures. ODIHR interlocutors also noted concerns about vote buying and intimidation, particularly in certain regions.¹⁶

Recent reporting and a newly released documentary, *The Price of the Vote*, highlight allegations of widespread and systemic vote-buying and coercion practices in economically vulnerable communities, particularly in north-eastern Hungary. Based on more than 60 interviews with local actors, the film details a range of methods used to support candidates of the governing parties in single-member constituencies, including direct vote-buying, in-kind incentives, and coercive practices linked to access to social benefits, public services, or public employment. These accounts suggest the existence of broader systems of dependency and control in small communities, where local political and informal actors play a central role in mobilising and influencing voters. The reporting further indicates that such practices may be embedded in entrenched patronage networks and, in some cases, are accompanied by inconsistent or selective law enforcement responses to related criminal activity.¹⁷

Similar concerns had already been documented in ODIHR's 2022 final election observation report, which referred to longstanding allegations of vote-buying and pressure on voters, particularly in rural areas and in connection with public employment schemes, even if such practices were not directly observed by the mission.¹⁸

3.6 Postal voting, national minorities, and voter registration safeguards

Hungary provides for postal voting for citizens without a registered address in Hungary. Those having a registered address in Hungary but staying abroad on election day can vote at Hungarian embassies. Voters without a registered address can only vote on the national list. ODIHR notes that while confidence in the accuracy of the central voter register is generally high, concerns persist regarding the safeguards applicable to postal voting and the potential for misuse.¹⁹ As registration for the postal

¹⁵ Foreign Interference, p. 2., also ODIHR Interim Report, pp. 2 and 9.

¹⁶ ODIHR NAM, p. 2.

¹⁷ *The Price of the Vote*, available with EN subtitles <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCwQR5HRWR8>.

¹⁸ OSCE ODIHR EOM Final Report of the 2022 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, <https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/2/6/523568.pdf>, pp. 3, 21, 25.

¹⁹ ODIHR Interim Report, p. 1.

voting registry is valid for 10 years, and ballots are sent in unregistered mail, there is no possibility to ensure that the eligible person casts the ballot (or that the person is still alive).

Following the 2022 parliamentary elections, ODIHR has noted that “the differing modalities for out-of-country voting challenged the principle of equal suffrage, and the postal voting procedures do not include adequate safeguards to ensure the integrity and reliability of the process.”²⁰ None of the related recommendations made by ODIHR were implemented.²¹

Hungary’s electoral system provides for the participation of recognised national minorities through dedicated minority lists. The system was found in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights in 2023, but no changes have been introduced since then.²² Voters who register as belonging to a national minority may vote for a minority list instead of a national party list. Such registration must be made in advance and can only be modified up to a statutory deadline prior to election day.²³

Recent reports have raised concerns regarding the integrity of this registration process, particularly in relation to the Roma minority list. According to publicly available information, a significant number of voters may have been registered on the Roma minority list without their knowledge or informed consent.²⁴

These concerns are relevant in the current electoral context for two reasons. First, while in previous elections only the German minority list included a sufficient number of registered voters to reach the threshold required to obtain a parliamentary mandate, the Roma minority list in 2026, for the first time, surpassed the required number (while the German will most likely not do so).²⁵

Second, and of direct relevance for voters on election day, individuals registered as minority voters are not entitled to vote for national party lists. Past experience indicates that some voters have only become aware of their minority registration status at the polling station, when they did not receive a national party list ballot. At that stage, it is no longer possible to modify registration, as deregistration must be completed several days prior to election day.

²⁰ OSCE ODIHR EOM Final Report of the 2022 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, <https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/2/6/523568.pdf>, p. 4.

²¹ OSCE ODIHR EOM Final Report of the 2022 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, <https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/2/6/523568.pdf>, p. 40.

²² *Bakirdzi and E.C. v. Hungary*, Application no. 49636/14 and 65678/14, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-220672>

²³ ODIHR NAM, p. 6.

²⁴ See e.g. <https://444.hu/2026/04/03/tobb-szaz-gyanus-regisztraciott-talaltak-egy-budapesti-kerulet-roma-valasztoi-nevjegyzekeben>

²⁵ For detailed data, see Political Capital’s interactive datasets: https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=3557

Selected further reading

Electoral integrity, risks, level playing field

[Democratic Backsliding: The State of Electoral Integrity in Hungary](#) (HHC, November 2025)

[Threat Assessment of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections](#) (HHC, December 2025)

[Foreign Interference Risks and Institutional Responses Ahead of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections – Briefing Note](#) (HHC, March 2026)

[Flash Report Ahead of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections](#) (HHC, April 2026)

Legal framework and election administration

[Amendments to the Hungarian election-related legal framework](#) (HHC, December 2025)

[The case of the Hungarian National Election Commission](#) (HHC, December 2025)

[European Commission for Democracy Through Law of the Council of Europe \(Venice Commission\) – Opinion on Act LXXIX Of 2024 Amending Certain Laws Relating to Elections](#) (June 2025)

[Joint communication on the execution of the ECtHR judgment in Bakirdzi and E.C. v. Hungary](#) (HHC and HCLU, January 2026)

Related, broader rule of law concerns

[Contributions of Hungarian CSOs to the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report](#) (HHC et al., January 2026)

[Deficiencies of the Law-Making Process in Hungary](#) (HHC, August 2025)

[The last piece of the puzzle? An assessment of the NHRI’s performance](#) (HHC and Háttér Society, February 2025)

Previous monitoring and related materials

[OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Interim Report – Hungary Parliamentary Elections 2026](#)

[OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report – Hungary Parliamentary Elections 2026](#)

[OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report – Hungary Parliamentary Elections 2022](#)

[Hungarian Citizen Election Report – European Parliament and Local Elections 2024](#)