



A GUIDE TO THE EUROPEAN AND LOCAL ELECTIONS IN HUNGARY

Key information on the electoral systems and voting method



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Table of Contents

Basic information	3
European Parliament Election	4
Electoral districts	4
Nomination	4
Mandate calculation	4
Calculating seat share using a d'Hondt-matrix	4
Election of local councils, assemblies, and mayors	5
Election of mayors and the mayor of Budapest	5
Election of local councils in settlements with less than 10 thousand residents	5
Election of local councils in settlements with more than 10 thousand residents (along with Budapest districts)	6
The election of the 19 county assemblies	7
Election of the Budapest Assembly	8
The elections of national minority self-governments	8
The election of local minority self-governments	8
The election of regional minority self-governments	9
The election of minority self-governments on the national level	9
Voters by the types of elections	10
Voting at the place of residence or at another polling station	11
Local Elections: Voting at domicile or temporary residence	11
European Parliament Elections: Voting at any Hungarian polling station or at a foreign representation	11

Basic information

Never before have local and European elections been held on the same day. They could have been in 2014, the first time the two elections were held in the same year, as the term of office for mayors and municipal representatives was increased from 4 to 5 years. Even in 2014 and 2019, the two elections were held a few months apart. In 2024, the two elections will be held on the same day for the first time, and this is expected to remain the case in the long term.

There is no limit on campaign spending. Unlike parliamentary elections, there is no legal limit on campaign spending – anyone can spend as much as they can. Neither candidates nor nominating organizations receive central campaign funding (in either election). In this light, the fact that the campaign officially lasts only 50 days is of little significance. In fact, it starts much earlier, and it is no exaggeration to say that Hungarians live in a permanent election campaign.

Foreign funding cannot be used in the campaign. While only political parties can put up a list for the European Parliament elections, both parties and associations can put up candidates and lists for local elections. All candidates, associations and parties may not use foreign funding “for the purpose of influencing or attempting to influence the will of the electorate”.

Multiple nominations are possible. A voter may sign the nomination form of several candidates or lists, including lists for the European Parliament, candidates for the local government, mayor candidates and county lists.

Ballots	Budapest	Cities with county rights	Settlements with a population above 10 thousand (cities with county rights not included)	Settlements with a population below 10 thousand
Mayoral candidates	✓	✓	✓	✓
Candidates for Budapest mayor	✓			
Single-member district candidates	✓	✓	✓	
Multi-member list candidates				✓
County/Budapest assembly lists	✓		✓	✓
European Parliament party lists	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total number of ballots	5	3	4	4

*The table does not include ballots for the election of national minority self-governments. Voters for the national minority municipal elections receive an additional one, two or three ballot papers – see details under the subheading *The elections of national minority self-governments.**

European Parliament Election

A party list system is used to elect the 21 Hungarian members of the 720-seat European Parliament.

Electoral districts

In the European Parliament election, the whole country constitutes one electoral district.

Nomination

Lists can be set up by nominating parties – without territorial restrictions – needing to collect 20 thousand signatures.

Mandate calculation

Party lists receive seats proportionally based on their share of the vote using a d'Hondt-matrix. The electoral threshold is 5%, regardless of the number of nominating organizations.

Calculating seat share using a d'Hondt-matrix

We enter the names of the lists that passed the electoral threshold in the header of a table. On the vertical axis, we list natural numbers starting with '1'. In the first row of the table, we indicate the number of votes collected by lists, then half of this number in the next row, a third of them in the third row, and so on. The first party list mandate is given to the party with the highest number in the chart. We select this number and then go to the largest of the remaining numbers, and the party that achieved this number receives the second mandate. We carry this out until all party-list mandates are distributed.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	1,231,111	1,097,771	541,359	165,159	131,695
2	615,556	548,886	270,680	82,580	65,848
3	410,370	365,924	180,453	55,053	43,898
4	307,778	274,443	135,340	41,290	32,924
5	246,222	219,554	108,272	33,032	26,339
6	205,185	182,962	90,227	27,527	21,949
7	175,873	156,824	77,337	23,594	18,814
8	153,889	137,221	67,670	20,645	16,462
9	136,790	121,975	60,151	18,351	14,633
10	123,111	109,777	54,136	16,516	13,170

Example of mandate distribution using a d'Hondt-matrix (seats available: 21). Result: A: 9 seats, B: 8 seats, C: 3 seats, D: 1 seat

Election of local councils, assemblies, and mayors

Election of mayors and the mayor of Budapest

In all 3177 Hungarian settlements (more precisely, in the 3154 settlements and the 23 districts of Budapest), voters elect their mayors directly. In addition, voters also elect the Budapest mayor in the capital.

Nomination

To be a mayoral candidate candidates must collect a certain number of signatures depending on the size of the settlement.

- In settlements with less than 10 thousand population, candidates must receive recommendations from 3% of the electorate.
- In settlements and Budapest districts with a population between 10 and 100 thousand, candidates must receive recommendations from 300 voters.
- In settlements and Budapest districts with more than 100 thousand population, candidates must receive recommendations from 500 voters.

Budapest mayoral candidates must collect signatures from 5000 voters.

Mandate calculation

In the one-round mayoral election, the mayor will be the candidate who receives the most votes, meaning that winners do not need to gain more than half of the votes. These are winner-takes-all elections, where votes cast for the losing candidates are lost.

Election of local councils in settlements with less than 10 thousand residents

Of the 3177, in 3011 settlements a multi-member list is used.

Electoral districts

A single electoral district consists of settlements with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants.

Nomination

A candidate must receive signatures from 1% of the electorate.

Mandate calculation

Instead of party lists, constituents vote for as many candidates as there are open council seats. The candidates with the most votes will be elected as representatives; for example, if the council consists of six seats, the six candidates with the most votes will be elected as representatives.

Election of local councils in settlements with more than 10 thousand residents (along with Budapest districts)

In the 143 settlements (mostly cities) that belong in this category and in the 23 Budapest districts, voters use a mixed electoral system to select their local representatives. Constituents vote for individual candidates in their electoral districts, and votes cast for losing candidates are aggregated into a compensation list.

Electoral districts

Each settlement has a minimum of eight electoral districts, the number of which gradually rises in proportion to the population. With a population of roughly 192 thousand, Debrecen is now the largest city in Hungary, excluding Budapest. The city is divided into 23 separate electoral districts. Therefore, the 143 settlements are divided into eight to twenty-three electoral districts.

The number of compensation mandates shifts based on the same approach, thus the number incrementally increases from the minimum three mandates with the settlements' size. . In 2024 Debrecen will have nine compensation list seats. Hence, these compensation list mandates will range between three and nine in the settlements in question.

Nomination

A single-member district candidate must collect signatures from at least 1% of the voters living in the constituency.

Those nominating organizations can assemble a compensation list that has candidates in at least two-thirds of electoral districts.

Mandate calculation

Constituents vote only for single-member district candidates (meaning they do not vote for compensation lists). The candidate with the most valid votes will be the representative for the particular district.

Compensation seats are distributed among the lists based on the aggregated number of so-called fragment votes. This is done by aggregating the votes cast for the losing single-member district candidates, and allocating the compensation list seats in proportion to these votes, using the Sainte-Laguë method.

- In 2024, 1586 single-member district seats and 621 compensation list seats will be distributed nationally. Therefore, roughly 72% of the seats will be allocated using majoritarian logic, with the 28% of seats that are assigned based on lists serving as a little counterbalance to the distortions of this system.

Calculating seat share using the Sainte-Laguë method

The Sainte-Laguë method differs from the d'Hondt-matrix described above in a way that only the odd numbers need to be written on the vertical axis, and the divisions are then performed accordingly. Parties and associations with lower (but not insignificant) support are thus more likely to win seats, while formations with higher support are less likely to be over-represented.

	A	B	C	D
1	11,037	9,500	9,111	3,155
3	3,679	3,167	3,037	1,052
5	2,207	1,900	1,822	631
7	1,577	1,357	1,302	451

Example of mandate distribution using the Sainte-Laguë method (number of available seats: 6). Result: A: 2 seats, B: 2 seats, C: 1 seats, D: 1 seats

The election of the 19 county assemblies

The members of the county assemblies are elected in a proportional electoral system.

Electoral districts

The whole of a county constitutes an electoral district (not including cities with county rights whose residents cannot vote for county lists).

The number of seats in county assemblies varies depending on the population of the county in the following manner:

- Up to 400,000 residents: one representative for every 20,000 residents, but at least 15 representatives
- Up to 700,000 residents: 20 representatives, beyond 400,000 residents 1 representative after every 30,000 residents
- Above 700,000 residents: 30 representatives, beyond 700,000 residents 1 representative after every 40,000 residents

Nomination

To submit a list, nominating organizations must collect signatures from at least 0,5% of the voters in the county (not counting voters in cities with county rights).

Mandate calculation

County list mandates are distributed based on the d'Hondt-matrix. The threshold is 5% for a single nominating organization, 10% for a joint list of two organizations, and 15% for lists containing more than two organizations.

The county assemblies do not include representatives from the 25 cities with county rights. As a consequence, some 1.5 million voters have no opportunity to express their party sympathies directly on a county list.

- The 25 cities with county status: Baja (since 2022), Békéscsaba, Debrecen, Dunaújváros, Eger, Érd, Esztergom (since 2022), Győr, Hódmezővásárhely, Kaposvár, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Nagykanizsa, Nyíregyháza, Pécs, Salgótarján, Sopron, Szeged, Székesfehérvár, Szekszárd, Szolnok, Szombathely, Tatabánya, Veszprém, Zalaegerszeg.

Election of the Budapest Assembly

32 out of the 33 representatives are elected in a proportional electoral system. The mayor of Budapest is automatically a member of the assembly.

Electoral districts

The whole of the capital city constitutes an electoral district.

Nomination

Parties and associations can submit a list by either (1) fielding a Budapest mayoral candidate, or (2) fielding mayoral candidates in a minimum of 3 of the city's 23 districts.

Mandate calculation

The Budapest assembly lists receive seats using a d'Hondt-matrix proportionally to their vote share. Regardless of the number of nominating organization, the threshold is 5%.

The elections of national minority self-governments

There are thirteen recognized national minorities in Hungary: Armenian, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, and Ukrainian. There are three levels of minority elections: local, regional and national.

The election of local minority self-governments

Calling for the election

A general election of local minority self-government shall be called if:

- The number of persons belonging to the given nationality in the settlement reaches 25 persons per nationality or
- The local self-government of the given minority has been formed in the settlement, and there are at least 20 inhabitants of the given national minority or
- The settlement had a minority public educational institution, a minority vocational training institution, or a public education institution that provided national minority education on 1 December of the year preceding the year of the general election.

The number of inhabitants belonging to a national minority is based on the latest census figures.

Electoral districts

In a general election of local minority self-government, the whole settlement constitutes a single electoral district regardless of its population.

The number of representatives is 3 if the number of voters on the national minority register is less than one hundred or 5 if the number of voters is one hundred or more.

Recommendation

To be a local minority self-government candidate, the nominated representative must collect the recommendation of at least 5 % (but at least 5 voters) of the voters on the minority register at the time of the election.

Mandate calculation

The election is carried out in a so-called “individual list” election system: constituents may vote for a maximum number of candidates equal to the number of representatives who can be elected (i.e. a maximum of 3 or 5). The representative mandates are awarded to the candidates with the most votes.

The election of regional minority self-governments

Calling for the election

An election of regional representatives of minority self-government shall be called if elections are held in at least 10 settlements in the county (or in the capital).

Electoral districts

The county or the capital constitutes a single electoral district.

Recommendation

A minority organization may submit a national-minority list if it has put forward a candidate in at least 10 % of the elections for the election of representatives of local minority self-government in the capital or county and has collected the recommendations of at least 2 % of the national minority electorate.

Mandate calculation

There are 7 members of the regional minority self-government.

The minority lists allocate the mandates in proportion to the votes cast. The threshold is 5% for a single nominating organization, 10% for a joint list of two organizations, and 15% for lists containing more than two organizations.

The election of minority self-governments on the national level

Calling for the election

The election of national minority self-governments will be held under any circumstances for all national minorities.

Electoral districts

The whole country constitutes one electoral district.

Recommendation

A minority organization may submit a national-minority list if it has put forward a candidate in at least 10 % of the elections in the elections of local minority self-government representatives and has collected the recommendation of at least 2 % of the minority voters.

Mandate calculation

The number of representatives that can be elected varies according to the number of national minority voters, gradually ranging from 15 to 47.

The minority lists allocate the mandates in proportion to the votes cast. The threshold is 5% for a single nominating organization, 10% for a joint list of two organizations, and 15% for lists containing more than two organizations.

Voters by the types of elections

The National Election Office updates the electoral register daily so one can see how many constituents are eligible to cast a vote on a given day – if there was an election that day. You may find the data below dated 21 April 2024.

	Parliamentary	Local	European Parliament
Hungarian citizen with Hungarian residence*	7,680,563	7,680,563	7,680,563
Eligible for postal voting**	438,003	0	125,441
Citizen of another EU Member State with a Hungarian domicile***	0	137,197	3,632
Refugees and citizens holding the right of continuous residence in Hungary****	0	35,517	0
Total	8,118,566	7,853,277	7,809,636

The number of voters in the electoral register by the types of elections. Source: National Election Office, 21 April 2024

* Every Hungarian citizen residing in Hungary may vote in all three types of elections.

** Those Hungarian citizens who do not reside in Hungary can vote by post. Most of them are Hungarians living in the neighboring countries (primarily in Romania and Serbia), but not exclusively: according to the National Electoral Office, this electorate is spread over 120 countries. Notably, there is a significant difference between the number of citizens who can vote by post in the National Assembly and European Parliament elections. This difference is because no EU citizens can vote twice in the European Parliament election. For instance, a dual Romanian-Hungarian citizen residing in Transylvania can vote for the EP lists in Romania but not in Hungary. The figure of 125,441 excludes voters living in EU Member States, including Hungarians from Transylvania, but does include constituents from Serbia, as it is not an EU Member State. This explains the over 300 thousand difference in voters between the National Assembly and the European Parliament column. We can see a zero in the local election column because those citizens who do not have a Hungarian residence cannot vote for a municipal representative or mayor.

*** EU citizens residing in Hungary can vote in municipal and European Parliament elections. The National Electoral Office automatically registers EU citizens living in Hungary for the local elections, but the Office only registers those for the European Parliament election who specifically request it. When the Office registers an EU citizen for the European Parliament election, it immediately informs the electoral authority of the country concerned of the entry so they can remove that person from the electoral roll of that country. This way, it is not possible for any EU citizens to vote in the EP election in two different countries.

**** According to the Fundamental Law, “all adult persons holding refugee status or the right of continuous residence in Hungary shall have the right to vote on local ballots for the election of council members and mayors.” The concept of “the right of continuous residence in Hungary” was introduced at the end of 2023, primarily covering persons previously referred to as “settled persons” and “immigrants”. As the table indicates, they can only vote in municipal elections.

Voting at the place of residence or at another polling station

Local Elections: Voting at domicile or temporary residence

Hungarian citizens who have a temporary residence in addition to a domicile can choose where they wish to vote. By default, all Hungarian domiciles are automatically registered in the voters’ register of the polling district of their domicile, but they can re-register in the voters’ register of the polling districts of their temporary residence. This also means that the re-registered citizens will vote for their local representatives and mayor in their temporary place of residence and will cast their European Parliament ballot there. Importantly, this possibility only applies to the place of temporary residence declared up to 30 days before the election is called (11 February 2024) - this prevents those wishing to establish temporary residence during the campaign to be able to vote in battleground constituencies in a close election. (However, the electoral offices will enter domicile changes in the voters’ register until 7 June.)

Absentee voting is not possible for local elections. Therefore, constituents not at their domicile or temporary residence cannot vote for local and mayoral candidates.

European Parliament Elections: Voting at any Hungarian polling station or at a foreign representation

Absentee voting is possible for European Parliament elections. Citizens (having a residence in Hungary) can choose where they wish to cast their votes in the country; they can re-register at the designated polling station in any settlement and vote in the EP election – but not in the local (or the local minority self-government) elections.

Similarly, if Hungarian citizens plan to be abroad on election day, then they can request to be entered into the designated electoral roll of foreign representations so they can cast their ballots there. However, they will only receive ballots for the European Parliament elections and not those for local elections.

This guide is a comprehensive and neutral overview of the Hungarian electoral systems for local, European Parliament, and national minority self-government elections.

You may find our election-related briefings here¹.

We prepared a similar guide for the parliamentary system in 2022, which is available here².

¹ https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?category_list=1&category_id=32&category_gb=Elections

² https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_read=1&article_id=2980