

# HUNGARIAN CITIZEN ELECTION REPORT II.

## GENERAL ELECTIONS

HUNGARY  
April 2026



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## SUMMARY

On 12 April 2026, more than eight million eligible Hungarian voters were called to elect 199 members of the next National Assembly. Among them were approximately 500,000 postal voters without a registered address in Hungary and 74,000 registered national minority voters. The election produced a record turnout of 79.56% and was won by a landslide by Péter Magyar's TISZA party, which thereby ended 16 years of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz-KDNP rule. In a heavily distorting electoral system, TISZA obtained 53.2% of the votes and secured 141 parliamentary seats (71%), achieving a constitutional supermajority. Fidesz-KDNP received 2.4 million votes (38.6%) and 52 seats; the Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (*Our Homeland Movement*) received 359,000 votes (5.6%) and six parliamentary seats.

The elections were conducted in an environment characterised by a systemic blurring of the boundary between state and party. Public resources, institutional capacities, and official communications were consistently deployed to the advantage of the governing party, Fidesz. Coordinated, publicly funded messaging and mobilisation – enabled by a permissive legal environment with weak oversight and limited judicial scrutiny – allowed for continuous campaigning and the circumvention of procedural safeguards applicable to political actors. Collectively, these dynamics created a structurally uneven electoral framework that reinforced the advantages of the governing majority, constrained effective remedies, and undermined the conditions for genuinely fair and competitive elections.

The technical conduct of the elections was adequate: voting, administration, IT systems, and public information all functioned efficiently. Nevertheless, concerns persisted regarding the independence, composition, and transparency of electoral bodies. Legislative amendments affecting the National Election Commission (NEC) weakened procedural guarantees, while shortcomings in voter registration, candidate registration, and national minority voting undermined equal participation. Reported abuses – including misuse of personal data and irregularities in the postal voting process – exposed vulnerabilities affecting the integrity of the electoral process.

Since 2022, the electoral framework has undergone a series of amendments that further eroded fair competition. These were adopted without transparent or inclusive public consultation, while key international recommendations were not implemented. Constituency boundary changes, the abolition of campaign spending limits, increased parliamentary group subsidies, and measures restricting transparency and oversight collectively reinforced the structural advantages of the governing party.

The political structure of the Orbán system rested on the continuous demonstration of a societal majority. That majority had been so weakened by the economic crises of recent years that popular discontent could no longer be concealed, and the system collapsed. The campaign took place largely in the online sphere alongside cross-country tours, with extensive use of artificial intelligence, disinformation, and false narratives. Foreign actors – primarily Russia – made significant attempts to interfere in the electoral campaign.

While Fidesz had previously dominated social media through political advertising, the ban on political advertising introduced before the 2026 election campaign prompted the governing party to revise its strategy. The party attempted to compensate for weaker engagement through a deluge of content; Fidesz politicians posted twice as much, yet the reach of TISZA candidates was two to three times greater. The pro-government media, which accounts for over 80% of traditional media in the country, presented the two competing political sides in a markedly one-sided manner, while independent outlets reported largely in a balanced fashion, with a slight inclination towards the opposition.

The 2026 Citizen Election Report is a joint initiative of the most prominent Hungarian civil society organisations active in election monitoring: 20k – Free Vote, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), Hungarian Helsinki Committee, K-Monitor, Mérték Media Monitor, and Political Capital. Its aim is to provide an authentic account of the electoral process from a Hungarian perspective, based on analyses by experts with decades of experience and on the personal observations of hundreds of ballot counters, observers, and voters who followed the voting process.

## POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The 2026 parliamentary election cycle effectively began immediately after the 2024 European Parliament and local government elections. Having burst onto the political scene almost from nowhere during those elections, TISZA moved swiftly to build its campaign for 2026. As the election drew closer and the party's growing strength became apparent, opposition parties faced a stark choice: enter the race and risk – if the result was close – siphoning votes from TISZA and inadvertently helping to keep Fidesz in power, or stand aside and thereby forfeit further state funding and undermining their own long-term viability. The far-right Mi Hazánk, consistently polling near the parliamentary threshold, hoped to play kingmaker in case of a close result. The Democratic Coalition (DK), forced to reinvent itself following the resignation of former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, chose to contest the election, as did the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), which had achieved moderate success in local politics. The remaining parties all withdrew from the contest, citing their desire to maximise the chances of a democratic transition.

Meanwhile, Fidesz continued to dismantle the rule of law and intensify social polarisation. The regime sought to secure its own survival by repeatedly restructuring the electoral system (see also the section '*Legal Framework*'), launching new attacks on the independent media and civil society (e.g., through the Sovereignty Protection Act, see *ibid.*), and tightening its grip on a stagnating economy. In the end, the regime's own economic failure became one of the primary reasons for its loss of majority. Since autumn 2022, the majority of Hungarian voters had experienced a deterioration in living standards; growth stalled, and from 2023 onwards Hungary recorded the European Union's highest inflation rate, while public services – healthcare, education, transport, social welfare – deteriorated severely. Across the widest range of social groups, the majority of voters simply no longer felt it was in their interest to sustain the system. **The desire for stability was overridden by the desire for change, particularly among young people, who participated in the election in overwhelming numbers.**

A decisive factor was that the dissatisfied majority that had formed against the government did not remain disorganised. From spring 2024, Péter Magyar and TISZA constituted a powerful, anti-establishment political alternative to Viktor Orbán's Fidesz – one the regime proved incapable of fragmenting or weakening. This was due in part to the erosion of the governing party's own ideological foundations, beginning with the clemency scandal that erupted in 2024 and culminating in its subordination to Russian interests, which had become evident by spring 2026. The combination of a strong leader and a grassroots movement with a strong rural base created a unique constellation in which the opposition was able to prevail despite operating under profoundly unequal conditions.

Although the intelligence scandal targeting TISZA that emerged in spring 2026 suggests that the conflation of state and party extended beyond communications and financial cooperation to the deployment of intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, authoritarian regimes of this type maintain power through informational rather than coercive means. The effectiveness of such means is, however, finite. The information machinery of the Orbán regime was unable to override the substantial popular discontent channelled by TISZA; its reach and effectiveness declined.<sup>1</sup> The fact that **a traditional political tool – the nationwide in-person campaigning that enabled direct contact with voters – proved more powerful than the informational apparatus** played a significant role.

## ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The period preceding the 2026 elections saw the first post-truth electoral campaign in Hungarian electoral history. The governing party's central narrative – an imminent war with Ukraine – along with the majority of its sub-messages, were works of fabrication utterly detached from reality, based on false statements and fake documents. It was also the first campaign to take place largely in the digital and social media space, relying heavily on artificial intelligence and disinformation. Deepfake content and networks of fake profiles and bots played a major role in disseminating and amplifying campaign messages. The intervention attempts by numerous international actors at varying levels of intensity also represented a new phenomenon in Hungarian electoral campaigns.

Fidesz campaign narratives were primarily built on fearmongering and the amplification of anxiety, employing war rhetoric while disseminating disinformation about Ukraine and the European Union, and portraying Péter Magyar as a puppet of Brussels and Kyiv.

By contrast, TISZA's communications strategy centred on personal campaign events, Péter Magyar's videos and posts, and organic social media reach. Magyar consistently encouraged supporters to share his content, which generated a stronger organic reach than Fidesz-affiliated actors. The centrepiece of TISZA's campaign was the promise of a 'regime change' – an offer to address the dysfunction, incompetence, and corruption affecting the Hungarian state. In parallel, Magyar sought to situate Fidesz's abuses within the broader pattern of systemic corruption associated with Orbán's circles.

### *State-Party Fusion in the Campaign Environment*

The 2026 parliamentary elections were conducted in a campaign environment characterised by the extensive conflation of state and party activities. **Public resources, state communication infrastructures, and institutional capacities were consistently deployed in ways that benefited the governing party, providing it with a structural and entrenched advantage.**<sup>2</sup>

Coordinated messaging across government,<sup>3</sup> state institutions,<sup>4</sup> public authorities,<sup>5</sup> and state-owned companies<sup>6</sup> closely mirrored the narratives and priorities of the governing parties, including targeted attacks on opposition actors – in particular TISZA. State-funded communications campaigns – such as the 'National Petition' and the 'TISZA tax' consultation – were presented as official public information campaigns while functioning in practice as large-scale mobilisation instruments. In the pre-election period, voters regularly encountered such messaging through nationwide mailings, billboards, and public service media content, all financed from the state budget. The government used state databases containing personal email addresses – including the 'VakcinaInfo' database created for COVID-19 communications purposes – to disseminate party-political messages.<sup>7</sup>

Amendments to the Electoral Procedure Act introduced in 2018 had placed state communications outside the scope of campaign regulations, enabling continuous political messaging without campaign finance restrictions. Legal proceedings initiated to remedy this situation proved ineffective, allowing incumbent politicians to maintain disproportionate visibility and resource advantages while circumventing safeguards applicable to parties and candidates.<sup>8</sup>

The conflation of state and party extended beyond direct government communication to broader mobilisation networks (see also the section '*Campaign Financing*'). These processes were compounded by deficiencies in oversight and media pluralism. Public service media failed to provide balanced coverage and did not offer equal airtime to leading opposition actors (see also the section '*Media and Social Media*').<sup>9</sup>

Judicial oversight has been ineffective. In late March and early April, the Constitutional Court (CC) annulled, on multiple occasions, Kúria (Supreme Court) judgments that had found violations of electoral equality in cases involving public broadcasters and their social media activity. This back-

and-forth between the two courts produced unusually harsh dissenting opinions and judgments verging on absurdity.<sup>10</sup> The repeated annulment of substantively similar rulings across separate proceedings revealed a broader pattern in which the CC systematically neutralised efforts by courts to address structural imbalances, undermining the timely and effective adjudication of electoral disputes.<sup>11</sup> In one case, for instance, a complaint lodged on 8 March resulted in a (thus far) final Kúria judgment only after the elections, on 13 April 2026.<sup>12</sup>

Concerns regarding the instrumentalisation of state institutions further illustrate the depth of state-party fusion. Investigative reporting pointed to a potential covert intelligence operation targeting TISZA, in which Hungarian law enforcement and intelligence services may have been involved. This raises serious concerns about the potential deployment of coercive powers against political actors in the electoral context. Institutional responses to broader risks, including foreign interference, were lacking: proposals to involve counter-intelligence services were rejected,<sup>13</sup> and parliamentary scrutiny was largely absent,<sup>14</sup> undermining transparency and accountability and further eroding public trust.

Taken together, these practices point to a systemic pattern rather than isolated irregularities. **The combined use of state resources for political messaging, the integration of campaigning and mobilisation networks with state structures, and the selective application of legal and oversight mechanisms created a structurally uneven electoral environment.** This reinforced advantages of the governing party and undermined the conditions for genuinely fair and competitive elections.

### *Foreign Influence*

Given that Russia regarded the Orbán government as a key instrument in its hybrid war against the West, the Kremlin deployed various tools and methods to keep the government in power. The Orbán government was of particular importance to the Kremlin because, at the helm of a NATO and EU member state, it was capable of influencing and weakening Euro-Atlantic institutions.

**Russian interference and disinformation operations intensified progressively during the electoral campaign in an effort to assist the Orbán government's re-election.** According to investigative sources, the Kremlin supported covert political influence operations: experts with Russian intelligence ties intervened using methods similar to the hybrid strategies deployed in Moldova, including social media manipulation and amplification of messages already present in Hungarian public discourse that aligned with the governing party's narratives. Kremlin-linked actors also developed communications strategies portraying Viktor Orbán as a strong leader and his opponents as incompetent figures serving foreign interests. A leaked document indicated that Russian intelligence had even contemplated a 'false flag' operation – a staged assassination attempt – to influence the campaign.

The Kremlin also intervened in the electoral campaign through information operations. Russia conducted disinformation campaigns, including by launching the bot network known as 'Matryoshka'<sup>15</sup> and deploying fake TikTok accounts publishing AI-generated videos.<sup>16</sup> These activities served to exploit tensions between Ukraine and Hungary and attack Péter Magyar.

The Orbán government and the Kremlin are also presumed to have cooperated in two joint information operations. The Kremlin directly supported the Orbán government by facilitating the release of two Hungarian-born Ukrainian prisoners of war, who subsequently appeared at a Fidesz event. After Hungarian authorities seized a cash shipment lawfully in transit through Hungary from Austria to Ukraine, Kremlin-linked networks boosted the Fidesz communication campaign about an alleged 'Ukrainian gold convoy' by spreading fabricated images and information. The Hungarian government attempted to manufacture evidence of alleged Ukrainian financing of TISZA; however, no such evidence materialised.

### *Alleged Ukrainian and European Union Interference in the Campaign*

Having failed to demonstrate results on other fronts during the campaign, Fidesz built its communications around a central fearmongering narrative: the threat of imminent war. This overarching narrative was supported by disinformation and hostile sub-narratives – particularly regarding Ukraine and the European Union – which sought to heighten public fear and anxiety by exaggerating the immediate danger of war and the loss of sovereignty.

The Orbán government and affiliated actors disseminated a disinformation narrative according to which 'Brussels' and Ukraine were interfering in the campaign. The narrative suggested that 'Brussels' was working with TISZA to overthrow the Orbán government and install a pro-Ukraine, pro-EU government in Hungary. By making unfounded allegations of Ukrainian interference, the Orbán government's aim was to provoke a strong reaction from Ukraine and thereby 'prove' its involvement and support for TISZA. The narrative portrayed Ukraine and the European Union as external enemies to Hungarian voters, while conflating them with an internal enemy: TISZA.

Although Prime Minister Viktor Orbán ultimately acknowledged defeat, the disinformation campaign regarding the alleged interference of the EU and Ukraine – and their purported connection to TISZA – would have provided a basis for questioning the integrity of the election and contesting its results had the margin of defeat been narrower.

### *Campaign Financing*

The campaign financing system for Hungarian parliamentary elections is not merely outdated; through the deliberate weakening of the regulatory framework, it has further institutionalised opacity and inequality of opportunity. The laws governing this area were reshaped to serve ruling-party interests in the period preceding the 2026 elections. Most conspicuously, the governing parties' majority in the National Assembly abolished the cap on campaign expenditure in June 2025. Citing December 2025 amendments to the Political Party Act, the State Audit Office (SAO) declared that it would examine concealed campaign financing during the 2026 campaign only in cases involving suspected foreign funding. This decision effectively granted full immunity and a free pass to domestically financed third-party proxy campaign organisations. As a consequence, the SAO declined to address concerns relating to large-scale campaign activities associated with the governing party.

The abuses were further facilitated by the Electoral Procedure Act, which exempts state 'public information' activities from campaign regulations, thereby rendering publicly funded communications that mirror governing-party messaging lawful as long as no party logo appears. The system further defines the campaign period rigidly as the 50 days preceding the vote, making meaningful scrutiny of earlier political expenditure impossible.

A single factor could have threatened this domestic machinery built on legal loopholes and proxy networks with billions in public funds: the European Union's Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA). The government and state institutions – involving the Ombudsman and the Constitutional Court – strategically and deliberately sabotaged the implementation of the regulation in Hungary.

As a direct consequence of this loosened legal framework, the 2026 campaign was marked by the complete fusion of state, governing party, and proxy organisations, as well as by an unprecedented asymmetry of resources. Governing-party messages were dominated by an extensive network of proxy organisations with opaque funding. The Center for Fundamental Rights, a government-funded think tank, organised international events costing billions and launched influencer campaigns; the Digital Civic Circles (DPK) – concealed behind a nominally independent corporate group – carried out large-scale mobilisation; while the National Resistance Movement (NEM), another government proxy organisation, targeted the opposition through a nationwide poster and comic-book campaign. In none of these cases were the sources of financing made visible to the public.

Simultaneously, the overt involvement of state bodies and state-owned enterprises crossed every previous boundary, exploiting to the maximum the scope afforded by official 'public information' activities. The Government Information Centre ran the 'National Petition' targeting the opposition at a cost of billions in public funds; MVM, the public electricity provider, launched a nationwide 'educational' campaign while sending letters bearing Orbán's portrait to households; the National Bank of Hungary published advertisements that were virtually identical to Fidesz slogans; and the State Lottery Company organised free concerts targeting the most closely contested swing constituencies, featuring performers who openly declared their support for the governing party. The state-party-proxy fusion was perfectly symbolised by the state-funded 15 March national holiday event, which effectively functioned as a campaign rally, combined with the 'civic'-organised Peace March – one of whose prominent officials appeared on the Fidesz national party list.

However, the legal environment – which imposed no transparency requirements and no consequences for non-compliance – also failed to incentivise transparency among opposition parties. None of the parties fielding a national list published a continuously updated public account of campaign expenditures. Revealingly, any visibility into campaign spending structures was confined to MKKP – which fell below the 1% parliamentary threshold – and only because of legal compulsion: the obligation to repay state subsidies received prompted the party to disclose part of its campaign-related expenditure during a public crowdfunding appeal.

### ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The National Election Office (NEO), along with regional and local election offices, administers the electoral process. These bodies effectively managed the IT and logistical tasks related to voting, ensured that the official election website operated reliably and was kept up to date, and regularly provided information on important upcoming deadlines and other relevant details for voters, candidates, and parties.

Responsibility for ensuring the integrity and lawfulness of the electoral process rests with the election commissions. During parliamentary elections, these are: the National Election Commission (NEC), regional election commissions, constituency election commissions (OCEC), local election commissions, and polling station commissions. In terms of their significance, the OCECs and the NEC stand apart: they certify voting results, oversee the registration of candidates and nominating organisations, and adjudicate complaints and appeals related to the elections.

Election commissions consist of elected members and members delegated by parties, who make decisions by majority vote. Elected members are chosen by political bodies (Parliament in the case of the NEC; municipal councils at lower levels); **however, the criteria for the nomination and election of members are not transparent.**

Delegated members of the NEC are appointed by parliamentary party groups between general elections, and by parties establishing party lists during the election campaign. A 2022 amendment to the Electoral Procedure Act required parliamentary parties' delegates to be continuously present in the NEC, including before the registration of party lists. However, the same amendment introduced a provision under which delegates appointed by parties without a parliamentary group (who may be delegated after the lists are submitted) have no voting rights within the NEC. This differentiation in delegated members' rights is unjustified and undermines the equal opportunity of non-parliamentary parties contesting elections. Under the same amendment, national minority self-governments that field a minority list may no longer delegate members to the NEC, a right they previously held.

Polling station commissions play a key role in the conduct of election day and in the certification of results. Their composition is similar to that of the election commissions, with both elected and

delegated members. They carried out their election day duties smoothly; the certification of results was timely and notably swift, with only minor administrative errors reported during the day.

### *Voter Registration*

On 12 April 2026, 8,114,688 persons were registered as eligible voters. Of these, 496,286 were postal voters without a registered address in Hungary (who were required to separately request inclusion in the register) and 73,791 were registered national minority voters.<sup>17</sup>

Voters could exercise their right to vote at the polling station corresponding to their permanent address, or their temporary address if they requested a transfer. Absentee voting was possible in any municipality if requested before the deadline. Voters residing abroad with a Hungarian registered address could vote at Hungarian embassies and consulates upon timely request, while voters without a registered residency in Hungary could vote by post. Consequently, **citizens residing abroad remain unable to exercise their right to vote on an equal footing.**

Persons excluded by a criminal court from participating in public affairs do not have the right to vote during the period of imprisonment and for an additional one to ten years following release as specified in the individual sentence. Persons with limited mental capacity who have been disenfranchised by a court are likewise excluded from voting. The exclusion of convicted persons is concerning because time served is not counted, and criminal courts often impose the maximum ten-year exclusion. The exclusion of persons with limited mental capacity is overly broad and does not differentiate based on the degree of mental capacity.

### *Candidate Registration*

Five parties fielded a national list – the lowest number since 1990. Several smaller opposition parties announced before the start of the campaign period that they would not contest the election, so as not to split votes for TISZA, the largest opposition party.

National lists were submitted by the following parties (in the order determined by the NEO for placement on the ballot): Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA), Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland Movement), Democratic Coalition (DK), Fidesz-KDNP.

Three parties fielded candidates in all 106 individual constituencies: Fidesz-KDNP, TISZA, and Mi Hazánk. Fielding a candidate required the nomination signatures of 500 voters registered in the given constituency. A voter could nominate more than one candidate. The NEO provided an online platform enabling voters to verify which candidates' nomination forms included their signature. In the event of unauthorised use of personal data, the voter could file an objection with the competent election commission within three days. On the basis of such a complaint, the unlawfully used nomination would be deleted, but this did not automatically result in the deregistration of the candidate concerned.

**The nomination process revealed numerous instances of misuse of personal data.** In some cases, the data of deceased persons was used to sign nomination forms.<sup>18</sup> Suspicions also arose that personal data submitted during a previous election had been used.<sup>19</sup> Electoral authorities uncovered several instances of abuse, but overall, the integrity of the nomination process was not safeguarded effectively.

### *Minority Lists*

Hungarian law recognises 13 national minorities, each entitled to obtain a preferential seat in the National Assembly. Each minority may field a closed national minority list. Voters registered as members of a national minority may only vote for their minority list, not for a party list.

For a national minority to obtain a parliamentary seat, it must secure 25% of the number of votes required to win a party list seat. Although this represents a reduced quota compared to parties, in practice, only the German and Roma minorities have any realistic prospect of reaching the threshold, as, based on the most recent census data, the remaining recognised minorities lack sufficient populations to meet even the reduced quota.<sup>20</sup>

In 2026, approximately 44,000 voters were registered as Roma national minority voters and 23,000 as German. The remaining minorities had fewer than 2,000 registered voters each. Ultimately, fewer than 19,000 valid votes were cast for the Roma minority list, and less than 18,000 valid votes were cast for the German minority list. Since approximately 25,000 votes were required to obtain the preferential seat, no minority list received a mandate.

HCLU received several dozen reports, involving approximately 150 individuals, indicating that voters – primarily Roma people – had been added to the national minority register without their knowledge or consent, primarily in northern and eastern Hungary. Many of those affected only discovered at the polling station that as a result, they could not vote for a party list, by which point deregistration was no longer possible.<sup>21</sup> The organised nature of the abuse is suggested by a sudden spike in register entries<sup>22</sup> as well as reports of data collection tied to food distributions, whereby the disclosure of personal data led to inclusion in the register. HCLU's telephone legal aid helpline also received queries indicating that in some cases polling station commissions cited declarations of minority affiliation made during the census as the reason for inclusion in the minority register – a matter that raises serious data protection concerns.

### *Postal Voting*

The postal voting system also revealed numerous irregularities. **The postal voting process lacks transparency and adequate legal safeguards for safety and secrecy.** Postal ballots may be returned by post or delivered in person to Hungarian diplomatic representations or polling stations in Hungary. However, the Electoral Procedure Act does not require submission by the voter personally. Ballots may be entrusted to any third party without formal authorisation, rendering their collection and submission entirely non-transparent. It is common in neighbouring countries for ballots to be collected by civil society organisations closely linked to Fidesz, at designated collection points or door-to-door, with canvassing for the governing party. This practice was observed in Romania and Serbia.<sup>23</sup> At such collection points, there is no verifiable control over the type of ballot boxes used, the storage of ballots, or their delivery to the NEO. Nor can it be ensured that voting remains secret or free from undue influence. As these are not official polling stations, Hungarian electoral authorities lack the competence to oversee compliance with legal safeguards. Press reports indicated that in certain localities in Romania, civil society organisations close to Fidesz not only collected postal ballots but also distributed them to voters, making it impossible to verify who received the ballots, who did not, and who actually completed them.

Data in the postal voter registry remains valid for ten years, and records of deceased individuals are not removed, resulting in thousands of ballot papers being sent to the deceased. There was no way to verify whether ballots had been cast in their names.<sup>24</sup> Journalists demonstrated that empty ballots addressed to these individuals can be obtained and returned by third parties.<sup>25</sup> Authorities are unable to prevent such abuses, and cannot invalidate ballots demonstrably sent to deceased persons. The system is also severely vulnerable because the official envelope is not the only permissible means of returning a ballot.

HCLU received several complaints that voters did not receive their voting envelopes in time, leading them to seek replacements at diplomatic missions, or – in the absence of a Hungarian diplomatic mission – rendering them unable to vote. Many voters, distrustful that their envelope would arrive in time, sent it by registered post. In their cases, reports continued to reach the HCLU legal aid service

for days after the election indicating that although the envelope had been posted in late March and had arrived in Hungary in the first days of April, the tracking system showed the parcel had not yet left the International Post Exchange Centre, or had been delayed in delivery by other means. As postal ballots arriving late are invalid, this constitutes a serious violation of fundamental rights, and raises questions of liability of the postal service.

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Since the April 2022 parliamentary elections, several legislative amendments have affected the electoral system. Some were administrative or technical in nature, while others substantially influenced electoral equality and fair competition. The recommendations issued by the OSCE/ODIHR with regard to previous elections<sup>26</sup> remained largely unimplemented.

In 2024, Parliament changed the boundaries of single-member constituencies without any public or cross-party consultation, raising concerns about gerrymandering and reinforcing structural advantages for the ruling party. In June 2025, the Venice Commission criticised this process and the associated legislative amendments for undermining checks and balances and the principle of equal suffrage.<sup>27</sup> Shortly thereafter, Parliament removed all limits on campaign expenditure, further entrenching the advantages of the governing parties.

Further legislative amendments increased state funding for parliamentary party groups, disproportionately benefiting the governing party. An amendment to the Freedom of Information Act restored the data disclosure deadline but introduced new exemptions that restrict access to public information. Additional amendments enabled the NEC to hold closed-door sessions reducing transparency, expanded judicial panels adjudicating electoral disputes, and imposed asset declaration requirements on Members of the European Parliament. The state of danger, enabling rule by decree, remained in force.

Amendments adopted in 2022 extended the territorial scope of the Electoral Procedure Act to cover infringements committed abroad – without eliminating the irregularities associated with postal voting – and altered the composition of the NEC, removing voting rights of delegated members appointed by parties without a parliamentary group and thereby weakening procedural safeguards. The regulations continue to preclude citizen election observation.

The national minority voting system remained unchanged, with persistent deficiencies, including an excessively high preferential quota for representation – effectively preventing most recognised minorities from gaining a parliamentary seat –, limited electoral choice, and risks to ballot secrecy.

The 2023 Sovereignty Protection Act introduced the offence of the “illegal influencing of the will of voters”, targeting the use of prohibited foreign support of candidates and nominating organisations, while extending restrictions on foreign funding to independent and non-partisan actors in the electoral context. It also established the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO), vested with a broad and vaguely defined mandate and operating without effective judicial oversight.<sup>28</sup> In practice, the SPO has been used to investigate and publicly target opposition actors, independent media, and civil society organisations under expansive notions of “foreign influence”, amplifying narratives of the governing majority during the campaign and exerting a chilling effect on independent scrutiny of elections.

Taken together, these developments not only centralised political control over the electoral framework but further tilted the playing field in favour of candidates of the governing parties. The absence of transparent and inclusive consultation in electoral law-making, combined with the governing majority’s ability to enact further changes, undermined confidence in the process.

## *Legal Remedies*

Problems previously observed in relation to legal remedies persisted in the 2026 elections. Particularly noteworthy is the 'locus standi' (affected party) requirement, which significantly narrows the circle of those with standing to seek remedies from the stage of appeal onwards. This manifested, for example, in cases where HCLU sought to hold campaign abuses involving the use of children to account before the Kúria. Given that the NEC, by virtue of its legal status, makes decisions less on legal than on political grounds, appeals against its decisions frequently require recourse to a judicial forum – access to which, in turn, requires the procedural participation of a candidate or nominating organisation, given the overly restrictive interpretation of standing. This not only makes enforcement logistically difficult (since, within the extremely short deadlines, contact must be established with the candidate or party and the necessary documents and authorisations must be obtained), but also presents a structural obstacle to actors independent of party politics and to the millions of non-candidate voters.

A further problem with electoral remedies is the **high degree of formalism, which results in an overwhelming proportion of submissions being rejected by election commissions without substantive examination.** Commonly, the absence of a personal identification number, the inadequate citation of the specific statutory provision allegedly infringed, or the lack of sufficiently corroborating evidence leads to the dismissal of submissions without substantive review. As a result, the electoral remedy system loses much of its inclusiveness: a case can only be brought successfully before the election commissions if the applicant dedicates considerable expertise and time to preparing the submission. Well-developed submissions of adequate substance and indicating a likely serious infringement are often dismissed on formal grounds.

## **MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

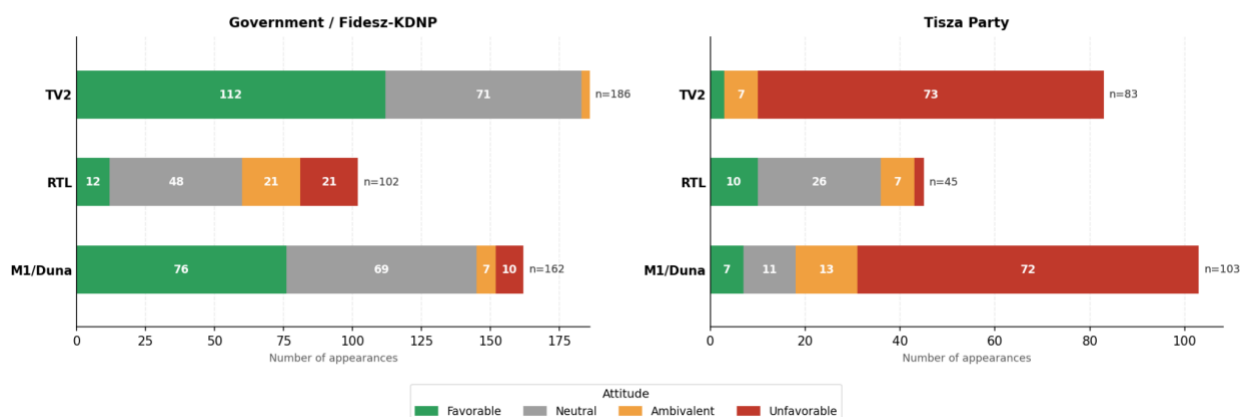
### *Media Monitoring*

Mérték Media Monitor conducted media monitoring of seven high-reach mainstream media outlets – three prime-time news programmes and four news portals – on weekdays between 16 March and 10 April 2026. The study focused primarily on pro-government news sources; independent media was represented in the sample by RTL's evening news programme. The research examined which topics the outlets focused on, the quantity and quality of airtime provided to representatives of parties contesting the election, and what political and public discourse narratives and propaganda messages appeared in their content. The sample included domestic news and foreign-focused stories in which Hungarian actors featured.

The news items of pro-government outlets were dominated by negative messages: narratives criticising the opposition (27.6%) and external enemies (28.6%) – such as Ukraine and the EU – together accounted for more than half of the monitored content, while domestic (24.3%) and foreign policy (11.2%) narratives building the government's positive self-image appeared at lower proportions. In the breakdown by source, RTL stands out sharply: 64% of the narratives it featured were critical of the government, whereas in the majority of pro-government outlets, the proportion of narratives critical of the government remained below 5%.

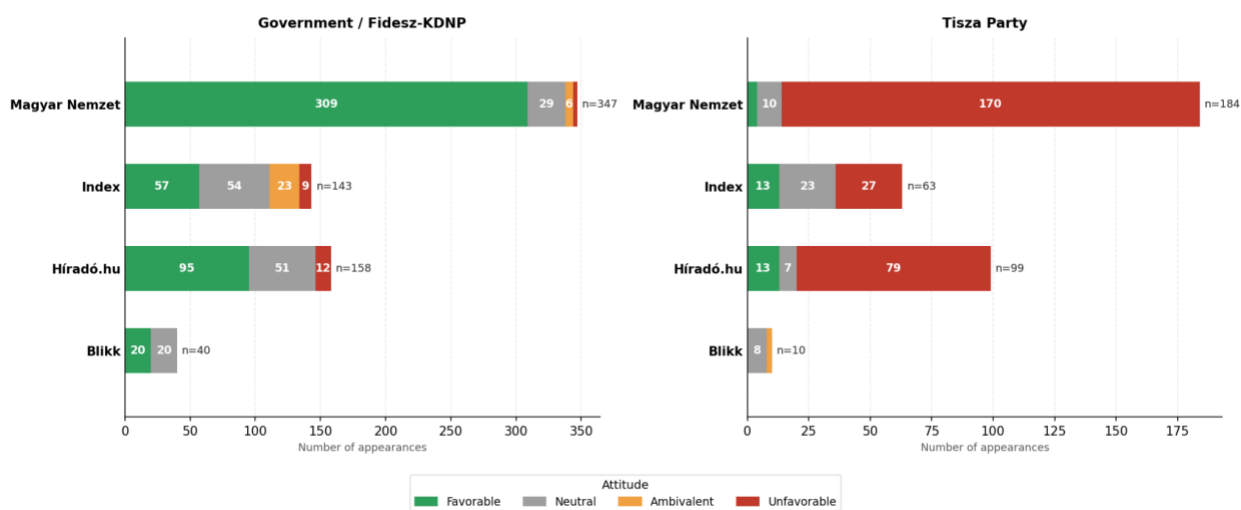
In the aggregate categories of 'Government/Fidesz-KDNP' and 'TISZA Party', all appearances linked to the government or to the respective parties and/or their members are captured. In television news programmes, marked differences emerged in the portrayal of the two major forces – with the exception of the RTL news show, in which neutral statements predominated slightly for both parties, albeit with a somewhat critical attitude towards the governing parties. Public service media and TV2, by contrast, treated the two parties at virtually opposite poles: on TV2, for instance, Fidesz-KDNP did not receive a single negative portrayal, nor did TISZA receive a single positive one.

### Attitude towards Government/Fidesz-KDNP and Tisza Party – TV newscasts



Similar patterns characterised the monitored news portals: hirado.hu and Magyar Nemzet presented the governing parties in a markedly positive light and TISZA in a markedly negative light, and even Index and Blikk – though to a much smaller degree – displayed this same differential treatment.

### Attitude towards Government/Fidesz-KDNP and Tisza Party – online press



The research clearly demonstrates the bias of pro-government media, which is rendered particularly serious by the fact that the public service broadcaster's television news programme and news portal both presented the two competing political sides in a wholly one-sided manner.

### Social Media Campaign

While Fidesz had dominated social media in previous campaigns through political advertising, the governing party revised its strategy in response to the ban on political advertising introduced in autumn 2025. To compensate for the absence of political adverts, Orbán-affiliated actors turned to alternative methods and tools in order to reach a broad audience and maintain their dominance in the information space:

- Fidesz relied on the coordinated support networks known as 'Fighters' Club' and 'Digital Civic Circles' (DPK) to increase organic reach. Fidesz politicians and affiliated influencers directed and coordinated members to amplify messages through reactions, comments, and shares.

- Fidesz deployed coordinated networks of fake profiles and pages to boost the reach of its content. This type of inauthentic amplification is capable of rapidly generating significant activity while creating the appearance of broad social support across multiple profiles.
- **Fidesz politicians flooded social media with high volumes of content to offset weaker engagement.**<sup>29</sup> Since posts by TISZA candidates achieved organically higher reach and thus addressed a wider audience, Fidesz politicians began posting more frequently and encouraged supporters to produce short, algorithm-friendly videos such as Reels. Their reach nonetheless remained far below that of TISZA.<sup>30</sup>
- According to 20k's monitoring conducted on a database of close to 900 accounts between 20 January 2026 and election day, Fidesz politicians posted two to three times more content than TISZA, yet achieved only half the interactions. On TikTok – the platform most widely used by young people – Fidesz was exceptionally active, accounting for two-thirds of all political content. Throughout the campaign, TISZA politicians gained more followers each week than Fidesz, while the smaller parties (DK, MKKP) – to some extent foreshadowing the election results – began losing followers in the final weeks.<sup>31</sup>
- Fidesz-affiliated actors employed various methods to circumvent restrictions on political advertising. These included repeatedly reposting deleted advertisements, concealing the political character of content, and creating 'false flag' pages.
- Fidesz-affiliated indirect actors and associated Facebook pages made tactical use of emotionally charged, AI-generated videos, as these provoke strong emotional reactions, simplify narratives, and exploit gaps in platform filtering systems. Despite this, with few exceptions, the posts that achieved the highest interaction counts week-on-week were typically light-hearted, personal, celebrity-style videos over ones making explicit references to politics and the election.

## ELECTION DAY

Despite the heightened atmosphere, election day passed without serious incidents. The incident reporting application operated by 20k, together with the telephone hotline and email legal aid service operated by HCLU, recorded a total of several hundred reports, queries, and questions. The majority related to basic procedural and technical shortcomings: the active and irregular involvement of registry clerks in the work of ballot-counting commissions, the appearance of large numbers of apparently foreign voters in certain individual constituencies, the bussing of voters, and problems with polling-station voter registers (unlawful use of data, missing or deceased voters). Although in their aggregate and gravity these irregularities were not sufficient to materially influence the outcome of the election, the volume of reports revealed a deep distrust of the conduct of the elections.

The international community regarded the 2026 Hungarian election as one of the most important of the year, and the extraordinary level of attention was matched by the intensive presence of international observers. The NEO accredited nearly 900 international observers, who in their public reports typically highlighted the unequal conditions of competition between parties, the systemic conflation of state and party that provided the governing party with structural advantages, and the divisive and fear-inducing nature of Fidesz campaign communications.

Across the country, thousands of civil volunteers participated in efforts to ensure the integrity of the election, documenting electoral abuses and seeking to prevent them through their physical presence.

## *Election Results*

As forecast, the 2026 election produced record turnout: nearly 80% of those eligible voted. TISZA, led by Péter Magyar, achieved a sweeping victory. According to official NEO data, TISZA obtained 141 seats (96 individual constituency and 45 list seats); Fidesz-KDNP obtained 52 (10 individual constituency and 42 list seats); and Mi Hazánk obtained 6 list seats. TISZA thereby secured a two-thirds parliamentary majority.

TISZA received nearly 3.4 million list votes (53.2% – 45 seats); Fidesz-KDNP received more than 2.4 million (38.6% – 42 seats); and Mi Hazánk received 359,000 (5.6% – 6 seats). DK obtained 1.1% and MKKP 0.8%, both well below the parliamentary threshold. It is noteworthy that TISZA achieved this sweeping victory despite a heavily distorting electoral system favouring Fidesz: with 928,000 more list votes, it obtained only three more list seats than the ruling party. The dominance of TISZA was more clearly reflected in the individual constituencies: it won 96 of 106, including all Budapest districts. TISZA secured 71% of parliamentary seats with 53% of the vote.

Postal ballots – the overwhelming majority of which are cast by ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries – once again favoured Fidesz in massive proportions and, as in previous elections, delivered an additional list seat to the governing party. Although high turnout enabled Fidesz to increase its total of postal votes (282,000) compared to the previous election, their proportion was 'only' 84% – ten percentage points less than in 2022. In the Zala 2 constituency, the margin between the TISZA and Fidesz candidates fell below 100 votes, triggering a statutory recount, which confirmed the TISZA candidate's victory. After counting absentee votes and votes cast abroad at diplomatic missions, TISZA was able to overturn results in three constituencies where Fidesz had been leading, thereby securing those mandates.

Viktor Orbán conceded defeat and congratulated Péter Magyar. In the wake of the election results, Klára Dobrev and the entire DK leadership resigned, as did Dávid Nagy, MKKP's head of list and party director. The scale of TISZA's victory exceeded most projections; the record turnout reflects an extraordinary societal demand for change. TISZA not only changed the government but secured parliamentary dominance providing virtually unlimited legislative latitude – a position that represents both an opportunity and a responsibility. Péter Magyar succeeded, on the promise of change, in attracting the votes of almost all previous opposition voters as well as several hundred thousand former governing-party supporters; nonetheless, a significant proportion of his votes were general protest votes against the regime. The new government must contend not only with an extremely broad and diverse voter base but also with severe structural challenges, including a massive fiscal deficit, the urgent need to unlock frozen EU funds, and the task of bringing institutions captured by Fidesz back within the framework of the rule of law.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Our analysis indicates that the Hungarian electoral system, including a series of recent legislative amendments, continues to suffer from significant democratic deficiencies. Regrettably, Hungarian law still does not provide for independent citizen election observation; such activities are permitted only for international organisations. For Hungarian citizens, the sole opportunity to be actively present in polling stations is through participation in polling station commissions – either as party delegates or as elected members appointed by public authorities. The absence of a framework for citizen election observation is unjustified and risks undermining public confidence in the electoral process. Furthermore, it places Hungarian citizens at a disadvantage in exercising oversight over their own elections compared to foreign nationals.

## **ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> See further: [https://politicalcapital.hu/hirek.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=3672](https://politicalcapital.hu/hirek.php?article_read=1&article_id=3672).
- <sup>2</sup> See Hungarian Helsinki Committee, [Entrenched State-Party Fusion Ahead of Hungary's 2026 Parliamentary Elections](#), April 2026.
- <sup>3</sup> Anna Jelinek, "[The government is again flooding the country with Orbán's face during the campaign](#)", 444.hu, 22 March 2026.
- <sup>4</sup> "[The MNB explained why it started campaigning before the election: the new leadership saved a lot](#)", HVG, 17 February 2026.
- <sup>5</sup> Ádám Kolozsi, "[Government propaganda is now arriving via Ügyfélkapu \[the state digital gateway\] in the campaign's final stretch](#)", 444.hu, 13 March 2026.
- <sup>6</sup> Bálint Szántó-Nagy, "[You say everything is fine in the country, your voice is deeper!](#)", Telex, 14 March 2026.
- <sup>7</sup> Ferenc Bakró-Nagy, "[Orbán is now threatening Ukrainian danger via VakcinaInfo email addresses](#)", Telex, 10 March 2026. See also: "[The Kúria held that the voter is 'not sufficiently affected' to turn to a court over the infringement of electoral law](#)", Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 10 April 2026.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, [NEC Decision No. 267/2026](#) and [Kúria ruling Kvk.III.39.093/2026/11](#).
- <sup>9</sup> Balázs Cseke, "[RTL \[public broadcaster\] did not invite Péter Magyar once during the campaign; politicians of opposition parties with immeasurably strong support were invited multiple times](#)", Telex, 29 March 2026.
- <sup>10</sup> [Kúria ruling Kvk.I.039.088/2026/5](#).
- <sup>11</sup> See: CC Decisions [1125/2026 \(III.23.\)](#), [1147/2026 \(III.24.\)](#), [1157/2026 \(IV.1.\)](#), and [1180/2026 \(IV.7.\)](#).
- <sup>12</sup> [Kúria ruling Kvk.V.39.103/2026/3](#).
- <sup>13</sup> See the [minutes](#) of the NEC session of 7 March 2026.
- <sup>14</sup> András Dezső, "[In the national security committee, they acknowledged having received a warning about the Russians, but maintain they are not in the country](#)", Telex, 9 March 2026.
- <sup>15</sup> "Russia's Matryoshka bots spread disinfo about Ukraine-Hungary tension, allege "thousands" of attacks on Hungarians by Ukrainian refugees", The Insider, 14 March 2026.
- <sup>16</sup> Alice Lee and Madeline Roache, "[Influence Campaign on TikTok Uses AI Videos to Boost Hungary's Orbán Ahead of Crucial Elections](#)", NewsGuard, 20 March 2026.
- <sup>17</sup> <https://vtr.valasztas.hu/ogy2026/informaciok/valasztopolgarok-szama?tab=orszagosan>
- <sup>18</sup> Balázs Cseke, "[The Mi Hazánk candidate in Józsefváros may have submitted nominations signed by deceased persons; the election commission is filing a complaint](#)", Telex, 27 February 2026.
- <sup>19</sup> Tamás Bod, "[Fidesz's Norbert Erdős also submitted a photocopied nomination sheet; a criminal complaint for forgery has been filed](#)", Magyar Narancs, 24 February 2026.
- <sup>20</sup> For a detailed account of the irregularities of the national minority electoral system, see the joint position of HCLU and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee in the case of Bakirdzi and E.C. v. Hungary (Application No. [49636/14](#)): [DH-DD\(2026\)148](#), 28 January 2026.
- <sup>21</sup> Márton Zeller, "[It is possible that some people will only find out in the voting booth that they cannot vote for political parties](#)", Lakmusz, 9 April 2026.
- <sup>22</sup> [https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=3557](https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=3557).
- <sup>23</sup> Hunor Tőkés and Emese Vig, "[RMSZ is collecting Transylvanian postal ballots with complete logistics, with the goal of directing as many as possible to Fidesz](#)", Transtelex, 24 March 2026. Péter Kókai, "[In Vojvodina, Fidesz friends have literally taken the handling of postal ballots into their own hands](#)", HVG, 31 March 2026.
- <sup>24</sup> Erika Zsizsmann, "[Two ballots in one name, an envelope sent to a deceased person – readers have reported irregularities about postal voting](#)", Transtelex, 3 April 2026.

<sup>25</sup> Csaba Lukács, "[Practically anyone can obtain a blank, uncompleted postal ballot in Transylvania](#)", Magyar Hang, 3 April 2026.

<sup>26</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Hungary, Parliamentary Elections and Referendum, 3 April 2022: [Election Observation Mission Final Report](#), 29 July 2022.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), [Opinion on the Act LXXIX of 2024 on the amendment of certain laws relating to elections](#), 16 June 2025.

<sup>28</sup> See "[Hungary's Act on the Protection of National Sovereignty in Breach of EU Law](#)", Amnesty International Hungary and Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 8 February 2024.

<sup>29</sup> [Bálint Szántó-Nagy](#), "One hundred and six are fighting in Orbán's digital conquest, where János Pócs is the unbeatable role model", Telex, 26 January 2026.

<sup>30</sup> Gergő Lovas and Anita Vorák, "[Comments are the best weapon, simple doesn't mean stupid, Viktor Orbán is the red ace](#)"—that's what the fighters were taught at the training camp", Telex, 20 October 2025.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.20k.hu/kozossegi-media-figyeles-1>.