

Findings of Polish Election Observers Following Observation of the Hungarian Parliamentary Elections of 12 April 2026

The following observations highlight selected aspects of the Hungarian electoral process that, in the view of Polish international election observers, merit further discussion and potential reform. They do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of the electoral process, but rather reflect findings from election day observation, as well as discussions with stakeholders and participants in the electoral process.

1. Introducing Citizen Election Observation into Hungarian Electoral Law

Despite significant public interest in elections and electoral integrity, Hungarian law currently does not provide for domestic, non-partisan election observation. Hungarian citizens seeking to contribute to electoral oversight often do so by serving as members of polling station commissions - thereby becoming part of the election administration rather than independent observers - or by informally monitoring developments around polling stations.

Introducing a legal framework for citizen election observation would strengthen the transparency of the electoral process and contribute to building long-term public confidence in elections.

2. Trust in the Electoral Process

During our time in Hungary prior to the election day, we observed a highly polarised political environment, accompanied by significant distrust between supporters of competing political forces. Allegations and suspicions regarding potential electoral irregularities, including concerns about so-called "carousel voting", were frequently raised in public discussions.

At the same time, election day itself presented a notably different picture. Polling station commission members and party delegates generally interacted professionally and respectfully, and open hostility between political opponents was largely absent. In our view, strengthening public trust in electoral processes and institutions could contribute not only to electoral integrity but also to reducing broader political polarisation.

3. National Consultations (Nemzeti Petíció) and the Use of Public Resources

Alongside the parliamentary election campaign, the Hungarian government conducted a nationwide public consultation campaign (Nemzeti Petíció) concerning support for the war in Ukraine. While these consultations are formally distinct from elections and are not legally binding, they were highly visible during the electoral period.

We were concerned by the apparent imbalance in campaign visibility. Materials related to the consultation prominently featured the incumbent Prime Minister yet were not accounted for as electoral expenditure. This effectively created parallel streams of political communication: one financed within the framework of the governing party's election campaign and another

financed through the consultation campaign. Both campaigns employed similar political messaging and visual themes.

Consideration should therefore be given to clarifying and strengthening rules governing the financing of electoral and consultation-related campaigns, particularly where public institutions and resources are involved.

4. Voting by the Hungarian Diaspora Abroad

Hungarian citizens residing abroad who do not maintain a registered address in Hungary may vote by mail for national party lists. In practice, civic organisations and political actors representing Hungarian communities abroad often assist in collecting and transporting completed ballot packages to Hungary.

While these arrangements may facilitate participation, the involvement of politically affiliated actors in functions that resemble elements of election administration may affect perceptions of neutrality and independence. Furthermore, stories circulating in the media and public discourse regarding alleged irregularities in previous elections continue to influence public perceptions and contribute to mistrust.

Additional safeguards for the handling and transport of postal ballots could help increase confidence in the process. Measures such as a ballot tracking system and clearer regulation of the role of third parties involved in ballot collection and transportation merit consideration.

Hungarian civil society organisations also reported limited opportunities to observe the collection, handling and transportation of postal ballots. Expanding observation opportunities in this area would significantly enhance the transparency and credibility of diaspora voting.

5. The Role of Polling Station Secretaries

Under Hungarian law, polling station secretaries are responsible for preparing election documentation and ensuring the correct completion of official records. From our observation secretaries generally played a positive role, providing valuable procedural expertise and support to polling station commissions.

However, although secretaries are not members of the precinct election commissions and do not have the right to participate in the active counting of ballots, in some polling stations they appeared to take a more active role than envisaged by the legal framework. Greater clarity regarding the division of responsibilities - or alternatively the formal integration of secretaries into the vote-counting process - could help address this ambiguity.

6. Ensuring the Secrecy of the Vote

Accessibility and Voting in Polling Stations

We frequently observed polling station staff assisting voters with disabilities in a respectful and professional manner. However, in some cases voters using wheelchairs were not fully able to cast their ballots in conditions that guaranteed secrecy of the vote, for example due to

difficulties in accessing voting booths. Developing and consistently implementing common accessibility standards could help address these challenges.

Mobile Voting

The procedures governing mobile voting, including voting conducted in voters' homes, could benefit from further safeguards to ensure ballot secrecy. One possible solution would be the introduction of portable voting booths, similar to practices used in other OSCE participating states, such as Moldova.

7. Comprehensive Reconciliation of Ballot Papers

Our observation of the counting process indicated that ballot paper accounting is not fully integrated into a single reconciliation procedure. Specifically, the number of ballot papers received by a precinct election commission does not necessarily have to equal the combined total of ballots issued and ballots unused.

This creates potential vulnerabilities and limits the ability of precinct election commissions to identify and investigate discrepancies. Information regarding ballot distribution, receipt and unused ballots is currently recorded in separate documents and is not systematically reconciled within the official results protocol.

Introducing a more comprehensive ballot accounting system, requiring full reconciliation of all ballot papers within a single framework, would strengthen transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

Based on our discussions with stakeholders and participants in the Hungarian electoral process, as well as our review of reports produced by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, we recognise that many issues affecting electoral integrity arise outside of election day itself. Nevertheless, we hope that these observations contribute constructively to ongoing discussions about possible improvements to Hungary's electoral framework.

We offer these recommendations in a spirit of solidarity with Hungarian civil society organisations working to strengthen electoral integrity, transparency and public confidence in democratic processes.