

HUNGARY

Election Observation Mission 2026 Preliminary Report

Introduction

Agora Election Observation (AEO) and SILBA – Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy are two non-governmental, non-profit organisations committed to the promotion of democracy, participation, and human rights. Both organisations work with young people and deploy international election observation missions as part of their efforts to support democratic processes and encourage youth and civic engagement. For the 12 April 2026 Hungarian parliamentary elections, both AEO and SILBA deployed an election observation mission. On Election Day, the two organisations joined forces and conducted a joint observation, following the same working methodology. This cooperation strengthened the observation capacity of both organisations and enabled the collection of broader, more significant Election Day observations. On Election Day, the joint observation conducted by AEO and SILBA enabled the deployment of 69 international observers from 22 nationalities.

Prior to Election Day, the observers met with several local organisations and stakeholders, and both missions conducted research into the electoral process. However, this preliminary statement focuses primarily on direct observation on Election Day. More detailed findings will be presented in the final reports, drawing on a comprehensive analysis of data collected by the two organisations throughout their respective missions.

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Electoral Context

The Hungarian legal framework allows only for international election observation. The National Election Office accredited nearly 900 international observers for the 2026 parliamentary elections. The accreditation procedures were clear, the authorities were responsive to the missions' requests, and the process was administered efficiently, thereby facilitating the deployment of observers. However, the lack of a formal distinction between observation missions with established methodology and other delegations exposes the process to the risk of infiltration by fake and biased international observers seeking to advance political interests by imitating genuine observation efforts, a practice that is becoming increasingly common.

At the same time, the absence of a framework for domestic election observation continued to limit citizens' and young people's direct participation in the electoral process, amid an increasingly restrictive environment and reduced opportunities for civil society organisations to engage in public life.

Mission Description

On Election Day, AEO and SILBA observers were deployed in 16 out of Hungary's 19 counties as well as the capital city of Budapest. They visited 364 polling stations and submitted a total of 445 observation forms covering opening, voting, counting and tabulation. The polling stations observed were located in urban (50 per cent), suburban (30 per cent) and rural (20 per cent) areas.

Election Day Observations

Election Day took place amid a highly polarised environment, with the ruling Fidesz party and the challenger Tisza party accusing each other of alleged electoral fraud and irregularities. Despite this, Election Day was generally calm, orderly, and professionally administered. At the same time, observers noted recurring shortcomings, notably regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities, the secrecy of the vote, and repeated instances of group or family voting. Women were well represented among polling station commission members, accounting for around 67 per cent of all commissioners, and chairing some 75 per cent of the polling stations observed. By contrast, young people appeared underrepresented. Delegated commission membership was largely dominated by Tisza and Fidesz, which were represented in more than 90 per cent of the polling stations observed.

Official preliminary data indicate that voter turnout was notably high, standing at nearly 80 per cent of eligible voters. Young people appeared to account for approximately 22 per cent of voters observed in the polling stations visited. However, no official age-disaggregated turnout data were available at the time of writing. Prior to Election Day, the National Election Office announced that more than 180,000 first-time voters were eligible to vote in the 2026 parliamentary elections. Citizens aged 18 and above have the right to vote; notably, the voting age is lowered to 16 for those who are married, raising concerns about unequal treatment based on civil status.

Voters cast two ballots: one for a candidate in a single-member constituency and one for a national party list. Voters registered as national minority voters could vote for a national minority list instead of a party list, while also voting for a candidate in a single-member constituency. However, in practice, only the Roma and German minorities are sufficiently numerous to meet the minimum vote threshold to secure representation. According to the preliminary results, no national minority reached the required threshold to obtain a parliamentary seat.

Election Day Observations

Procedures: Opening, Voting, and Closing

The opening was assessed positively in all polling stations observed and was described by observers as generally calm, smooth and professional. Polling stations opened on time and had the required election materials. Opening procedures were generally followed.

Voting was assessed positively and was most frequently described by observers as organised, orderly, and calm. Election materials were available, voting procedures were followed in the vast majority of cases, and polling station commission members demonstrated a good understanding of the procedures. The atmosphere was generally calm, with no signs of tension or unrest either in the vicinity of or inside polling stations. At the same time, observers noted several recurring shortcomings. Accessibility remained uneven, with one-third of the polling stations observed being either not accessible or only partly accessible to persons with disabilities. In six per cent of the polling stations observed, the layout was assessed as inadequate for the conduct of voting, mainly due to insufficient space, and overcrowding was also sometimes noted. Although voters are not obliged to mark their ballots inside voting booths, the secrecy of the vote must always be ensured. However, observers reported that voters did not mark and cast their ballots in secret in seven per cent of cases. Polling booths were also sometimes positioned in a way that could jeopardise the secrecy of the vote. Observers also noted that voters photographed their ballots and attempted to assist multiple voters in some three per cent of cases, practices that may expose them to pressure or intimidation. Group or family voting which could not be justified as assisted voting emerged as the most recurrent concern and was reported in 27 per cent of cases across 98 of 364 polling stations visited, a practice which was often tolerated by polling station members. Although polling station commissions were generally cooperative and welcoming towards observers, in around 11 per cent of cases, observers did not have an unimpeded view of the procedures.

Election Day Observations

Closing and counting were assessed positively overall and were generally conducted in a calm, orderly, and transparent manner. Polling stations closed on time, and the procedures were generally followed. Observers had an unimpeded view of the procedures, and transparency was generally ensured. However, some minor procedural errors or omissions were observed, mainly involving miscalculations followed by recounts and corrections, uncertainty about the correct order of procedures, and the handling of spoiled or invalid ballots. Additionally, in a few cases, the figures for certain ballot types did not reconcile with the number of voters' signatures, and commissioners were reported to have difficulty completing the protocols. Nonetheless, observers did not report indications of deliberate falsification of results. In 20 per cent of the polling stations visited, observers or other entitled persons were denied copies of the results protocols, contrary to Hungarian legislation.

Election Day Observations

Post-Election Procedures: Tabulation and Results

While vote counting began immediately after the polls closed at most polling stations, not all votes were counted on election night. Postal votes, as well as votes cast at foreign representations and by absentee voters, are processed through a separate procedure, with some ballots counted only in the days following Election Day. Consequently, the preliminary results released on election night do not yet reflect all valid votes. It is also worth noting that the absentee voting framework facilitates participation of more mobile groups of voters, including young people and students residing away from their place of residence for study or work. At the same time, Hungarian citizens living abroad while maintaining a domicile in Hungary are required to vote in person at a Hungarian diplomatic representation, whereas those without a registered domicile, whether residing abroad or within the country, vote by mail, resulting in unequal conditions.

Tabulation was generally conducted in an orderly and transparent manner. However, in some cases, poor arrangements for the receipt of polling station materials, limited available space, and overcrowding were also observed. Observers' comments also noted initial confusion among some staff regarding the observers' presence, although the observation was permitted without restriction.

General Conclusions

On election night, the National Election Office promptly published preliminary results and updated them in real time as data were received, contributing to the transparency of the process. Early preliminary results indicated a clear lead for the Tisza party over the ruling Fidesz party, with projections suggesting a constitutionally significant two-thirds parliamentary majority. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán publicly conceded defeat and congratulated the winner shortly afterwards, a move that helps ease political tensions and contributes to the conditions for a peaceful transition of power.

Acknowledgements

AEO and SILBA would like to thank the election authorities for facilitating the accreditation process, as well as representatives of civil society, journalists, local stakeholders, fellow international observers, and all other interlocutors who contributed to this observation. Both missions also thank the local coordinators and interpreters for their cooperation and support. Special thanks are due to Commit Global for providing Vote Monitor, which enabled real-time data collection and reporting from polling stations. The findings and conclusions of AEO and SILBA are fully independent.

Organisers



Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy is a Danish non-partisan and non-profit youth organization which aims to strengthen democratic dialogue, institutions and organizations. Silba organizes local and international activities, with a main focus on election observation missions, long term international projects and local engagement.

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