This is a summary of the qualitative research conducted by experts at Unhack Democracy Europe, a new non-profit election watchdog. Our goal was to uncover, summarise and raise awareness of the anomalies surrounding the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections as experienced by ballot counting officers.

This paper is based on qualitative research conducted after the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections. It uncovers anomalies (e.g. curtailing rights of party delegates, influencing mobile votes and organized collection of mobile voting, signing empty voter logs etc.) surrounding the elections as experienced by opposition ballot counting officers. Furthermore it aims to raise national and international awareness of these electoral irregularities.

Keywords: Parliamentary elections in Hungary 2018; ballot counting officials, electoral irregularities, qualitative survey.

Chart 1: Experiencing anomalies

The research was completed in two phases:
The first series of interviews were conducted between 14th to 27th August 2018. During this period we interviewed 124 people across Hungary in person, on the phone and with the help of online survey platform, SurveyMonkey. We managed to reach the biggest group of ballot counting officers online, with 111 people responding to our questionnaire about their role on 8 April 2018. We also interviewed a further 13 officers in person.

The second phase of in-person interviews were conducted between February and April 2019, involving 41 people, who were working in precincts whose results showed some anomalies, including high rate of void votes, missing and extra ballots as well as ticket-splitting, when a voter casts one ballot for the opposition and the other for the government.

Hungarian voters typically cast both of their ballots in one direction but ticket splitting is the behavior when someone votes for two different parties with their candidate vote and their party list vote. In the analysis, we set a ticket splitting threshold of 4%, meaning that if the Fidesz candidate exceeded the Fidesz party list by more than 4% in a given polling station, we would label that as “suspicious”. There were a total of 579 polling stations (about 5.6%) where ticket splitting exceeded this 4% threshold. The suspicious ticket splitting level was more than twice as high in polling stations where there were no opposition delegates present than in areas where both opposition and Fidesz delegates were part of the counting committee.

It is important to highlight that contrary to the OSCE/ODHIR’s election report, our research specifically focuses on election day ballot counting anomalies so does not cover Hungary’s media landscape, campaign financing, gerrymandering and the amended election system that could also have impacted the election outcome.

The following findings are based on a total of 165 ballot counting officers’ online testimonies, phone and face to face interviews across 15 counties. The demographics show that over 60% those who responded were at least 55 years old and 28% were over 65 (Table 2).
Chart 2: Ballot Counting Party Delegates by Age

Women were overrepresented by 7% in the committees.

Chart 3: Sex of Ballot Counting Party Delegates

Following our findings are a number of recommendations we have put forward which we believe will greatly improve future election's legitimacy and transparency and assist in the work of ballot counting committees.
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The ballot counting officers’ statements about irregularities made online and in face to face interviews are grouped into the following topics:

1. UNPREPAREDNESS OF BALLOT COUNTING COMMITTEES

At parliamentary elections, the ballot counting committee is comprised of municipality designates and party delegates. Before a parliamentary election, citizens can apply through the municipality or a party/independent candidate to count ballots but municipality designates are often also municipality employees. The job of the committee is to prepare the operations at polling stations, lawfully conduct the elections, count ballots and close the counting process at the polling station.

According to the National Election Office Nemzeti Választási Iroda “The ballot counting committee’s designates and delegates’ rights and obligations are the same, with the difference that the delegates do not receive a fee,” although parties are not prohibited from compensating their delegates. The chair together with the deputy of the committee can only be municipality designates. The note taker, a municipality employee, is responsible for administering and recording the results, turnout numbers and irregularities and although designated by the Local Election Office he or she is not part of the committee.

1.1 PARTY DELEGATES PERCEIVED BY MUNICIPAL DESIGNATES

Despite having equal rights and obligations the party delegate ballot counters are often treated as observers by the committee chair, deputy and note taker.

Often party delegates were not allowed to actively take part in the committee’s responsibilities, for example many delegates reported that they were not allowed to handle the electoral rolls or accompany the mobile ballot box to pensioners’ homes.

Tolna county:
“I said that I want to check the IDs at the table and they said “no way”….They did not (even) allow me to handle the electoral rolls. They did not allow anything and I was told my place is in the corner.”

Békés county:
“Here only the chair and the guy next to him were handling the electoral rolls. We used to be able to deal with everything (back then).”
Zala county:
“I did not deal with the registry, only two people were working with it. The truth is that they always take it from me. I stamped the ballots. There were two people who were checking the registry. They were from the municipality… they distributed the tasks and we did not say no.”

Hajdú-Bihar county:
“I thought it was strange that four committee members were checking the IDs, the signatures on the registry list the counting of the turnout number and stamping and distributing the ballots. The rest of us could only watch it from a distance. During the counting they asked me to double check the empty envelopes, while those committee members were counting.”

Fejér county:
“We were told that only the official ballot counters will do the mobile ballot votes.”

1.2 CURTAILING RIGHTS OF PARTY DELEGATE BALLOT COUNTERS

Face to face interviews reveal the majority of ballot counting committee members are not aware of their full rights. Many of them have been working as ballot counters since the democratic transition in the early 1990s and because of their decades-long experience they do their jobs based mostly on routine rather than official procedure. The interviews also show that because many follow this routine, the steps that ensure the safe mechanism of the election process are not followed and they are often not up to date with election rules or new changes.

The interviewees also added that in many cases the committee chair and note taker were often doubtful and uncooperative which made the ballot counting officers’ work more complicated. As a consequence, in many cases there were no official voter logs filled out on irregularities witnessed by opposition party delegates.

In many cases the party delegates often are not fully aware of their rights, which makes it difficult to know how to stand up when pressured illegally.

An opposition party delegate reported that the authorities illegally interfered in their work.

Pest county:
“We could stamp ballots, note the turnout number etc. like in previous years. Now they let us do it too for a while then the local designate came in. I think she was from the Local Election Office and said that party delegates are not allowed to check the data (of voters), they cannot stamp ballots and note the turnout number. This was around 11 in the morning. As a party delegate we did not know who the lady was that came in but she must have been a senior person to those who were sitting their in an official capacity (municipality’s designates). They accepted it and
immediately told us to stand up and that we were not allowed to do anything. There was a lot of secretive talking there I tell you.”

Tolna county:
“Then I noticed that there were fewer ballot papers. And asked where they were and they said they will check it and I said this is not how it is done and I will step out and will call whoever delegated me here. Then the note taker stood in front of me and said “You are not going anywhere and you are not calling anybody here.”. I became very angry and said you are not going to boss me around here. I came (to work) here for free and I was delegated here and you cannot give me orders. Then she went (to the door) and let the voters in.”

1.3 INADEQUATE TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE OF RECORDING RESULTS IN VOTER LOGS

Several delegates observed that a lack of knowledge from committee chairs and note takers caused disruptions in the committee’s work, especially with administering the results in precincts where there were irregularities.

Party delegates reported that the note taker often needed help with administering the results in voter logs, stretching the already minimum 15 hour work day. There were thousands of precincts where there were missing or extra ballots, more or less than the number of people who showed up to vote. According to the law, if there are extra ballots they need to be deducted from each party or candidate, depending on where these extra ballots occurred. In these precincts party delegates did not always understand how the results were affected and administered. They were also unclear as to what they were signing as the chair of the committee did not explain the rules in detail. Furthermore, generally it can be said that committee members do not have sufficient time to examine the voter logs before they sign them nor are they adequately informed about how irregularities in the results are administered.

Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county:
“I cannot grasp it…what the hell could have happened…they were fluffing with is until 2 AM…because the numbers did not add up…”

Pest county:
“The note taker and the chair were new. They were making calculations for almost an hour and a half. They were not on top of things at all. They were making calls and changing things so we would get the official results.”

Nógrád county:
“Neither the chair nor the note taker were up to the mark. The numbers did not add up.”
Komárom-Esztergom megye:
“I know that the maths did not work. This was her first time doing this. This is why we had to start again. The result did not add up and I was bloody tired by 2 AM.”

Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok megye:
“I think the voter log is incorrect…he added up the numbers then the other two messed up the voter log.”

Pest megye:
“The note taker was a bit uncertain in his role but he said he had done this many times. The calculation was a bit difficult.”

Pest megye:
“There were mathematical inconsistencies but I did not understand it because it was so strange the way they added up the numbers…This Math after (the count) was very strange. They did not note in the log why they had to count like this.”

Budapest:
“We could not make sense of the voter log. They flashed it up for two seconds and we could not examine it. We really tried to.”

There were many delegates who complained about the lack of transparency. There were also instances when committee chairs did not ask for the committee members’ IDs at the start as the rules clearly demand it.

One of the party delegates from Budapest added:
“Before, at previous elections they always asked for my ID and I had to prove my identity. When I got there by half past five am then the municipality’s employees were already working there and they did not even ask who I am. I could have walked in from the street. I was concerned about it and also complained.”

1.4 RARE ADMINISTRATION IRREGULARITIES

Party delegates often do not officially record irregularities, instead they try to resolve the issues on the spot, which means that the opportunity to formally appeal is lost.

 Nógrád county:
“There was someone who greeted me, I went out and (when I turned back) I realised that she (from the committee) was holding her hand and pointed to her “Put the cross here aunt Marika!”. There was a delegate from Jobbik with whom we could work together, so there could be some order there.”
Komárom-Esztergom county:
“Quite a few people knew my colleague (in the committee) from Fidesz whom I went to do the mobile ballot voting with. I had to warn her once because she was assisting someone in the booth. There was a mobile ballot voter for whom we had to wait for over half an hour. It turned out that she wasn’t even at home. We were sitting in front of her house waiting.”

2. DAMAGED CREDIBILITY OF PRECINCT RESULTS DUE TO FALSIFIED, INADEQUATE AND PRE-SIGNED VOTER-LOGS

Unhack Democracy Europe’s research found that the most serious issues on election day were around voter logs, which should guarantee the credibility of the results.

16.3% of online respondents experienced at least one irregularity while processing the results. Respondents mostly complained about the long waiting times when reporting the results and that they were not allowed to be present when the results were typed into the system. After the ballots are counted at the polling station, the chair of the committee either takes the voter log with the results to the local election office hosted by the municipality and types in the official numbers with an administrator behind closed doors or the chair calls the local election office to transmit the results on the phone.

Chart 4: Anomalies during recording

A series of different online respondents said:

“I was not allowed to check the numbers being entered into the system. Although, I wanted to enter the room the security guards would not let me in.”

“We were not present when the numbers were entered in.”
“We could not send in the results to the centre (local election office) until half past midnight….it was quite annoying that from half past five in the morning until half past midnight we had to stay there because of this.”

“We had to wait for a really long time after the count to wait for the center’s (local election office’s) answer. Then everyone got bored and then we finished with the voter logs.”

“The note taker wanted to send in the results but we had to wait for hours because of the local election office to finalise the voter logs between 10 to 12.”

“The only thing was that for a very long time we were unable to reach the center (local election office) to tell them the results.”

A further 11% reported not receiving a copy of the voter log, which they are entitled to by law. One of the reasons cited was that there was no photocopy taken after the logs were filled out but in many cases despite repeated attempts party delegates were refused requests for voter logs or they were advised to come back to the notary the next day because it was the “instruction from the centre”.

![Chart 5: Photocopy of voter logs](chart)

It is important to highlight that in most cases members of the committee do not know how many voter log copies they need to sign.

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county:

“I had one problem that they did not give my a copy of the log because I would have had to go to the notary the next day. (They said) this is the instruction from the center that we could only get the copy from the notary the next day only. The problem is that what did we hand in? We cannot check that.”
One of the interviewees in Tolna county told us that he had been asked to sign the empty logs before they started the counting:

“What was interesting that they already made us sign the logs before we even opened the envelopes. So, they made us sign the blank voter logs, which only had the basic info without the results.” “When the log go onto valasztas.hu the correction was already there.” “It was suspicious that on one of the pages there was a correction and a big stamp right on it. I talked to one of the committee members (after) and asked if there had been any correction and he also said there wasn’t any.”

In Tolna county an opposition delegate had to count in the dark. The delegate stated in the interview that the results in the log were falsified.

“…they changed the results in the log when I couldn’t see it. They changed it at the end that’s for sure. So, we did not count that number (stated in the log).

The party delegate then said they changed the number of ballots cast for the opposition:

“We counted the ballots but I did not see what she wrote in the log. I didn’t even see what I signed. “They changed it later that’s for sure.”

Although, the law does not prohibit filling out more than two voter logs, there was a precinct in Tolna where there was a working photocopy machine yet for every committee member they filled one out:

“The chair of the committee filled out 6 and then everyone signed those, every six of them. There was a photocopy machine but we did not copy anything.”

3. ELECTION SOFTWARE FAILURE

12% of online respondents reported that the software system went down on election day. This meant many of them had to wait for hours when the results were being uploaded into the computer. 20% of face-to-face interviewees reiterated that the software system went down, which resulted in unusually long waiting times often until 1:30 am when the chair of the committee could report the results and the delegates were able to receive their official voter log copies.

The party delegates received information that “the system went down” and that “the system froze” nationwide or that the local election office is difficult to reach. Some of the delegates especially from bigger cities explained that their committees reported the results to the local
election offices in their constituencies on the phone. In smaller towns the committee usually
walks together to the local election office hosted by the municipality and they wait until an
administrator enters the numbers into the system behind closed doors. Party delegates are not
present at this stage.

The long hours of waiting is physically and mentally tiring, especially for those delegates who
were locked into the polling station.

Budapest:
“We waited for two and a half hours because of system failure. It was well into the night when
we went home at half past one. They said the whole problem was that the system failed
centrally. There was some sort of system failure. We did not sign any voter log because we
were waiting. This was for hours. I asked multiple times and the answer was that the system did
not work and we were waiting for the HQ.”

Tolna county:
We would have handed over the ballots at the municipality but there was some sort of computer
issue and the lady could not register the results. We were waiting for hours first in the car then
at the entrance hall until they managed to type in the numbers.”
“When we handed over the ballots we had to wait because the computer went down. The
national system stopped working and we had to wait for hours there, so when the computer
restarted the numbers could be entered. It was a long night.”

Békés county:
“We went to to municipality after 11. Someone please tell me if you wait until 1:30 AM from 5:30
AM, who would examine the voter log that you have to sign? You are happy to be free to go
home. This is a big problem, we couldn’t wait to go home then they shoved this voter log under
our nose to sign it. Whether it is like that what it says or not (we did not know). We would have
even signed our own death sentence.
We signed it but I did not verify count whether it was the same that we signed at the polling
station. That I did not check.
They said the system was not functioning properly, that it was slow and it froze. We waited for
an hour only for them to say that the system froze. Those who went in early at least got
seats but we were standing on the stairs until 1:30 AM. We did not have an election like this.
This was a tragedy! I could not wait for them to hand me the voter log copy. They have to admit
that it was inhuman.
In the past we always went home at 10 or half past 10. Now they did not even let us out from
the room where we were counting. I even asked why they had to lock the door. We did not want
to escape. We did not experience anything like this before. We finished with the count by 8:30
PM and they let us out of the polling station after 11 PM then we waited at the municipality
office’s stairs until 1:30 AM. I did not even at look what I was signing.”
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county:
“We completed the counting process at around 10 or 10:30 PM. Then we went to the municipality together, where the system was down. It just didn't work. Then they took the logs to the constituency’s main election office, where the system went down again. Following that they returned around half past 1 or 2 to sign the logs and then it was over. (We received a copy before they left.)

Tolna county:
“We had to go over to the municipality offices where we were made to wait for an hour. The others took the ballots in to the building. We followed them. They said that we should wait in the dining room but I told them I will wait here (in the hall). We did not know what we had to wait for but apparently the computer froze. I told them I needed the photo copy and they made me wait for more than an hour.”

Budapest:
“As the note taker informed me, there was system failure.”

Békés county:
“We had to wait when we went to the municipality offices and we wanted to hand over the material. We had to wait for hours then and it was one or half past one when they released us. It was a system failure or the system was overloaded. I don’t know what we had to wait for. Not only for us but the other precincts too. It was going slow...the system is overloaded, this is what they said. We always have to wait but this time it was unusually long.”

Békés county:
“We finished counting by half past 8. Then we were waiting there. The chair of the committee called the local election office then they said we should not go in (to the municipality offices) because the system did not work. Before (this election) when we finished with the ballot box we went to the municipality offices (where the Local Election Office is based). This time we signed the voter log once in kindergarten (where the polling station is) and then at the municipality offices when the entire process was over. Then we also sign some other paper there.
The system was broken or it did not work in the entire country (this is what they said). They said the system did not work...We did not understand why the system went down now in the 21st century.”

Budapest:
“We waited for hours for our voter logs to be approved because of the main system’s failure.”

Budapest:
“We finished with the counting after 10 PM. There was something wrong with the system and the chair couldn’t report how many ballots each party received. We had to wait for quite a long time but I don’t know exactly for how long.”
As asked about the claims of numerous counting officers that the system had frozen, the National Election Office responded: “The election IT system processing the election data functioned without any failure during the election”.

4. CHAOS AND DISORGANISATION IN ABSENTEE PRECINCTS AND IN PRECINCTS WHERE ABSENTEE BALLOTS WERE COUNTED

A record number of people (200,041) voted through absentee ballots on 8 April 2018. Absentee ballots are cast by voters in person, who are unable to vote at their official home precinct. Therefore, they need to register prior to the elections and there are designated precincts in their chosen constituency, where they are able to vote. There were a slew of irregularities in absentee precincts during the processing and transportation of absentee votes. Party delegates highlighted that in bigger absentee precincts there were not opposition party delegates at every table and sometimes all opposition delegates were seated at one table.

In the busiest precincts long queues resulted in significant waiting times. In bigger cities every constituency had only one absentee precinct despite the record number of absentee voters. As voters with permanent addresses in the country can only vote in person, they can register to cast their ballots at a different constituency, which often results in extended waiting times especially in bigger cities.

For example in Budapest’s 11th district’s Bocskai út absentee precinct, the voters had to wait for more than 3 hours to cast their ballots. Local voters also cast their ballots in the same polling station with absentee voters, the long queues often deterred them from staying. It was not uncommon that they were unaware that they actually had a separate ‘local’ queue with no waiting time.

This could also explain why in the busiest absentee precinct the locals turnout rate was on average 20% lower than the average in the constituency.

4.1 COMMON BALLOT BOX FOR ABSENTEE AND LOCAL BALLOTS

In the smaller and medium sized absentee precincts opposition party delegates reported that there was one ballot box designated for the absentee votes in green envelopes and the local voters’ ballots. (While local voters do not need to use the white envelope handed to them, absentee voters must put both of their ballots in the green envelope and seal it.)

There was an absentee precinct in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, where there were three extra ballots in the common ballot box.
“The absentee voters had the same ballot box. There was one mobile ballot box. But they (absentees) had a different queue. The white and the green envelopes were in the same ballot box.”

In Békés county, party delegates told Unhack Democracy Europe that the municipality’s designates including the chair and the note taker did not keep the required security standards in a precinct, where domestic absentee and embassy ballots were counted a week after the elections. This means that party delegates were not present when the room, where the local voters’ ballots were kept for a week, was locked.

Békés county:
“There were no security measures in our presence, for example nothing was stamped in our presence. Only the chair of the committee together with the note taker handed over the ballots without us witnessing it.”

In one of Budapest’s absentee precincts the party delegates reported numerous irregularities.

“It was physically tiring because voters were continuously coming from 7 in the morning until 7 in the evening and we had to pay attention. We couldn’t even eat. The crowd was so big that we couldn’t check who was going where. There weren’t enough of us.”

While on the night of the elections after the polling stations close only the local ballots are counted, the absentee votes’ green envelopes are not opened and only counted by the number.

“We could feel that there were green envelopes that only had one ballot in them (because they were thinner). Whether they dropped it in a local ballot box or took it home, we don’t know. There were more party list votes in the local ballot box than the number of people who showed up to vote. (According to the rules) after each extra vote one had to be deducted from each party.”

“It was strange because it looked like the absentee voter walked across the hall toward the local urns, so I think there was some sort of intention behind it.”

4.2 THERE WEREN’T ADEQUATE TOOLS TO SECURELY STORE AND TRANSPORT BALLOTS

“After we counted the ballots we had to wrap these absentee unopened envelopes securely in a pile but we received such poor wrapping tools that when we finished, anyone could have pulled anything out of the pile or add to it (of envelopes). The pile wasn’t properly sealed or stamped. It was pointless to sign this.”

“We had to put the green envelopes in boxes and they took them to the HQ I don’t know who had access to it and who didn’t but you could do anything with it”
4.3 HOURS OF WAITING FOR VOTERS; DISORGANISATION AT PRECINCTS WHERE ABSENTEE VOTERS CAST THEIR BALLOTS

In another Budapest precinct because of the extremely high number of absentee voters there was a huge crowd and subsequent mistakes. One of the delegates interviewed by Unhack said:

“Yes, the local voters were separated from the absentee voters but we couldn’t really pay attention because they were many. There was a long queue because of the absentee voters. When there were a lot of people coming at once we could not pay attention to who dropped his/her ballot where.”

Party delegates also reported that there were local voters who were deterred by the long absentee queues that they thought was the local voters’ queue and turned around.

“Yes, there were such cases for sure. We had to make arrangements. We went out and said that the local voters don’t have to stay in the queue but this was later. Earlier it could have happened that someone turned around after seeing the queue. If I was a voter I would have done the same.”

A similar case was reported by another party delegate in Budapest:

“It wasn’t ideal that the absentee and local voters cast their ballots in one room because when local voters looked at the queue they often turned around. We heard it from quite a few people that they preferred to go home home. Only in the afternoon were local voters told that they don’t need to stay in the long queue. The communication wasn’t good at all.”

5. INFLUENCING MOBILE VOTES AND ORGANISED COLLECTION OF MOBILE BALLOT BOX VOTING REQUESTS

13% of the online testimonies reported some irregularity with the mobile ballot box votes’ processing and handling. One of the recurring complaints was that municipality designates did not allow many party delegates to accompany the mobile ballot box and that the elderly were influenced to vote for Fidesz.
Chart 6: Mobile ballot anomalies

There was a village, where 60 of the 1000 eligible voters requested mobile voting and in another town in the local hospital the sick elderly had a note on their bedside table with the word ‘Fidesz’ on it:

“There were some c60 mobile ballot box voting requests [in the village]. In our precinct there were 30 something. When the notary found out her eyes opened wide because not even in the county seat they had so many. We are about 1000 voters here. There was a person who got these old people here. Her husband was in our committee. So when we went to take the oath ahead of the elections these 60 requests were already in.”

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county:
“It was written on a piece of paper on a bedside table who she needs to vote for. It was written that she is voting for Fidesz. It wasn’t written that she was voting for Miklós Seszták but it was the consequence of that. We saw it by multiple sick people probably 4 or 5.”

Pest county:
“He said 45 minutes before closing that there is another 8 mobile voters. This was hell. In reality we had to go to the dying, who wanted to vote for Fidesz with their last breath in total misery. There was an elderly couple, where the man was recently released from hospital and his wife was suffering from dementia and even at this stage they still wanted to vote for Fidesz.”

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county:
“It is as sure as I sit here that they were trained to vote for Fidesz. This is for sure. It was said that “You know who to vote for, don’t you?” They were trained. I saw it. There was 1 vote for Jobbik and the rest for Fidesz.”
Budapest:  
“A representative of Fidelistas (Fidesz’s youth division) handed in the mobile voting requests and one of the voters thought when we went to collect her ballot that we came from Fidesz.”

Komárom-Esztergom:  
“Every elderly woman, where we went with the mobile ballot, voted for Fidesz. They said it themselves, we did not ask of course. Because they (Fidesz) went there even the day before and handed out pens, food and God knows what else. This is called bribery and trickery.”

Budapest:  
“Unfortunately, I did not go with the mobile ballot but the others explained as they also recorded in the protocol that there was a voter who did not request mobile ballot voting and there was a building, where they rang the buzzers in the morning of the elections and said not to wait for the mobile ballot because it will not be coming.”

6. BALLOT COUNTING COMMITTEE MEMBERS’ AND MINORITY VOTERS’ LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE LAW

More than 10% of online respondents experienced irregularities during handling and processing minority votes.

Often ballot counting committee members did not know what ballot to hand to minority voters and they noticed that even during the day they handed out the wrong ballots. Furthermore, even voters were unaware that they were registered on the minority electoral rolls and that they need to actively de-register if they want to be taken off. The minority voters often do not know themselves what ballots they should receive and that they can only vote for the minority list instead of the party list (in addition to the single member constituency ballot).

Nógrád county:  
“You know guys as we usually do it, we know each other, we trust each other. Here we followed the usual routine. The problem was that we were not 100% informed and trained because the rules have changed.”

Anonymous online respondent:  
“There were confusions on multiple occasions because the voter knew his/her registration differently than what the electoral rolls said.”

Tolna county:  
“There was confusion that the deputy chair was registered as a German minority voter and so she could only vote for the minority list (not the party list). She was then trying to sort it out at the polling station on the phone but she was clearly not allowed to do it. Anyway, she didn’t succeed and I did not say anything.”
Veszprém county:
“The chair made several phone calls before the chair and the deputy realised that they did not handle the minority situation well. It was during the day when they realised it.”

Nógrád county:
“The first conflict was when the Roma voters came and they (other committee members) shouldn’t have handed out the party list ballots...When those four voters left then I said to them that I don’t think we should have handed out the party list ballots too... And then it turned out (during the day) that I was right.”

Budapest:
“Those who have been counting ballots for a long time did not know the effective law.”

7. EXTRA AND MISSING BALLOTS DUE TO ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES AND OTHER IRREGULARITIES

As we also concentrated on precincts with missing and extra ballots the interviewees reported that the number of ballots cast did not match with the number of voters who showed up to vote.

Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county:
It turned out that there were 3 extra party list votes than the number of people who went to vote.

“Then one thing popped into my mind...other times we started the day by counting the ballots but it didn’t happen this time.” “...because the officials said they had already counted them.” We also counted the unfilled ballots at the end...” “Then we also realized that the number of leftover ballots did not match... then we started to check the registry again and count everything once more.”

“I cannot for the love of God imagine what else it could have been...other than some sort of fraud. But there was absolutely no sign of any sort of fraud there or misuse. We did not even leave the polling station...”

In a constituency in Pest county there were more than 30 extra votes, so 30 more ballots in the ballot box than the number of people who turned up.

“The chair said that this never happened to him and he was very shocked that the numbers did not match. He got embarrassed and did not understand how the numbers don’t add up. We
counted it twice and the difference was very big and we could not figure out who could have made a mistake.”

Overall out of five and a half million in-country votes about 3000 went missing. Paradoxically, 500 extra votes turned up in certain precincts’ ballot boxes, so more ballots than the number of people who went to vote.

Unhack’s investigation published in openDemocracy proved that according to the public data available on the official website valaszas.hu there were over a thousand missing absentee votes.

“Hungarians from within Hungary but currently outside the country (such as those working or studying abroad) have to vote in person at a Hungarian embassy. In addition, people who are away from home on the day of the vote can choose to cast their ballot in person in another polling station in Hungary. These absentee ballots are then transported to their relevant constituency to be counted. However, the number of these voters who showed up to cast their ballots, as recorded on the official website, is 2,918 higher than the number of envelopes recorded as being counted – implying that 1% of the total votes went missing. While some of this can be explained by errors in how precinct committees filled out the voter logs, there is still a large number of ballots that remain unaccounted for – enough to influence the outcome in one or more single-member constituencies.”

Asked about this discrepancy, the Hungarian National Election office said “all absentee and embassy votes were counted”.

However, because absentee voters not only need to register but sometimes need to also travel to the consulate or designated precinct, where waiting times often run to 2 to 3 hours, it is less likely that they would just put these envelopes in their pockets and go home.

8. THE RULING PARTY’S MOBILISATION ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The party delegates interviewed in our research reported that illegal activities often happened via the phone. The National Election Office’s official guide says: “The goal of the phone ban is that the members of the committee could not record and note who went to vote and who did not. The violation of the ban, in other words obtaining this data (for example: copying the electoral rolls or registering it with the purpose that it can be transmitted to someone) and sending the data outside of the polling station is a serious violation of the law.”

Tolna county:
“There was a committee member, who was in this group of four who could get access to the papers and count who was coming. One of these members’ husband came in and the lady, who
was checking who came and who did not said that they need to mobilise, because so and so have not arrived yet and that they need to tell someone. Most likely that they needed to get the attention of the minority that someone has not turned up yet. It was 4 in the afternoon when they were in trouble. Then the minority has arrived and their chief then the rest of the clan. They arrived in two or three waves. Then I talked to the janitress, who also confirmed it and said they were mobilising. So not only in our precinct but most likely in other precincts as well.”

Komárom-Esztergom county:
“There was a lady. This Fidesz poor old dear got her phone and called someone that ‘Mariska, you have not come yet.’ We agreed that we will not use the phone.”

Tolna county:
“She said that they arrived Mr. Mayor. I said what!? Get the hell out of here with your phone right now….but then I realised that she wasn’t really interested in how many people came but rather who came because they came street by street...because the local parish church has a pick up truck and they went street by street to transport voters.”

Pest county:
“They said they would go and smoke outside. But then you could see that there were more voters coming after the cigarette break. Some of the committee members who went out were Fidesz delegates. They know everyone here.”

It was not only party delegates who stepped outside to use the phone but also the municipalities’ designate. “Of course, he/she is the best caller.”

9. THE LEADING PARTY’S GROWING ELECTION CLIENTELISM

Unhack found new evidence of electoral clientelism such as outright vote buying, intimidation and threats to withdraw social benefits. These testimonies underline our concerns about expanding networks of voter-clientelism in Hungary. It is difficult to measure the scale of this phenomena but a recent study by Yale and California Davis professors shows that 5-7% of the examined towns’ total population across the chosen 3 counties experienced voter clientelism in the 2014 elections at the scale of similar to that of Argentina and just below Venezuela’s. This has likely worsened since 2014. Some of the closely contested constituencies in 2018 were in the counties examined in the study in 2014.
In Jász-Nagy kun-Szolnok county the opposition party delegates found out from friends and family that that they received money for their vote for Fidesz. Further, those ‘agents’ who recruited voters also transported them to the polling stations.

“This is a very poor village. They told me that they each received 5000 forint (€15) for a vote. The old people were trained and their family members helped. Apparently those who brought the voters got 10,000 forint (€30) per voter and amassed millions of forints (thousands of euros). “If they do it like this on a small scale imagine the big guys.”

In Nógrád county Roma people were trained to cross the last box, which was for the Fidesz candidate and on the party list they were instructed to vote in the box with a certain number next to it, which was Fidesz again. In return they were promised that they could keep their benefits and public workforce jobs.

Nógrád county:
“Here it was so organised by one side that I almost felt redundant. For example, when the Roma voters came in then they did not know that they had to vote for Mr. Balla but that they needed to vote for the last name because it was the last on the ballot... I chatted with them as I walked them out. They knew that it was number X on the ballot and on the candidate list it was the last. And he (the voter) said at the end that they would have never ever received CSOK benefit in their lives otherwise... I talked to at least 30. And he also told me that he has public work scheme enrollment thanks to this.”

In Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county the opposition party delegate was asked to find Fidesz on the ballot paper. These voters often also marked the Roma party and made their votes void. “Most of the times I had to help the illiterate Romas as they asked “Which one is Fidesz?”; where should they put the X? I got goosebumps but I showed them. Their personal data was checked and the ballots were handed to them. Then they went to the booth. But when I was helping these voters in the booth I saw that many of them voted for both Fidesz and the Roma party at the same time.”

10. TRANSPORTATION OF PHANTOM VOTERS (2014, 2018)

Following the 2018 election, Hungary’s Supreme Court, the Kúria, as well as the chief prosecutor’s office condemned what happened on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border as ‘organised fraud’ where voters were bussed across the border. Our investigation has revealed new evidence that voters were also bussed in other parts of the country too. Opposition Party delegates also reported that in Békés and Szabolcs there were people voting who did not reside there and who were transported to the delegate’s towns in order to vote.
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county:
“In 2014 (at the parliamentary election) for sure. Then there was a car and 8 people came. They cast their ballots then disappeared. Then came another car. But this time it did not happen like this.”

In another constituency in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county a party-delegate reported the following about the 2014 municipal elections:

“And when we had the vote then (the Fidesz mayor) sent notes to Ukraine. And here the mayor’s son was handing out these notes that we need to vote for the mayor and the they guys from Fidesz.”

A party delegate from central Hungary informed us that the local pastor brought their relatives to vote from Ukraine at the 2018 parliamentary elections:
“I didn’t understand why they (the chair and deputy) did not let me check the IDs of the voters. There were many unknown faces, who are not residents here and I don’t know who they are. But I practically know everyone here. Many of these strangers came with the priest and I even asked who there were. I was told that they are relatives of the pastor, who is from Ukraine originally.”

In Bács-Kiskun county one of the party delegates near the Serbian border reported:
“I have never seen so many Hungarians from Transylvania, who work here and who would be also asked to vote. Some of them had to be turned away because their naturalisation has not been completed yet. In total about 30 Roma people from Transylvania came to vote in our precinct.”

Another testimony from the same town reveals:
“In an empty building on the highstreet there are 10-12 people registered but they do not live there. They are Hungarians from Serbia who only come to cast their ballots here.”

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye:
“There isn’t any house, where there wouldn’t be registered dual citizens even in the mayor’s home. Many don’t dare to talk because the mayor threatened them that they won’t get any public work if they talk to the media.”

“There are quite a few (Ukrainian-Hungarians) registered at our address. We were promised that my parents will have public work so we registered the Ukrainians. The mayor and his son gave notes (to voters) that they need to vote for Fidesz.”
11. THE FAILURE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES

Opposition parties did not provide any information on the number of their own ballot counting officers despite multiple information requests from Unack Democracy Europe. According to the official National Election Office website there were no opposition party delegates in 1100 precincts out of the total 10285. This means the parties did not use the opportunity afforded to them by law.

On average there were 700 eligible voters per precinct and given the national turnout rate (70.22%) this means that approximately 540,000 voters’ ballots were tallied without opposition presence.

Accordingly to the online testimonies and face to face interviews the demographics show that over 60% of the party delegates were over 55 years old. The volunteers reported that they had difficulties in getting in touch with the parties that delegated them. None of the opposition parties provided enough information for their delegates about the duties of the committee and how to spot possible irregularities.

According to the responses it can be argued with confidence that the parties did not take up the anomalies noted by their ballot counting officers. In most cases the voter logs were not even collected by the local party officials -with the exception of some able local leaders.

Chart 7: Parties asking for feedback

Did your delegating party asked for your feedback about your experience working at the polling station? Did they ask for the photocopy of the voter log?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but not the voter log</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, the voter log</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>26.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, regarding the following:</td>
<td>14.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most obvious example of passive attitude was from LMP, the Hungarian green party. LMP did not even respond to supporters who made multiple attempts to volunteer. This meant that many willing volunteers could not become ballot counting officers. Furthermore, no opposition party asked for feedback and reports from their ballot counting officers in an organised manner.
12. BARRIERS IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR BALLOT COUNTING OFFICERS AND DIFFERENCE IN FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

The oath taking occurs a few days before the elections in front of the given town’s (precinct’s) mayor. It poses both logistical and financial challenges to volunteers.

“If someone wants to volunteer for a committee far away from his/her hometown the person should not have to travel there separately. It is especially important to have opposition ballot counting officers in remote places where the chances of misuse is higher.”

“For me it took quite a long time to go down to the oath. I know someone who withdrew the application because he couldn’t go to take the oath before the elections.”

Furthermore, signing the incompatibility documents that can be sent via mail or dropped off in person at the party’s office poses another obstacle. According to the opposition ballot counters there were precincts across the country where the municipalities’ designates and Fidesz’s delegates received the same amount of compensation 35,000 forint (or 110 euros) for the day. By contrast the opposition party delegates, with the exception of a handful of cases, did not receive anything.

The financial compensation and the unequal treatment of opposition ballot counting officers by Fidesz delegates and municipal designates was a source of conflict on occasions.

13. DEFECTS IN THE LOCAL ELECTION OFFICES’ TRAINING

Several party delegates reported that the local election offices' training events were superficial. Rules were stated without illustrative examples. The booklet produced by the National Election Office does not include any practical information regarding the committee’s work, especially in regard to handling possible anomalies. The booklet is often difficult to interpret.

Furthermore, Unhack found a booklet produced by a local election office which contained instructions that contradict the law.

There was a reported difference between the quality of training organised by NGO Számoljuk Együtt (Let's Count Together) and the local election offices. This was especially true when explaining impartiality requirements and providing practical examples to reinforce learning:

“For my point of view the paid municipality designates seemed to have received a worse training than us at Számoljuk Együtt (Let's Count Together). Or maybe the municipality
designates did not want to pay attention to the details such as why there should not be a pen on the table when we count the ballots.”

Furthermore, there were several party delegates, who expressed their wish to use a more practical and standardized training.

“It would be better if the information was grouped into sections by topic and illustrated by videos. That way it would be easier to digest what to do for example with the ballot boxes.”

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Unhack Democracy Europe’s research we put forward the following recommendations:

1. There needs to be a more practical approach to training party delegate ballot counting officers, with a special focus on rights, recording irregularities and understanding voter logs. Unhack wants to introduce an e-learning platform based on our research.

2. It is crucial to raise the importance of ballot counting among younger people and encourage them to take part in the democratic process.

3. It is important to have at least one opposition party delegate in the committee. In the bigger absentee precinct their should be at least one opposition delegate at each table.

4. Opposition parties need to move ballot counters from the cities to smaller towns, where it is difficult to recruit.

5. The parties’ ballot counting delegate coordinators need to attend ballot counting training sessions with the delegates.

6. The parties need to contact their delegates following the elections to gather information about anomalies and examine them in depth.

7. To ensure a professional, objective environment that minimises conflict, delegates should not only come from the local community but also from other towns.

8. Total transparency is not guaranteed along every step of the ballot counting process. For example the results are entered into the national election system behind closed doors and the absentee ballots are transported without party delegate observation then subsequently stored in a place where delegates are not present at the close. Further improvements are needed to bring more transparency into the process.

9. If there are extra ballots in the ballot box (more ballots than the number of people who turned up to vote) the law requires these extra ballots to be deducted from each party or candidate. Because this distorts the results the rule should be amended.

10. Currently the delegates must take an oath in person a few days before the elections in the presence of the local mayor and it often poses logistical and financial challenges especially to those who are not local. It would be necessary to reform this outdated practice and find alternatives, for example by introducing the use of Skype.
15. OUTLOOK

Following the 2019 European Parliamentary Elections on 26th May we conducted an online survey with opposition ballot counting delegates. The 38 question survey was completed by 605 ballot counting officers, which is a six-fold increase from last year’s. In the current phase of the research, we are now selectively interviewing some of the delegates who filled out the questionnaire and the summary will likely be published by the end of this year. We also plan to start our qualitative research following the October 2019 municipal elections, whose results will be released early 2020. Our preliminary research of the EP elections concludes that the opposition party delegates experienced anomalies surrounding mobile ballot box voting in care homes, handling of voter logs and prohibited access to electoral rolls.