



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

SWEDEN

GENERAL ELECTIONS

13 September 2026

ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

5-7 May 2026



Warsaw
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I. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the authorities of Sweden to observe the 11 September 2022 general elections and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 5 to 7 May 2026.¹ The NAM included Meaghan Fitzgerald, ODIHR Head of Election Department and Kakha Inaishvili, ODIHR Election Adviser.

The purpose of the mission was to assess the pre-election environment and preparations for these elections. Based on this assessment, the NAM should recommend whether to deploy an ODIHR observation activity for the forthcoming elections and, if so, what type of activity best meets the identified needs. Meetings were held with officials from state institutions as well as with representatives of political parties, media, civil society, and the international community. A list of meetings is annexed to this report.

ODIHR would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden for their assistance in organizing the NAM. ODIHR would also like to thank all of its interlocutors for taking the time to meet with the NAM and for sharing their views.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of governance. Legislative power is vested in a unicameral parliament elected for a four-year term. Of the 349 members, 310 are elected through a proportional open-list system in 29 multi-member constituencies, and 39 are compensatory adjustment seats. To win seats, a party must obtain either 4 per cent of the national vote or 12 per cent in a single constituency. The 13 September general elections will be held concurrently with regional and municipal council elections.

The Elections Act was recently amended in 2025 and 2026. These changes introduced a new chapter on election security, designating the Swedish Election Authority (SEA) as the co-ordinating body for lower-level electoral authorities and establishing mandatory incident reporting. Amendments also strengthened accessibility requirements, including extended mobile polling to voters in police custody and care facilities, formalised the accreditation of citizen and international observers in line with a prior ODIHR recommendation, and introduced a requirement to provide identifying information when submitting election appeals to verify the appellant's standing. Other previous ODIHR recommendations, including further measures to ensure the transparency of campaign finances remain unaddressed.

Following the 2025 amendments, these appeals must include the appellant's personal identity or organisation number, or other identifying information, enabling the ERB to verify the appellant's standing. Deadlines for other categories of appeals vary by subject matter

¹ On 24 March 2026, ODIHR received an official invitation to observe the elections.

Election administration is decentralised and led by the SEA, with County Administrative Boards, and 290 Municipal Election Commissions administering elections at the sub-national level. While the SEA does not have oversight powers over these bodies, recent amendments have strengthened its coordination role in the protection of elections. Voters may cast ballots in advance at designated polling stations and those unable to visit a polling station due to illness, disability, age or detention may vote by courier or through mobile polling officers arranged by municipalities. All ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the efficiency, professionalism and impartiality of the election administration at all levels.

Citizens over 18 years of age are eligible to vote. Some 7.9 million voters are registered for the upcoming parliamentary elections. The SEA conducts detailed outreach, including by sending each voter a voting card containing their name, registration number on the voter list, and polling station information. For the first time, the SEA will issue digital voting cards to an estimated six million voters with a registered e-mail address, while the remainder will receive their cards by post. ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed no concerns regarding voter registration procedures or the accuracy of the voter lists.

To stand for office, a candidate must be an eligible voter who has given consent to be nominated. Parties may choose between closed lists, on which only formally nominated candidates may be elected, and open lists, on which any consenting candidate may be elected, including those not printed on a party's ballot. Most political parties met by ODIHR NAM reported applying internal policies to promote women's representation on candidate lists, including alternating placement of women and men. Women comprise around 44 per cent of candidates registered for the parliamentary elections. ODIHR NAM received no concerns regarding the party or candidate registration processes.

Women are well represented in public offices, holding 45 per cent of the seats in the parliament and 12 of 23 ministerial positions in the government. At the same time, ODIHR NAM interlocutors raised concerns about the prevalence of online harassment and intolerant speech targeting women in politics, including the use of deep fakes. Misogyny was identified as a significant factor in reducing women's political participation, in some cases leading to resignations from political party leadership.

The election campaign is largely unregulated, with no official campaign period defined. While ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in their ability to campaign freely, they noted a growing trend in the coarsening of political discourse. The campaign is expected to focus on domestic issues, with the conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine also expected to feature prominently. Political party interlocutors highlighted candidate safety as a significant concern, with online threats and harassment predominantly targeting women and minority candidates expected. Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors also raised concerns regarding the potential for disinformation and foreign interference to feature in the campaign, including the use of AI-generated content and manipulated imagery.

The legal framework for campaign finance remains unchanged since the last general elections. Public funding is the main source of party financing and is allocated on the basis of parliamentary representation and past electoral performance. There are no restrictions on its use, including for campaign purposes. There are also no caps on donations or total party income and no limits on campaign expenditure by parties or candidates. Legislation does not regulate third-party spending or prohibit foreign donations. Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that while annual revenue reporting is in place and broadly respected, the framework remains susceptible to circumvention including with respect to anonymous contributions.

The media environment is pluralistic, though media ownership is increasingly concentrated. Media coverage of the election campaign is largely unregulated. During the campaign period, public broadcasters plan to organise a range of election-related programmes at the national and regional levels, including debates with party leaders and make some content available in minority languages and selected programming featuring subtitles and sign-language interpretation. Working conditions for journalists are generally regarded as safe and well protected. Most ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall satisfaction with their media access and campaign coverage.

Decisions of the SEA determining the outcome of the election can be appealed by any voter or electoral contestant no later than ten days after the election results have been certified; however, there are no deadlines to review the cases. Appeals received by and decisions of the Election Review Board are made publicly available. Following the 2025 legislative amendments, appeals against election results must include the appellant's identification information, enabling the Election Review Board to verify the appellant's standing.

The 2025 amendments to the Elections Act formalised the accreditation of citizen and international election observers, addressing a prior ODIHR recommendation. All stages of voting and counting are open to public observation, with the same conditions applying to citizen and international observers. Election observation covers advance voting, election-day voting, and the preliminary and final counts.

All ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the electoral process and in the ability of the election administration to manage the elections in a professional, impartial, and transparent manner. Some interlocutors identified areas that could benefit from external review, particularly with regard to political finances, while acknowledging the pending legislative proposals intended to address the identified gaps. Online campaigning, including intolerant rhetoric and the harassment of candidates online, was identified as another area of concern, though not seen as significantly affecting the conduct of the upcoming elections. Most ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed a potential election observation activity, but expressed the view that an observation activity for these elections would be unnecessary. On this basis, the ODIHR NAM does not recommend the deployment of an election observation activity for the 13 September general elections. ODIHR encourages the authorities to consider the issues raised by interlocutors during the NAM and to address previous ODIHR recommendations that remain outstanding, and reaffirms its readiness to support the authorities in future electoral reform processes.

III. FINDINGS

A. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of governance. The monarch serves as head of state, with ceremonial functions and duties. Legislative powers are vested in the unicameral parliament (*Riksdag*), composed of 349 deputies elected for a four-year term. Following the 2022 elections, the coalition led by the Social Democrats lost its majority, and a minority government composed of the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals was formed under Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, supported by the Sweden Democrats on the basis of the *Tidö Agreement*.² The upcoming general elections are held concurrently with regional and municipal council elections.

² The 62-page Agreement sets out the conditions for cooperation between the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals and the Sweden Democrats, and outlines policy cooperation in six main areas: crime, healthcare, education, growth and household economy, immigration and integration, and climate and energy, giving the Sweden Democrats influence on policies without cabinet representation.

All ODIHR NAM interlocutors characterised Sweden as a strong democracy with a robust electoral process, while several of them noted a gradual decline in the broader democratic and human rights environment. In particular, interlocutors reported a sustained reduction in public funding for civil society organisations, observing that it had disproportionately affected certain organisations, with implications for their participation in public debate.³ These concerns were also raised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders.⁴

Civil society interlocutors also raised concerns regarding pending legislative developments, citing potential implications for freedom of expression and public participation. In particular, interlocutors referred to the Government's proposed provisions allowing the conduct of non-citizens to be taken into account in decisions on the granting or revoking of residence permits even when it does not amount to a criminal offence, the scope of which had been debated during a recent public consultation.⁵ Against this backdrop, while overall voter turnout remains high, interlocutors reported declining electoral participation and eroding trust in democratic institutions among specific population groups, including migrant communities and ethnic minorities, attributed partly to structural barriers and partly to a sense of non-belonging.⁶ ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that these issues along with an escalation of intolerant rhetoric has contributed to an increase in the polarization of society.

The ODIHR NAM was informed that the authorities have substantially intensified their election protection efforts ahead of the 2026 elections, citing the advent of AI-generated content, the uncertain European security environment, and observed instances of foreign electoral interference elsewhere in Europe.⁷ The framework focuses on safeguarding the conduct of the elections, the security of elected representatives and candidates, and societal resilience to foreign malign information influence, with several agencies conducting continuous threat and risk assessments. Operational responsibility for the assessment and handling of incidents rests with the responsible agencies, while the Government Offices co-ordinate Government communications and maintain situational awareness at the political level. The Government Offices measures to protect the elections are guided by a strategic concept and a complementary strategic communication strategy.

Women continue to be well represented in Swedish politics, currently holding 156 of 349 seats (45 per cent) in the *Riksdag* and 12 of 23 ministerial positions (52 per cent) in the government.⁸ At the same time, civil society interlocutors met by the ODIHR NAM reported that threats directed at women in politics are often sexualised and include explicit threats of sexual violence as well as the use of deep

³ Muslim communities, women's organisations, peace groups, and climate-related organisations were identified by interlocutors as particularly affected. While the introduction of "democracy conditions" for public funding was welcomed in principle, the criteria were described as vague, with Muslim organisations reportedly subject to heightened scrutiny and, in some cases, losing access to funding. See Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), "[Demokrativillkor](#)" (Democracy Conditions) for more details. See also "[Democratic conditions for grants to civil society](#)", 2019 Government Official Reports (SOU 2019:35).

⁴ Following the visit in March 2026, the UN Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor issued a [public statement](#) setting out detailed concerns on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

⁵ According to the Civil society interlocutors such formulation of the proposal could give rise to uncertainty about the boundaries of permissible conduct, with potential implications for participation in demonstrations and public debate. See the [draft proposal](#).

⁶ See the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [2025 press summary](#), "*Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Commend Sweden's Efforts to Assist Immigrants with Integration, Raise Questions on New Restrictions on Obtaining Citizenship and the Protection of Sami Reindeer Herders*".

⁷ Coordination at the political level is anchored in the Prime Minister's Office, supported by an interdepartmental working group ensuring close coordination between the operational and political levels. At the agency level, inter-agency coordination is led by the Swedish Electoral Authority, while efforts to identify threats and build societal resilience are led by the Psychological Defence Agency.

⁸ See 2026 [Inter-parliamentary Union data](#) on ranking of women in national parliaments.

fakes. Online misogyny was identified as a significant factor in reducing women's political participation, including the resignation of the Centre Party leader after only five months in office.⁹ ODIHR NAM interlocutors also reported an increase in intolerant speech against minority communities, including Muslim, Jewish, and Sámi, and indicated that they were not aware of any political party with a programme specifically designed to support candidates with minority backgrounds.

ODIHR deployed a Needs Assessment Mission for the 2022 elections, which did not recommend any election-related activity. Previously, ODIHR observed the 2018 general elections in Sweden.¹⁰ The final report issued in November 2018 contained six recommendations on improving the electoral process to bring it in line with OSCE commitments.¹¹

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

General elections are primarily regulated by the 1974 Instrument of Government, which is one of four fundamental laws of the Constitution, the 2005 Elections Act, the 2005 Election Ordinance, and the 2017 Local Government Act.¹² The Swedish Electoral Authority (SEA) issues guidelines to ensure uniform implementation of election procedures; however, these are not binding on the lower-level election administration. Sweden is party to major international and regional instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.¹³

The Elections Act was last amended in December 2025 March and June 2026. While the 2026 amendments were of a technical nature, the 2025 amendments introduced a new chapter on election security, designating the SEA as the main body responsible for co-ordinating lower-level election authorities in safeguarding elections. The amendments also introduced a mandatory incident-reporting mechanism, requiring County Administrative Boards, Municipal Election Committees, and overseas missions conducting voting to promptly report deviations from prescribed procedures, any obstructions of the voting process, falsification of votes, or any other events that may affect the conduct of elections.

The amendments also introduced a general provision requiring election authorities and overseas missions to ensure that voting is accessible to all voters, covering conditions for premises, voting procedures, and voter information. The provision on mobile polling officers, previously available to voters unable to travel to a polling station due to illness, disability, or age, was extended to voters detained in police custody and those in care facilities.

Positively, the amendments formalised the accreditation of citizen and international election observers, obliging municipalities, county administrative boards, and overseas authorities to receive accredited

⁹ Anna-Karin Hatt, leader of the Swedish Centre Party, announced her resignation as party leader in October 2025, citing persistent threats and harassment as the primary reason for stepping down. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, in its 2021 [Concluding Observations on the Tenth Periodic Report of Sweden](#) has recommended authorities to strengthen measures to prevent harassment of and threats against women politicians and candidates, including by requiring all political parties to develop policies to promote gender equality and combat harassment. See paragraphs 28 (c).

¹⁰ See previous ODIHR election-related [reports](#) on Sweden.

¹¹ In paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”.

¹² The Instrument of Government is one of four fundamental laws of the Constitution. Provisions of the 1972 Act of State Financial Support to Political Parties and the 2018 Act on Transparency of Party Financing are also applicable.

¹³ Including the [1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), [1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#), [1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), [2003 Convention against Corruption](#), [2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), and [the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights](#). Sweden is also a member of the Venice Commission and of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

observers before, during, and after elections, addressing a prior ODIHR recommendation. Finally, amendments further require that appeals against election results include the appellant's personal identity number or organisation number, or other identifying information, to enable the Election Review Board to verify the appellant's standing.

Of the 349 members of parliament, 310 are elected through a proportional system with open lists from 29 multi-member constituencies.¹⁴ The remaining 39 seats are proportional compensatory seats to adjust party representation.¹⁵ To be awarded a seat, a political party must either obtain 4 per cent of the votes cast nationwide or 12 per cent of the votes cast in at least one constituency. Votes are cast for party lists and voters may express a preference for individual candidates in the lists.¹⁶

C. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections are administered through a decentralised three-tier election administration system. The Swedish Election Authority (SEA) has the overall responsibility for administering the elections and its competencies include constituency delimitation, registration of parties and candidates, production of ballot papers and declaring the election results.¹⁷ Voters abroad may vote through embassies and consulates, with ballots returned to SEA for distribution to the relevant municipalities.

Following the 2025 amendments, the SEA was given explicit responsibility to support and co-ordinate activities aimed at protecting elections, and regional and municipal electoral authorities, as well as foreign missions hosting voting places, are required to promptly report to the SEA any incidents that could influence the conduct of the elections.¹⁸ Notwithstanding these reporting requirements, the SEA has no oversight powers over the lower-level election bodies. The system enables the SEA to provide verified, real-time information to the media and the public, which interlocutors described as essential for countering disinformation, given that misleading narratives are typically constructed around an accurate factual element. The public is also given the opportunity to report incidents, with the modalities left to the SEA to determine.

According to the SEA, Sweden was among the first European Union member States to establish a National Election Co-operation Network in line with EU recommendations.¹⁹ The SEA chairs the Network and, for the current electoral cycle, has organised working groups covering cyber issues, communication coordination, monitoring and situational awareness, and operational cooperation, the last of which focuses on communication techniques, meeting formats, and fallback channels for

¹⁴ These are called permanent seats. The constituencies generally correspond with counties. Stockholm, Skåne, and Västra Götaland are divided into smaller units due to population size. Each constituency has between 2 and 34 seats and the number of seats is revised prior to each election by the SEA.

¹⁵ These seats are calculated based on the difference between the permanent seats won and the number of seats the party would have received in a single nationwide constituency. The constituencies to which these seats are allotted depend on party scores following the allocation of permanent seats.

¹⁶ Voters may use three types of ballots: one with a printed party name and rank-ordered candidate list, on which the voter may mark a preference for a single candidate; one with a printed party name only; or a blank ballot on which the voter may write in a party and candidate name. To be elected on the basis of personal votes, a candidate must receive at least five per cent of the party's votes in the respective constituency.

¹⁷ The Tax Agency provides administrative support to the SEA, including IT development, infrastructure, and communication services.

¹⁸ Incidents are defined broadly to include any deviation from prescribed procedures under the Election Act, any failure to follow regulatory procedures, and any events that may affect the conduct of the election.

¹⁹ See European Commission, *State of the Union 2018: European Commission Proposes Measures for Securing Free and Fair European Elections*, [Press Release](#) of 12 September 2018.

different threat levels.²⁰ The core authorities hold daily coordination meetings, moving to twice-daily meetings during the election period.

At the sub-national level, elections will be administered by 21 County Administrative Boards (CABs), 290 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and some 6,300 Polling Boards (PBs). CABs are regional branches of government and their competencies pertain to the registration of candidates, district delimitation at the county level and the final counting of votes. MECs are appointed by the municipal councils and are responsible for the recruitment and training of PBs, the setting up of polling stations and the distribution of equipment and materials.²¹ All ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the efficiency, professionalism and impartiality of the election administration bodies at all levels.

Voters may cast their ballot in advance at designated polling stations during the 18 days preceding election day as well as on election day.²² Voters abroad may vote in person at diplomatic representations starting 24 days before election day, or by post starting 45 days before; voting from abroad is not possible on election day, and all ballots from diplomatic missions are sent to the SEA.²³ For the first time, advance voting envelopes will be machine-scanned for distribution to respective municipalities, discontinuing the previous practice of manual sorting by the Swedish postal service.

Voters who are unable to visit a polling station due to illness, disability, or age may vote by courier, as may those in police custody or correctional institutions and those served by rural postal services in remote areas.²⁴ The 2025 amendments expanded the option for voters unable to designate a courier to request that the municipality arrange for a mobile polling officer to collect the vote, with the ballot prepared in the same manner.

In total, some 710 million ballots are printed for election day, covering all types of elections.²⁵ According to the SEA the handling of ballots is the principal operational challenge. Ballot papers must be placed behind a screen, requiring voters first to select their ballots and then proceed to a booth to cast them. While contributing to the secrecy of the vote, this two-step arrangement has placed a logistical burden on municipalities, in particular with respect to the transport, installation, and accommodation of the screens within available premises, at times precluding the use of smaller venues such as libraries and preschools previously serving as polling stations. The arrangement has also lengthened voting time and resulted in queues on election day. A parliamentary inquiry comprised of representatives of all parliamentary parties is currently evaluating the ballot paper system, with party

²⁰ The Network includes the Psychological Defence Agency, Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency, Swedish Police Authority, Swedish Security Service, National Cybersecurity Centre, County Administrative Board, Swedish Post and Telecom Authority, and the Swedish Tax Agency.

²¹ For each electoral district, at least four voters are appointed to serve on the polling board, including a chairman and a deputy chairman. Only persons who have received the training prescribed by the SEA may be appointed as poll workers. The law does not prescribe eligibility criteria for election commission members or for the selection of chairpersons; however, the SEA issues guidance underlining that members of the election administration should be impartial and recommends that candidates standing in the elections should not serve on polling boards.

²² Approximately 2,300 advance polling stations and a further 200 "closed" polling stations (located in hospitals, prisons and similar institutions) are in operation during the advance voting period.

²³ The number of voting places abroad has increased to 291, up from 264, and voting hours for voters abroad have been extended.

²⁴ Eligible couriers include the voter's spouse or partner, their children, grandchildren, parents, or siblings (or those of the partner), professional care providers or persons regularly assisting the voter, rural postmen, and employees of detention or correctional institutions. The voter must prepare and seal the ballot personally in the presence of the courier and a witness, and the courier then delivers the sealed envelope to the polling station.

²⁵ Parties that received at least one per cent of the vote in either of the two preceding legislative elections are entitled to have ballots printed with the party name at the state's expense and distributed to all polling stations; other contesting parties are responsible for printing and delivering their ballots to the election administration.

positions divided between retaining the current multiple-ballot system, introducing a single ballot listing all parties, or using a neutral ballot on which voters would indicate their chosen contestant.²⁶

Newly adopted requirements oblige election authorities and missions abroad to ensure that voting is accessible to all voters. Pursuant to a government assignment, the SEA has reviewed voter-related information and materials from an inclusion perspective, including its website, instructional videos, voting cards, and media communications.²⁷ Municipalities are now legally required to report to the SEA on the accessibility of polling places, including wheelchair access, contrast markings, additional lighting and dedicated entrances; this information is consolidated in a central system covering all polling and advance polling stations.

For visually impaired voters, the SEA's guidance requires magnifying devices and adequate lighting at all polling stations. Voter information and ballot papers for the eight parliamentary parties are available in Braille. According to the SEA, a persistent challenge concerns preference voting by visually impaired voters, as the ballot paper system does not provide an adequate solution: while voters can vote for parties using Braille slates or, when possible, write on a blank ballot, casting a preference vote in practice requires assistance. The SEA acknowledged that no satisfactory solution has been identified so far.

D. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens over 18 years of age are eligible to vote. Voter registration is passive, with the voter register drawn from the continuously updated population register maintained by the Swedish Tax Agency. The SEA produces separate lists for each electoral district based on information available 30 days before election day, during which period voters may check their data through the local tax office. As of March 2026, 7,996,400 voters are registered for the upcoming elections.²⁸ The voter registration system enjoys high confidence and ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed no concerns regarding voter registration procedures or the accuracy of the voter lists.

Citizens who are no longer registered in the population register remain on the voter register for ten years from the date of deregistration; thereafter, they must submit a written notification to the Tax Agency every ten years to remain on the register.²⁹ Approximately 145,000 citizens are currently not on the voter register. To address this, the Government mandated the SEA, with the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, to expand information efforts on voting rights and procedures for citizens residing abroad, including direct outreach to voters removed from the register within the past fifteen years.³⁰ As part of this initiative, the SEA has sent letters to around 82,000 overseas voters who have been or will be removed from the electoral register before the elections. To date, just over 225,000 overseas voters have registered for the upcoming elections. Voters may request corrections to their records in writing until 1 September. Such requests are examined by the County Administrative Board.

Each registered voter should receive a voting card from the SEA no later than 26 August. The card contains the voter's name and registration number, details of the elections in which they are entitled to

²⁶ See Government Offices of Sweden [press release](#): “*The Ballot Paper Committee Proposes Fewer Ballot Papers and Clearer Responsibility for Safer Elections*” (15 January 2026).

²⁷ Information materials use numbered steps, universal pictograms, and accessible visual design developed in consultation with disability groups, with posters, templates, and information sheets adapted for different voter groups.

²⁸ In addition, 8,196,423 voters are eligible to participate in municipal elections and 8,147,129 in regional council elections.

²⁹ A notification of a new foreign address is treated as a request for inclusion. If the SEA receives a ballot from a citizen residing abroad who is not on the register, the voter is added to the register and the vote itself serves as a notification for the following ten years.

³⁰ See Government [press release](#) of 26 March 2026.

vote, and the address and opening hours of the polling station.³¹ For the first time, the SEA will send digital voting cards to all voters with an e-mail address. The SEA estimates that over six million voters will receive their voting cards digitally, although some 1.5 to 2 million voters without an e-mail address will still receive paper cards, which is a significant decrease compared to previous years. The SEA is preparing a major public information campaign to address any potential misunderstandings in this regard.³²

Voters abroad may cast their ballot by post from 30 July, or in person at embassies and consulates from 20 August onwards. As a new feature introduced for these elections, citizens abroad who have been removed from the electoral register, may also cast an advance vote within Sweden, which simultaneously re-registers them on the voter register for the following ten-year period.

E. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

To stand for office, a candidate must be an eligible voter and must give consent to be nominated as a candidate, either electronically through the SEA's e-service or on paper. Parties may choose between closed and open candidate lists.³³ On closed (locked) lists, only formally nominated candidates may be elected, and only those candidates may receive preference votes. On open lists, any person who has consented to candidacy for the party may be elected, even if their name does not appear on the printed ballot paper.³⁴

The deadline for parties to register their candidates and lock their lists was 9 April 2026. As of mid-April, 305 parties had given notification of their intent to participate in the general elections, and 265 had registered a party designation, of which 34 registered for the parliamentary contest.³⁵ Parties with open-list ballots may notify the SEA about their participation up to 30 days before election day, i.e. by 14 August 2026; parties represented in the parliament are deemed to have given notification of their participation automatically.

Most political parties met by the ODIHR NAM reported applying internal policies to promote women's representation on candidate lists, including some that have a practice of alternating the placement of women and men or general balance principles. Several parties indicated that women constitute approximately half or more than half of their candidates. Diversity on candidate lists, including with respect to ethnic background, age, and disability, was described by several parties as an internal priority pursued through local nominating processes and awareness-raising, though without quantitative targets. ODIHR NAM interlocutors raised no concerns regarding the party or candidate registration processes.

F. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The election campaign is largely unregulated, with no official campaign period defined, and campaigning continues year-round, intensifying in the months preceding election day. The Constitution guarantees freedoms of association, assembly, and expression.

³¹ For overseas citizens, the SEA must send voting cards no later than 50 days before election day.

³² Voting cards are not a precondition for casting a vote; voters are required only to present identification.

³³ The same candidate may appear on several lists but may only take one seat, allocated to the constituency where the candidate received the highest number of votes. Candidate names are listed in numerical order on the ballot papers, and the ballot must be designed to enable voters to cast a personal preference vote.

³⁴ For open-lists, consent may be submitted up to two days before election day. Therefore, the number of open-list candidates continues to rise throughout the campaign.

³⁵ See the Swedish Electoral Authority [press release](#) of 15 April 2026 for more details. Ballot papers cannot be printed unless all nominated candidates have consented. A party may withdraw a nomination in writing up to 10 September 2026, and candidates may withdraw their consent at any time.

All stakeholders met by the ODIHR NAM expressed confidence in their ability to campaign and convey political messages freely. However, they also expressed concerns over a coarsening of political discourse, with exchanges described as more emotional, less fact-based, and markedly more confrontational than in previous cycles. The campaign is expected to focus primarily on domestic issues, including the economy and cost of living, environment, employment, and migration, with the conflict in the Middle East and the war in Ukraine also expected to feature prominently. Several interlocutors further noted that issues concerning migrant communities, crime, and the situation of national minorities, in particular the Sámi community, may lead to divisive debate and could impact the political participation of these marginalized groups.

Political party interlocutors highlighted candidate safety as a significant concern, with threats and harassment occurring predominantly online. Parties working on environmental, climate, equal rights, and migration issues described themselves as particularly targeted, and ODIHR NAM interlocutors widely acknowledged that women candidates and candidates from minority backgrounds face heightened hostility, with the gendered nature of such treatment seen as a deterrent to women's continued political participation. In response, parties reported having developed internal preparedness measures, including candidate training, security guidelines, support hotlines, and establishing designated points of contact with the police and security services.

Parties met by the ODIHR NAM intend to adopt a hybrid approach to voter outreach, combining traditional methods such as leafleting and door-to-door canvassing with digital strategies, reflecting the growing importance of online tools. Most parties also reported having adopted internal policies on the use of AI in campaigning, typically requiring transparent labelling of AI-generated content and limiting its use to non-deceptive purposes. Inter-party negotiations on a code of conduct covering online conduct were reported to have taken place but had not produced a binding agreement.³⁶

Several interlocutors further raised concerns regarding disinformation and foreign interference, anticipating that AI-generated content and manipulated imagery will feature in the upcoming campaign. At the same time, the ODIHR NAM was informed that political parties have received briefings from various agencies, including the security services, and parties described co-operation on cyber-security and incident reporting as constructive.

G. POLITICAL AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Political party financing is regulated by the 1972 Act on State Financial Support to Political Parties and the 2018 Act on Transparency in the Financing of Political Parties.³⁷ There is no distinction between political and campaign financing, except additional reporting requirements for parties that participate in the elections. The legal framework provides for transparency of funds received; however, it does not provide for the comprehensive disclosure of expenditures, assets, or debts.

³⁶ Several political party interlocutors of the ODIHR NAM recalled a 2024 investigative media report concerning the operation of so-called "troll factories" (networks of accounts amplifying partisan content on social networking platforms) and indicated that one parliamentary party had been publicly identified as having operated such a network. Interlocutors observed that the absence of a legal framework regulating such practices, and the related question of transparency in how parties allocate their funds, remained outstanding.

³⁷ Additionally, certain provisions of the Election Act, the 1999 Act on Support for the Parliamentary Work of Members of the *Riksdag* and Parliamentary Party Groups, and the 2010 Act on the State Support to the Parliamentary Women's Organizations regulate specific aspects of party financing.

Public funding is the main source of party financing, amounting to approximately SEK 548 million (some EUR 50 million) annually.³⁸ It is allocated on the basis of parliamentary representation and past electoral performance, with no restrictions on its use, including for campaign purposes.³⁹ Parties may also receive donations from individuals and legal entities, including corporations, alongside membership fees and income from fundraising activities such as events and party-political lotteries, which are subject to gambling legislation. There are no caps on individual donations or on total party income, nor any limits on campaign expenditures for parties or candidates or restrictions on third-party spending.

Donations above SEK 29,400 (approximately EUR 2,700) must be disclosed regardless of donor category. Anonymous contributions above SEK 2,940 (approximately EUR 270) are prohibited for both political parties and candidates.⁴⁰ Foreign donations are not prohibited. Donations may, in principle, be received in any form, including in-kind and in cryptocurrency, with cryptocurrency treated as monetary donations for reporting purposes. Loans from financial institutions are likewise unregulated and fall outside current reporting requirements.

The Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency (*Kammarkollegiet*) oversees compliance with political finance transparency rules. Reporting during election campaigns is not required, but parties and other reporting entities must submit annual revenue statements, which the Agency publishes on its website.⁴¹ *Kammarkollegiet* may act upon notification of a possible breach or where non-compliance is otherwise suspected, but does not conduct routine audits.⁴² Where a violation is established, the Agency may impose sanctions directly, without prior judicial authorisation. The sanctions vary according to the nature of the breach.⁴³

Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors shared concerns regarding party financing, noting that the framework does not cover campaign expenditures or the activities of third-party organisations whose advocacy aligns with particular parties, including affiliated organisations, trade unions, and single-issue networks campaigning during the electoral period. Interlocutors observed that such activities may fall outside the scope of party revenue reporting and that their connection to party campaign efforts is difficult to trace.

The ODIHR NAM was informed that, following a 2022 media investigation that exposed weaknesses in party-financing disclosure rules, the Government established an inquiry engaging all political parties in the review of the legislation.⁴⁴ The inquiry's findings were translated into a formal bill, submitted to

³⁸ See Parliament [webpage](#) on "Financial Support to the Parties".

³⁹ Eligible for public funding are all parliamentary parties as well as those that received at least 2.5 per cent of the votes in at least one of the last two general elections.

⁴⁰ If a party or candidate receives an anonymous contribution exceeding the threshold, they must make reasonable efforts to identify the donor and return the funds. If the donor cannot be identified, the excess funds must be transferred to *Kammarkollegiet*, who will publish details of the transaction on its website.

⁴¹ Revenue statements must be submitted digitally by 1 July of the year following the reporting period (e.g. statements for 2025 are due by 1 July 2026). The names of private individual donors are withheld from the online publication in accordance with the Data Protection Act, but remain accessible upon request.

⁴² The Agency may react to violations in following cases: failure to submit a statement; submission of a false or inaccurate statement, including through omission or under-reporting of revenues; and violation of the prohibition on anonymous contributions.

⁴³ Late submissions are subject to a fixed sanction. Unreported revenue triggers a sanction equal to the amount in question, which may therefore be substantial. Receiving an anonymous contribution above the permitted threshold leads to a sanction equal to twice the amount exceeding the threshold. The Agency may also issue injunctions backed by conditional fines to compel co-operation, for instance where a party fails to provide information required for an investigation, although judicial action is required for the enforcement of such fines.

⁴⁴ See Government [press release](#) on *Stronger Transparency Regarding Political Decision-Making and Party Financing* (29 May 2026)

parliament on 30 April 2026, and adopted on 16 June 2026, with the resulting amendments entering into force on 1 July 2027. The new law introduces stricter transparency rules, including extended reporting obligations covering expenditures, assets, and liabilities, with election campaign costs reported separately although without itemisation; a prohibition on anonymous and foreign donations; and a broader range of cases in which parties are required to have their financial statements audited.⁴⁵

H. MEDIA

Media freedom and freedom of expression are constitutionally guaranteed by the Freedom of the Press Act, and further protected the Radio and Television Act. Television and news websites remain the main sources of political information for most citizens, although the use of online and social media sources has been growing. Public service broadcasting continues to play a central role and retains consistently high levels of public trust, although the rate of decline in linear television audiences outpaces the rate of growth of streaming services.⁴⁶ Ownership in the Swedish media market is increasingly concentrated across radio, television, and streaming, with particular consolidation in the newspaper sector.⁴⁷

Working conditions for journalists are generally regarded as safe and well protected, and were further strengthened by 2023 amendments to the Penal Code under which offences committed on account of a person's or a close associate's involvement in journalism or information dissemination constitute an aggravating circumstance in sentencing.⁴⁸ Further, on 1 May Sweden introduced specific anti-SLAPP legislation implementing the EU directive on the protection of persons engaging in public debate from abusive litigation.⁴⁹

Media coverage of election campaigns is largely unregulated. Impartiality requirements apply only to public service broadcasters, while other media are not subject to comparable content-related requirements. During the campaign period, the public broadcasters plan to organise a range of election-related programmes, including debates with party leaders at the national and regional levels and a final pre-election debate featuring all parliamentary parties, scheduled for the Friday preceding election day. Public broadcasters also intend to provide content in minority languages, with subtitles and sign-language interpretation available for some election-period programming. Contestants are allowed to purchase airtime on private television channels. Most ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall satisfaction with their media access and coverage, including during election campaigns.

The Swedish Agency for the Media oversees radio and television and is the competent authority for the European Media Freedom Act, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Regulation on the

⁴⁵ The government's proposal also introduces a new transparency regime for lobbying and political influence. A central element is a proposed law requiring lobbyists and other "influence actors" to register with the *Kammarkollegiet* and disclose their communications with certain political decision-makers.

⁴⁶ ODIHR NAM was informed that advertising revenue in traditional news media has been declining with a particularly acute impact on local news media, as advertising has shifted to search and social media platforms.

⁴⁷ According to the [Swedish Agency for the Media](#), ownership diversity has been declining for several years, particularly in the newspaper market, where acquisitions and mergers have left the daily press in the hands of a shrinking number of owners. Commercial radio is similarly dominated by two networks, Bauer Media and Viaplay Group, and linear television by *TV4*, *TV3*, and *Kanal 5*, which together with the public service broadcaster account for around 95 per cent of viewing. Streaming, by contrast, is dominated by global actors, with Netflix significantly larger than domestic services such as Viaplay and SVT Play.

⁴⁸ See Council of Europe, [Sweden – National Chapter](#), Freedom of Expression

⁴⁹ The [Act on Protection for Participation in Public Debate in Cross-Border Cases](#) (2026:241) aims to strengthen freedom of expression and public participation by protecting individuals and organizations from abusive or manifestly unfounded lawsuits intended to silence public debate. The law applies to civil proceedings with cross-border implications that concern a person's participation in matters of public interest, including journalistic, political, or civic expression.

Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TPPA), and parts of the Digital Services Act.⁵⁰ It is responsible, among other things, for the protection of freedom of expression, media diversity and accessibility, and media literacy. It is also mandated to promote media literacy, exercised primarily through co-ordination among actors in the field with a preventive focus on building resilience and enabling informed media use. According to the Agency, media literacy remains comparatively under-discussed in the regional debate on electoral integrity, which is more focused on responses to disinformation, and was identified as an area meriting greater attention.

As the competent authority responsible for the TPPA, the Agency conducted extensive stakeholder dialogue with political parties, media companies and other affected actors ahead of the Regulation's entry into application and continues to participate in EU-level discussions on aspects subject to interpretation, including issue-based advertising. The Agency informed the ODIHR NAM that since major platforms have voluntarily banned paid political advertising and interpreted their prohibition more broadly than the TPPA requires, they anticipate most political advertising will be traditional advertising.

Complaints against the media can be filed through two parallel channels. Ethics-related complaints concerning editorial content in any media outlet are handled by the Media Ombudsman, a self-regulatory body financed by press organisations and broadcasters, with appeals referred to the Media Council.⁵¹ Complaints alleging breaches of broadcasting law by radio and television, including the impartiality and public service obligations of public broadcasters, are handled by the Swedish Broadcasting Commission, a statutory body within the Swedish Agency for the Media that operates on a complaints-driven basis and does not conduct media monitoring.⁵² Defamation and other speech offences fall within the exclusive prosecutorial competence of the Chancellor of Justice, while data-protection complaints are directed to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection. Complainants may also bring civil proceedings before the ordinary courts.

I. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Election Review Board (ERB) has jurisdiction over appeals of the election results and appeals against certain decisions of the County Administrative Boards and the SEA. Decisions of the SEA confirming the outcome of the election may be appealed by any registered voter or by a party that participated in the election, no earlier than the day after election day and no later than ten days after the completion of the count. Following the 2025 amendments, these appeals must include the appellant's personal identity or organisation number, or other identifying information, enabling the ERB to verify the appellant's standing. Deadlines for other categories of appeals vary by subject

⁵⁰ The Swedish Agency for the Media became operational on 1 January 2024, following the merger of the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority and the Swedish Media Council. The merger, initiated by the Ministry of Culture in 2022, consolidated the two regulators' competencies into a single authority, which is organised into five units covering permits and media support, investigation and analysis, communication and promotion, administration, and a legal department for supervision and review.

⁵¹ The [Swedish Media Council](#) (*Mediernas Etiknämnd*) was originally founded in 1916 and is the oldest tribunal of its kind in the world. The Media Council is composed of four judges.

⁵² The Commission, composed of judges, journalists, and industry representatives appointed by the Government, reviews radio and television programmes for compliance with the Radio and Television Act and applicable broadcasting licences. It meets twice monthly and operates without expedited procedures for complaints review during election periods. In addition to reviewing individual programmes, the Commission conducts an annual assessment of public service broadcasters' compliance with their overall public service mission.

matter.⁵³ Decisions of the ERB are final. All appeals received and decisions issued are publicly available on the ERB's website. The Act does not prescribe deadlines within which the ERB must examine cases.

J. ELECTION OBSERVATION

The 2025 amendments to the Elections Act formalised the accreditation of citizen and international election observers addressing a prior ODIHR recommendation. Observer organisations may now apply to the SEA for accreditation, which confirms observer status and grants access throughout the entire election period. All stages of voting and counting are open to observation by the general public provided they do not disrupt proceedings and comply with instructions issued by election officials, with the same conditions applying to citizen and international observers. Observation covers advance voting, election-day voting, and the preliminary and final counts. Municipalities and County Administrative Boards are required to receive accredited observers before, during, and after elections.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the electoral process and in the ability of the election administration to manage the elections in a professional, impartial, and transparent manner. Some interlocutors identified areas that could benefit from external review, particularly with regard to political finances, while acknowledging the pending legislative proposals intended to address the identified gaps. Online campaigning, including intolerant rhetoric and the harassment of candidates online, was identified as another area of concern, though not seen as significantly affecting the conduct of the upcoming elections. Most ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed a potential election observation activity, but expressed the view that an observation activity for these elections would be unnecessary. On this basis, the ODIHR NAM does not recommend the deployment of an election observation activity for the 13 September general elections. ODIHR encourages the authorities to consider the issues raised by interlocutors during the NAM and to address previous ODIHR recommendations that remain outstanding, and reaffirms its readiness to support the authorities in future electoral reform processes.

⁵³ Appeals concerning corrections to the voter lists must be submitted no later than 12 days before election day; those concerning the division of constituencies, the allocation of constituency seats, and the division of electoral districts, within three weeks of publication of the relevant decision; and those concerning the registration of a party designation or candidates, within three weeks of notification of the decision. The ERB is composed of seven members appointed by the parliament; the chairperson must be a qualified judge and may not be a member of parliament.

ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS⁵⁴

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Ann-Sofie Nilsson, Head of the Security Policy Department
Eva Tojzner Glückman, Administrative Director
Jörgen Karlson, Deputy Head of the Department of Consular Affairs and Civil Law;
Anna Nyberger, Administrative Officer, Consular questions and Elections abroad
Anna Jakenberg Brinck, Head of Press, Communications Department.

Prime Minister's Office

Gabriella Gillstedt, Deputy Head of Staff, Office of the National Security Advisor
Klara Henriksson, Desk Officer, Office of the National Security Advisor
Per Sandström, Desk Officer, Crisis Management Coordination Secretariat
Cecilia Alpin, Desk Officer, Crisis Management Coordination Secretariat

Ministry for Constitutional Law

Anton Lindgren, Legal Advisor, Division for Constitutional Law

Ministry of Defence

Hannes Ahlvin, Desk Officer, Department for Cyber and Hybrid Affairs

Swedish Election Authority

Anna Nyqvist, Chief Executive

Psychological Defence Agency

Karin Lönnheden, Head of Operations Department
Jerker Sundstrand, Analyst

Agency of Secure and Accessible Communications

Morgan Westéus, Head of Unit

Swedish Tax Agency

Camilla Adebahr, Acting Chief of Staff;
Johannes Hummerdal, Senior Advisor
Charlotta Johansson, Senior Advisor
Alexandra Mylnikova Nordlund, Tax Legal Officer;

Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency (*Kammarkollegiet*)

Emma Ström, Legal Expert

Police

Linda Renman, National Election Coordination Officer
Martin Hemington, Coordination Officer
Jesper Molander, Assistant National Special Events Incident Commander

Swedish Agency for the Media

Jessica Durehed, International Coordinator
Anna Dingertz, Senior Lawyer

⁵⁴ The ODIHR NAM extended an invitation to representations of all OSCE participating States resident in Sweden.

Johannes Wik, Coordinator
Catharina Bucht, Analyst

Swedish Public Television

Michael Kucera, Program Director Current Affairs and New

Political Parties

Eva Svedling, Head of Policy, Green Party
Malin Aldal, Campaign Manager, Green Party
Muharrem Demirok, MP, Centre Party
Maria Noleryd, Chief of Staff, Liberal Party
Martin Andreasson, Deputy Secretary, Liberal Party
Ulrik Nilsson, MP, Moderate Party
Catharina Piazzolla, Head of Organization, Social Democratic Party
Olle Svahn, Head of MP support, Left Party
Mattias Bäckström Johansson, Party Secretary, Sweden Democrats
Fredrik Lindahl, Deputy Party Secretary, Sweden Democrats
Erik Nilsson Bramstedt, Deputy Party Secretary, Christian Democrats

National Human Rights Institute

Anna Jacobson, Head of Unit, Outreach and Communication, Institute for Human Rights
Tobias Rahm, Senior Advisor, Institute for Human Rights

Civil Society

Susannah Sjöberg, Secretary General, Swedish Women's Lobby
Ebba Nikolic Kajrup, International Secretary, Swedish Women's Lobby
Sofia Walan, Secretary General, Civil Rights Defenders
John Stauffer, Deputy Secretary General Legal Director, Civil Rights Defenders
Monica Klasén McGrath, Head, Public Affairs and Public Opinion, Disability Rights Federation
Sweden