



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

# MALTA

## EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

30 May 2026

## ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

6 - 9 May 2026



Warsaw  
15 May 2026

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**MALTA**  
**EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**  
**30 May 2026**

**ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Following an invitation from the Maltese authorities to observe the 30 May 2026 early parliamentary elections, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 6 to 9 May. The NAM included Lusine Badalyan, ODIHR Senior Election Adviser, and Goran Petrov, ODIHR Election Adviser.

The purpose of the NAM was to assess the pre-electoral environment and preparations for the elections. Based on this assessment, the NAM recommends 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 and with representatives of political parties, media, and civil society, as well as the resident international community. A full list of meetings is annexed to this report.

ODIHR would like to thank the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism for their assistance and co-operation in organizing the NAM. ODIHR would also like to thank each of its interlocutors for taking the time to meet with the NAM and for sharing their views.

## **II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On 30 May 2026, voters will elect new representatives to the unicameral parliament's House of Representatives. The electoral legal framework remains largely unchanged since the 2022 elections. ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally considered the election framework conducive to democratic elections, but noted that further reform and addressing recommendations to improve the electoral process is constrained by the interests of the two parliamentary parties. Some prior ODIHR recommendations were implemented, including the 2018 decriminalisation of defamation, but many remain unaddressed, notably on citizen and international observation, media regulator independence, campaign finance oversight, voting rights and assisted voting, polling staff conflicts of interest, and transparency of EC proceedings and results.

The Electoral Commission (EC) holds broad authority and is responsible for voter and candidate registration, the review of district boundaries, organization of polling, the vote count and establishing election results, as well as the oversight of party and candidate financing. ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in work of election administration and the integrity of voting and vote counting proceedings, attributing this to the extensive mutual oversight exercised by the two main parties. However, they noted that all other stakeholders have limited access to scrutinize certain key stages of the process, including the vote count, which reduces overall transparency. Some interlocutors also raised concerns over potential conflicts of interest arising from polling staff simultaneously serving as party agents, the absence of provisions for citizen and international observation, and restrictions on assisted voting for persons with disabilities.

Citizens aged 16 and above are eligible to vote, with restrictions for persons disqualified on mental incapacity grounds and those serving prison sentences exceeding 12 months. Voter registration is passive, based on civil and identity records, and the voter register published on 1 May included 356,707 voters. The full register, including voters' names, addresses and personal identity numbers, is published in the

Official Gazette. ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not raise concerns about the accuracy and inclusiveness of the voter register, or the publication of detailed personal data; however, some questioned the continued mandatory use of voter cards as redundant and burdensome.

ODIHR NAM interlocutors described candidate registration as straightforward and inclusive. Candidates may stand in up to two districts, a practice ODIHR has previously recommended eliminating as it may distort voter choice. Interlocutors noted difficulties in identifying women candidates, while non-parliamentary parties also reported challenges in finding candidates generally, which most attributed to a deeply bipartisan political environment and perceptions of limited prospects for smaller parties.

Women remain underrepresented in political life, including in parliament and the executive. Following the 2021 constitutional amendments, a gender corrective mechanism allocating up to 12 additional seats to the underrepresented gender in the two largest parties increased women's representation after the 2022 elections from 10 elected MPs (15 per cent) to 22 of 79 MPs (28 per cent).

The campaign is taking place in a calm environment, with ODIHR NAM interlocutors reporting that parties and candidates can campaign freely and without hindrance. The two parliamentary parties conduct extensive campaigns through rallies, canvassing, billboards and party-owned media, while smaller parties rely mainly on social media and more limited outreach. Many interlocutors described the entrenched two-party system as disadvantaging smaller contestants, and several raised concerns about the use of state resources, pre-election government promotion, and patronage-based voter outreach. Online campaigning is regulated primarily through directly applicable European Union regulatory framework, although some ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted with concern the absence of domestic implementing measures. Interlocutors described online discourse as polarised and at times hostile, including racism, Islamophobia and attacks on women candidates, while disinformation is seen as primarily domestic; AI and deepfakes are viewed as emerging threats rather than current concerns in the campaign. The Malta Communications Authority, as the Digital Services Coordinator, handles DSA-related complaints and co-operates with the European Commission and other national coordinators.

Campaign finance regulation remains unchanged since 2022, with prior ODIHR recommendations remaining largely unaddressed. ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted unresolved legal uncertainty over the Electoral Commission's enforcement powers following a 2018 Constitutional Court ruling concerning its combined investigative and punitive functions. Many interlocutors raised concerns about limited transparency and oversight, including the absence of party-level spending limits, third-party campaigning rules, and disclosure requirements for party-owned media and other affiliated entities, allowing the two parliamentary parties to benefit from significant commercial interests with limited scrutiny. Interlocutors also noted that substantial fundraising and spending may occur before the short official campaign period, while candidate reports are not published online and parties' audited annual reports are often submitted and published with delays.

The media environment is diverse, but ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the framework remains in need of reform, including on media independence, access to public information, and follow-up to the recommendations of the 2021 public inquiry into the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia. The broadcasting market is dominated by the public broadcaster and the two parliamentary parties' openly partisan commercial broadcasters, which interlocutors said limits space for pluralistic political information and access for smaller parties. Several interlocutors also asserted that the public broadcaster lacks editorial independence and favours the ruling party.

Candidate nomination objections are decided by the Electoral Commission, with appeal to the Court of Appeal within 24 hours, while results-related disputes are adjudicated by the Constitutional Court.

ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed overall confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the electoral dispute resolution system. While some procedures are time-bound, there are no precise deadlines for higher courts to resolve election complaints, however some interlocutors noted that complaints and appeals during the election process are generally handled expediently.

ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally considered the electoral framework to be conducive to the conduct of democratic elections, but many raised concerns about the transparency of the process, the environment for political competition, campaign finance oversight, access to information, and pluralism in the broadcasting media. Most interlocutors noted the value of an external review and several requested an ODIHR activity to follow the electoral process. The ODIHR NAM sees benefit in undertaking a closer examination of certain electoral domains, including the administration of the election process, the campaign environment, political and campaign financing and its oversight, and the media environment and its regulation. On this basis, the ODIHR NAM recommends deploying an Election Expert Team (EET) for the 30 May early parliamentary elections. ODIHR also encourages the authorities to consider previous recommendations that remain unaddressed.

### III. FINDINGS

#### A. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

On 27 April, Prime Minister Robert Abela announced early elections for 30 May, presenting the decision as a request for a renewed mandate to ensure economic stability amid international turbulence, and subsequently advised the President to dissolve the parliament.

In the 26 March 2022 parliamentary elections, the Labour Party won 55.11 per cent of the vote and initially secured 39 parliamentary seats. The Nationalist Party received 41.74 per cent of the vote and was allocated 29 seats. Four additional parties contested the elections, the APDP-The Green Party (1.61 per cent), the People's Party polled (0.52 per cent), the *Abba* Party (0.46 per cent), *VOLT* (0.13 per cent), as well as four independent candidates (0.43 per cent); none of these parties, nor any independent candidates, obtained sufficient votes to enter parliament. Since independence in 1964, only the Labour Party and the Nationalist Party have been elected to parliament and have alternated in power; the Labour Party has been in government since 2013.

Election stakeholders and international organizations have noted incremental progress in recent years in judicial independence and, most recently, a reform involving the judiciary in appointing the Chief Justice, and prosecutorial and investigative capacity has been strengthened, but the justice system remains under-resourced with lengthy proceedings, and corruption is still perceived as widespread, with limited number or final convictions in high-level cases.<sup>1</sup> There have been no new measures on strengthening safeguards for the working environment of journalists, advancing the independence of the public service media, or addressing broader concerns over media pluralism and the protection of journalists.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The November 2025 Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) [Addendum to the Second Compliance Report](#) under the Fifth Evaluation Round concluded that Malta was “not yet in sufficient compliance”; outstanding concerns include the lack of clear rules on lobbying contacts between senior officials and third parties, shortcomings in conflict-of-interest declarations, limited use of special investigative techniques in corruption cases, and broad exemptions limiting access to information under the Freedom of Information Act.

<sup>2</sup> See the European Commission's [2025 Rule of Law Report](#).

Women remain underrepresented in political life, including in the executive and in the parliament, despite some recent measures aimed at increasing their representation.<sup>3</sup> Only 10 women were elected to parliament in 2022 (15 per cent). Following the application of the 2021 constitutional gender corrective mechanism, six additional seats were allocated to each parliamentary party, increasing parliament from 67 to 79 members and women's representation to 22 MPs (28 per cent) (see also *Electoral System*).

ODIHR has previously observed three elections in Malta, most recently the 26 March 2022 parliamentary elections.<sup>4</sup> The final report for the 2022 parliamentary elections, published in July 2022, contains 21 recommendations, including 9 priority ones, for the authorities to improve the electoral process and bring it closer in line with OSCE commitments.<sup>5</sup>

## B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Malta has ratified major international instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.<sup>6</sup> The legal framework for parliamentary elections comprises the 1964 Constitution (last amended in 2025), 1991 General Elections Act (GEA, last amended in 2024), and 1939 Electoral (Polling) Ordinance (last amended in 2007).<sup>7</sup> The election framework is largely unchanged since the 2022 general election.<sup>8</sup> ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally considered the legislative framework to be conducive to the conduct of democratic elections. Several noted, however, that any further electoral reform requires the agreement of the two parliamentary parties, both of which benefit from the current arrangements, and that this dynamic constrains the prospects for greater pluralism in parliament.

The authorities previously implemented some ODIHR recommendations, including the decriminalisation of defamation through the 2018 Media and Defamation Act. Many other recommendations remain unaddressed. These include recommendations related to the absence of a legal framework for citizen and international election observation, the appointment procedures and independence of the governing board members of the Broadcasting Authority and the Public Broadcasting Services, as well the oversight and enforcement of political and campaign finance regulations and the imprint requirement on campaign materials. Additional unaddressed recommendations concern voting rights for persons with disabilities and proportionate restrictions on prisoner voting, the possibility for assisted voting by a person of choice, the conflict of interest arising from individuals serving simultaneously as polling staff and party agents, and the transparency of the Electoral Commission's proceedings and the publication of disaggregated results.

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<sup>3</sup> The 2023 UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, in its [End of Mission Statement](#) following its visit to Malta noted the continued underrepresentation of women in political and public life, including decision-making positions, and highlighted structural barriers such as persistent gender stereotypes, unequal sharing of family responsibilities, and the male-dominated nature of political institutions.

<sup>4</sup> See the previous [ODIHR election reports on Malta](#).

<sup>5</sup> 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".

<sup>6</sup> Including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2003 Convention against Corruption, 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, and the 1998 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Malta ratified the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2012 but retained a reservation to parts of Article 29, allowing it to continue applying existing electoral rules on voting procedures, polling facilities, electoral materials and assistance to voters unable to vote autonomously.

<sup>7</sup> In 2024, the Constitution was amended to allow for an extension of pre-arraignment detention in serious criminal cases, and in 2025, to establish a Commissioner for Standards of the Judiciary tasked with investigating complaints against judges and magistrates and verifying their asset declarations.

<sup>8</sup> The GEA was amended in 2024 with a sole change to simplify the procedure for voters who did not receive their polling card by allowing them to request a replacement in writing or online rather than by submitting a declaration.

The unicameral House of Representatives comprises a minimum of 65 members elected for five-year terms from 13 five-mandate electoral districts under the single transferable vote (STV) system. Voters vote by ranking candidates in order of preference and may rank as many as they wish, including across parties or independent candidates. The quota for a candidate to be elected is calculated by dividing the total number of valid votes in a division by a number exceeding by one the number of vacancies to be filled, with the result being increased by one (disregarding any fractional remainder). Remaining seats are filled through the successive transfer of surplus votes from elected and eliminated candidates to the next available preference indicated on each ballot.

According to the Constitution, if no more than two parties are elected, additional seats are awarded to ensure that the overall seat distribution is proportionated to each party's nationwide share of first-preference votes, and that a party that won more than 50 per cent of first-preference votes secures a parliamentary majority. Following the 2021 constitutional amendments, if fewer than 40 per cent of elected representatives are from either gender, up to 12 additional seats are to be allocated to candidates of the less represented gender from the two parties that attained the most votes.<sup>9</sup> This mechanism is activated only if no more than two parties are elected. Some ODIHR NAM interlocutors were critical of these arrangements, stating that the overall framework rests on the constitutional assumption of a stable two-party parliament.<sup>10</sup>

The Electoral Commission reviews electoral district boundaries every two to five years, to adjust them in case of deviation from the average by more than five per cent. The most recent review was concluded in July 2025 and the specific adjustments were the subject of some political disagreements between the two major parties.<sup>11</sup>

### C. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The Electoral Commission (EC) holds broad authority and is responsible for voter and candidate registration, the review of district boundaries, organization of polling, the vote count and establishing election results, as well as the oversight of party and candidate financing. The Commission is composed of the Chief Electoral Commissioner and ten members, nominated by the Prime Minister after consultation with the leader of the parliamentary opposition. In practice, the ten members are split evenly between the ruling party and the opposition party appointees. Since 2021, the EC must include at least four members of each gender.<sup>12</sup> The parliamentary parties can also nominate two delegates with rights of access to the Commission's proceedings and records.

Polling on election day will take place in 742 polling stations in 121 polling centres. Each polling station is administered by at least three Assistant Electoral Commissioners (AECs), including a chairperson

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<sup>9</sup> The mechanism does not apply if additional parties are elected to parliament.

<sup>10</sup> ADPD-The Green Party challenged the mechanism after the 2022 elections, arguing that the exclusion of candidates from parties that win no seats from access to the gender-corrective mechanism discriminates against smaller parties and violates guarantees of equality, freedom of association and free elections. The Constitutional Court rejected the appeal in February 2026, holding that constitutional provisions are of equal status and cannot be declared inconsistent with one another.

<sup>11</sup> The Nationalist Party has argued in boundary reviews in 2021 and 2025 that electoral districts should preserve whole localities in line with local council boundaries, rather than splitting them between two parliamentary election districts. The 2025 redistribution was the second consecutive review to split the locality of Naxxar.

<sup>12</sup> The current Commission comprises six men and four women; the chief electoral commissioner is a man.

nominated by the Electoral Commission.<sup>13</sup> Early voting will take place on 23, 26 and 28 May in 110 additional polling stations organized for voters in hospitals and care homes, prisoners with voting rights, EC members, polling staff and police officers.

ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in work of the election administration and the integrity of voting and vote counting proceedings, attributing this to the extensive mutual oversight exercised by the two main parties; however, they noted that all other stakeholders have limited access to scrutinize certain key stages of the process, including the vote count, which reduces overall transparency.

The contestants may nominate party agents to represent them at the opening and closing of polling, the delivery and transport of ballot materials, and the counting; they may also nominate district agents to liaise with the EC. AECs may concurrently serve as party agents which some ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted may lead to conflict of interest. Despite a prior ODIHR recommendation, the legal framework does not provide for citizen and international election observation, but electoral contestants may appoint representatives to attend various stages of the process.<sup>14</sup>

The law provides for a centralised counting centre to which all sealed ballot boxes are transferred following the close of polling. Counting is fully electronic, with a manual fallback in case of system failure. Each ballot is scanned and voters' ranked preferences are interpreted and processed to determine results. Ballots with unclear preferences are referred to party-nominated adjudicators and, where these cannot agree, to the EC. Only the EC and the delegates of the parliamentary parties have electronic access to the scanned ballots. After the draft results are produced, the party delegates are granted access to the detailed ballot interpretations and preliminary results for a four-hour verification period. By law, the EC investigates any reasoned objections by the delegates and contestants before declaring and publishing the confirmed results.

The EC informed the ODIHR NAM that it is training some 3,000 AECs through a hybrid model combining an online platform with assessments, which is mandatory for EC-nominated AECs, and in-person sessions held in multiple groups in the week before election day. Additional sessions are held for counting staff. Political parties separately train their own AEC nominees, who are also given access to the online training platform but are not required to use it.

The GEA requires that all polling stations be accessible. According to the EC, polling centres are inspected for accessibility ahead of election day. The EC must also produce special sleeve stencils to enable independent voting in Braille. The GEA provides that voters unable to vote autonomously must receive assistance from an AEC rather than from a person of their choice, a restriction which several ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted is inconsistent with international standards.<sup>15</sup>

#### **D. VOTER REGISTRATION**

Citizens who have reached 16 years of age by election day are eligible to vote. Citizens are ineligible to vote if they have been interdicted for mental incapacity by a competent court, if a Medical Board has

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<sup>13</sup> AECs are nominated by political parties contesting elections and supplemented by EC-nominated members as it sees fit. At polling centres with more than two polling stations, Polling Place Officers (PPOs) coordinate between the Electoral Commission and the polling station Chairpersons.

<sup>14</sup> The Electoral Commission assured the ODIHR NAM that members of a potential election observation activity would be permitted to observe the polling process accompanied by a Commission representative and would be granted access to the counting centre.

<sup>15</sup> See Article 29(a)(iii) of the 2006 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#), which stipulates that States Parties shall "guarantee the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice".

determined them disqualified for reasons of mental infirmity, or if they are serving a prison sentence exceeding twelve months regardless of the nature of the offence.<sup>16</sup> ODIHR has previously recommended that disability-based voting restrictions be removed in line with the international standards and that prisoner disenfranchisement be reviewed for proportionality with the offence. Since 2015, citizens may self-determine their gender identity, with the chosen marker (female, male, or non-binary or non-disclosed) reflected in their personal records, IDs and voter register.

Voter registration is passive. *Identità*, the agency responsible for the issuance of IDs, submits citizens' data to the EC for the compilation of the electoral register twice a year, in April and October, as well as within five days of calling elections. On 1 May, the EC published the entire voter register for the general elections in the Government Gazette, as required by law, containing names, addresses and personal identification numbers of 356,707 voters.<sup>17</sup> ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not raise significant concerns related to the publication of personal information, characterizing it as a long-established practice.

Eligible citizens who are not included or whose data is incorrect, as well as other registered voters, may submit applications until 21 May. Eligible voters may also request the update of other voters' records.<sup>18</sup> The EC may request assistance from the police in verifying records or requested changes. The EC may also remove a record from the voter register, on its own initiative or following a complaint by any registered voter, if it determines that the person does not meet the eligibility requirements; the EC must communicate such a decision in writing to the affected person, who may appeal to the Court of Appeal within seven days. ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not raise issues with the accuracy or inclusiveness of the voter register.

Following the calling of the elections, police started delivering voter cards to voters' registered addresses, which voters must present and surrender at the polling station in order to vote. Undelivered cards are subsequently held at the nearest police station or local council premises for collection, and ultimately at the EC up to midnight on 28 May. The EC collects information on undelivered voter cards and publishes it in the Government Gazette after the deadline. Some ODIHR NAM interlocutors described the voter card as a redundant election integrity mechanism and questioned the additional burden on voters as well as institutions.

## E. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Citizens of at least 18 years of age who are resident in Malta for at least six months in the preceding 18 month and are not subject to constitutional disqualification are eligible to be elected.<sup>19</sup> Prospective candidates seeking to run independently or as representatives of political parties may submit their nomination documents, together with an application deposit of EUR 90 and the signatures of four voters from the respective district, online or in person at the EC offices from 7 to 11 May.

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<sup>16</sup> The Medical Board, established under the GEA, comprises a doctor appointed by the EC and one doctor appointed by each parliamentary party, and its decisions are final and unappealable. In advance of these elections, in October and November 2025, the EC conducted medical capacity examinations of patients in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

<sup>17</sup> A full paper copy of the voter register can be purchased for a small fee from the Department of Information.

<sup>18</sup> The register is publicly searchable by street address on the Electoral Commission's website.

<sup>19</sup> The Constitution disqualifies citizens who have voluntarily acknowledged allegiance to a foreign State, undischarged bankrupts, persons certified or adjudged of "unsound mind", persons serving a prison sentence exceeding 12 months, public officers, members of any disciplined force, persons holding electoral administration offices, and persons disqualified for the conviction of an electoral offence. Partners with unlimited liability and directors or managers of companies that are parties to public works or supply contracts with the Government are also disqualified, unless they have published in the Government Gazette within one month before election day a notice setting out the contract and their interest in it.

Registered political parties must submit their lists of approved candidates by 11 May. The law permits candidates to stand in one or two districts, and to choose which seat to retain if elected in two districts. ODIHR has previously recommended eliminating this practice on the grounds that it may distort voter choice, since the seat the candidate vacates is filled by transferring those voters' ballots to other candidates they ranked, often producing a different outcome than the voters' first-preference choice would suggest.

Any voter may object to a candidate's nomination until 12 May. The EC must hear and decide all objections by 14 May. If the EC dismisses an objection, the decision is final. If the EC upholds an objection and the candidate's nomination is rejected, the candidate may appeal to the Court of Appeal within 24 hours of the EC's decision. The Court must hear and determine such appeals with urgency and before the printing of ballot papers begins. ODIHR NAM interlocutors described the process as straightforward and inclusive.

All political party representatives met by the ODIHR NAM described difficulties in identifying women candidates, attributing this to cultural factors, the structural disadvantage faced by women in a part-time parliament with evening sittings, the advantage enjoyed by male incumbents, and the harsher political discourse and online abuse directed at women in politics. Non-parliamentary parties additionally noted difficulties in finding candidates generally, despite the minimum candidacy requirements. Most ODIHR NAM interlocutors attributed these difficulties to the deeply bipartisan character of the society and the limited prospects of electoral success on a small-party ticket, both of which they considered to discourage candidacies outside the two parliamentary parties.

## **F. ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

The Constitution protects the fundamental freedoms. Campaigning is permitted from calling elections to the start of election silence, from midnight on the day before election day until the polls close at 22:00, during which political meetings and rallies, and the publication of political content by candidates and parties are prohibited. Traditional media are bound by these restrictions; social media platforms, however, continue to carry political content despite the formal silence. On election day, any form of campaigning is forbidden within 50 metres of polling stations, and political party offices and clubs whose entrances fall within that zone must remain closed.

All political parties and prospective candidates met by the ODIHR NAM described the ability to campaign without hindrance and freely convey their messages to voters. The two parliamentary parties run full-scale campaigns combining billboards, banners, large rallies, intensive door-to-door canvassing, and their own television and radio stations and newspapers; smaller parties and independent candidates campaign mainly through social media, with limited banners and door-to-door activity. The campaign environment overall was described as calm, without significant tension, violence, or confrontation, although the tone of online discourse was characterized as polarised and, at times, hostile.

Many ODIHR NAM interlocutors described an entrenched two-party system which disproportionately disadvantages smaller parties and independent candidates. Several interlocutors also described campaign-style billboards displayed by the governing party in the weeks before elections were called, and government infrastructure used in earlier months for promotional material later transitioned into party campaign advertising. Multiple interlocutors raised concerns about the use of state resources during the campaign, including allegations that ministry employees are involved in party campaign work, the rapid opening of public-sector employment processes in the period before elections, and the issuance of

one-off or annual financial benefits to citizens.<sup>20</sup> Major parties were also described as maintaining detailed voter-level information used to call non-voters, organise transport to polling stations, and provide individualized assistance with construction permits, employment, or other administrative matters, which several interlocutors characterized as a strongly patronage-based system.

The regulation of online campaigning is governed primarily by directly applicable EU instruments.<sup>21</sup> The Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising Regulation has been directly applicable since October 2025; however, some ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted the absence of domestic implementing measures. Candidates and parties campaign primarily on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with smaller parties and independent candidates relying particularly on social networks due to limited resources for traditional campaign. Malta Communications Authority (MCA), as the Digital Services Coordinator, handles DSA-related complaints, and participates in EU-level co-operation mechanisms. For very large online platforms, the European Commission leads supervision of systemic obligations, while the MCA co-operates with the Commission and other Digital Services Coordinators, including by transmitting complaints and participating in the European Board for Digital Services.

ODIHR NAM interlocutors described the tone of online political discourse as polarised, with significant volumes of hostility, racism, and Islamophobia on Facebook in particular, as well as attacks targeting women candidates.<sup>22</sup> Several interlocutors described disinformation, including content presented along partisan lines, as undermining voters' access to accurate information about the campaign. Some interlocutors explained that independent fact-checking infrastructure is limited but expanding.<sup>23</sup> AI and deepfakes were described as emerging rather than current concerns, although satirical AI-generated memes targeting both major parties have circulated widely from the opening of the campaign. Foreign interference was not identified by interlocutors as a current concern, with the disinformation observed during the campaign described as primarily domestically generated.

## G. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The legal framework regulating political party and campaign finance, comprising the 2015 Financing of Political Parties Act (FPPA), the GEA, and the 1982 Foreign Interference Act, has not been amended since the 2022 elections. Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors pointed to the unresolved gap in the EC's enforcement powers regarding campaign finance oversight, stemming from the 2018 Constitutional Court ruling on the FPPA.<sup>24</sup> Interlocutors noted that parliament is yet to amend the affected provisions, leaving legal uncertainty as to their application and effective enforcement. ODIHR's prior recommendations on political and campaign finance remain unaddressed, including those concerning public funding for parties, the regulation of party-controlled entities and third parties, donation disclosure thresholds, unified candidate reporting, electoral material imprints, and the EC's oversight powers and reporting transparency.

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, the Government [announced](#) on 4 May 2026 a EUR 1,000 annual bonus to be paid to all full-time workers.

<sup>21</sup> The Malta Communications Authority is the designated Digital Services Co-ordinator under the Digital Services Act, while co-operation with the large online platforms is supervised by the European Commission.

<sup>22</sup> Notably, a candidate of Syrian-Maltese and Muslim background has been the subject of sustained online abuse during the campaign, including racist and religious attacks on social networks.

<sup>23</sup> The Times of Malta established a dedicated fact-checking desk in 2023, and the EU-funded Mediterranean Digital Media Observatory, with the Times of Malta and the University of Malta as local partners, conducts disinformation analysis and media literacy work.

<sup>24</sup> The Constitutional Court ruled in October 2018 that provisions of the FPPA conferring on the Commission both investigatory and adjudicatory powers, including the imposition of administrative fines and sanctions, are incompatible with the constitutional right to fair hearing before an impartial tribunal. As Constitutional Court declarations apply only to specific cases and do not annul the legal provisions, the relevant provisions of the FPPA remain in force.

No public funding is provided for political or campaign activities. Campaigns may be financed through donations from individuals and legal entities up to EUR 25,000 per donor per year and through a party's or candidate's own funds. Donations above EUR 7,000 must be published, donations above EUR 500 must be reported to the EC, and donations above EUR 50 must be recorded internally only in the event of an inquiry; anonymous donations below this amount are permitted.<sup>25</sup> Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the FPPA's restrictions do not apply to media outlets and other entities owned or controlled by parties, which can therefore raise funds outside its scope, and that the two parliamentary parties benefit from significant commercial interests with limited transparency and oversight.

Candidates may not spend more than EUR 20,000 in each contested district. There are no separate rules for campaign spending at the party level, no ceiling on overall party expenditure, and third-party campaigning is not regulated. Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that significant campaign spending takes place outside the official campaign period, and that donations made before the campaign period do not need to be disclosed. Elected candidates must submit a statement of declared income and expenditure to the EC within ten days of being declared elected, unelected candidates must submit the report within 31 days of the publication of official results. According to the EC, these reports can be scrutinized or copied at the EC premises but are not published online.

Political parties are required to report electoral income and expenditure only as part of their annual financial reports, with no designated campaign-finance reporting; audited reports must be submitted within four months of the financial year-end and published on the EC website within one month of audit. Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted substantial delays in the submission and publication of audited annual reports, with parties routinely requesting deadline extensions, a practice introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic that has continued. Overall, interlocutors raised concerns about the lack of meaningful and timely oversight of campaign financing and the resultant lack of transparency and accountability.

## H. MEDIA

The Constitution guarantees the freedom of expression and the media market is diverse. The principal legislation governing the media includes the 1991 Broadcasting Act, the 2008 Freedom of Information Act, the 2018 Media and Defamation Act, and the regulation transposing the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive. The EU-wide European Media Freedom Act has been directly applicable since August 2025 and was given local effect through a legal notice; however, civil society groups have characterised the transposition as procedural rather than substantive. According to the ODIHR NAM interlocutors, further legislative reform of the media framework, including measures envisaged in response to the recommendations of the 2021 public inquiry into the murder of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, are yet to be adopted.<sup>26</sup> Draft media laws tabled in 2022 were effectively withdrawn following calls for substantive amendments, and the further consultation process has been characterised as

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<sup>25</sup> Anonymous donations above EUR 50, donations from entities whose ultimate beneficial owner is not identifiable, and donations from companies in which the State holds a controlling interest are prohibited. Foreign funding is restricted by law and subject to oversight by a dedicated Monitoring Committee.

<sup>26</sup> The independent public inquiry, established by the Government and published on 29 July 2021, found that the State had to "shoulder responsibility" for the journalist's death, having created an "atmosphere of impunity" and failed to take reasonable steps to protect her. It issued 28 recommendations on media protection, freedom of expression, and constitutional reform. Three men have been convicted of the murder and three further suspects, including the alleged mastermind, await trial.

untransparent.<sup>27</sup> Despite the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, journalists and observers continue to report obstacles in obtaining information from public institutions, including delays, broad statutory exemptions, and protracted appeal processes.<sup>28</sup>

The media landscape is well developed but characterised by structural concentration around the two parliamentary parties. Television remains the principal source of political information for many voters, despite the growing role of online media. The Constitution requires political reporting in public and private broadcasting to be impartial and coverage to be fairly distributed amongst political parties, and establishes the Broadcasting Authority (BA) as the body responsible for overseeing all radio and television broadcasters. The BA oversees 8 television stations, 13 radio stations, and approximately 22 community stations, while internet-based outlets and newspapers provide more independent coverage. The Public Broadcaster Service (PBS) and the two commercial broadcasters operated by the parliamentary parties dominate the broadcasting market.<sup>29</sup>

Several ODIHR NAM interlocutors described PBS as not editorially independent and as inclined to favour the ruling party in news and current affairs coverage, with the daily 20:00 news bulletin identified as particularly significant in shaping public political information. They also described the two party-owned commercial broadcasters as openly partisan platforms.<sup>30</sup> Several interlocutors observed that smaller parties have limited access to broadcasting media and that the dominance of party-controlled media outlets narrows the space for pluralistic political information.

Under the BA's broadcasting scheme, the PBS will allocate a five-minute address to each party leader or representative and four minutes per candidate, with the two parliamentary parties each capped at 130 minutes in total to avoid excessive allocations. Smaller parties are also each granted a ten-minute interview. There will be three debates involving the parliamentary parties, including a final leaders' debate, and a debate involving all parties.

## I. ELECTORAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The resolution of electoral disputes is primarily regulated by the Constitution and the GEA. Voter registration appeals are heard by Revising Officers, appointed among magistrates at the Court of Magistrates, within 21 days of the publication of the electoral register, with onward appeal to the Court of Appeal. Objections to candidate nominations are decided by the EC, with appeal to the Court of Appeal within 24 hours of the EC's decision. Other complaints, including disputes pertaining to the results and challenges to constitutional provisions governing the elections, are adjudicated by the Constitutional Court.

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<sup>27</sup> See also the European Commission's 2025 [Rule of Law Report](#) which found "no progress in adopting legislative and other safeguards to improve the working environment of journalists" and only "limited progress" on access to official documents.

<sup>28</sup> The 2024 Media Pluralism Monitor categorised the right to information as "high-risk", and in October 2024 the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights raised concerns about continued difficulties faced by journalists in accessing information of public interest and the use of SLAPPs by state agencies in response to freedom of information requests.

<sup>29</sup> ONE Television is operated by ONE Productions, owned by the Labour Party; NET Television is operated by Media.link Communications, owned by the Nationalist Party.

<sup>30</sup> In 2021, the online media outlet *Lov'in Malta* filed a constitutional challenge against the Broadcasting Authority's interpretation of the impartiality requirement under the Broadcasting Act, on which it has not enforced impartiality against the two party-owned broadcasters on the premise that the two stations balance each other out. The substantive merits of the challenge remain undecided in advance of the 2026 elections.

Revising Officers and the Court of Appeal are required by law to suspend consideration of all electoral disputes 14 days before election day. The legal framework does not include precise deadlines for higher courts to adjudicate election-related complaints, and the EC's own complaints-handling practice operates without published procedures. ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that few election-related complaints are generally submitted during the electoral process.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally considered the electoral framework to be conducive to the conduct of democratic elections, but many raised concerns about the transparency of the process, the environment for political competition, campaign finance oversight, access to information, and pluralism in the broadcasting media. Most interlocutors noted the value of an external review and several requested an ODIHR activity to follow the electoral process. The ODIHR NAM sees benefit in undertaking a closer examination of certain electoral domains, including the administration of the election process, the campaign environment, political and campaign financing and its oversight, and the media environment and its regulation. On this basis, the ODIHR NAM recommends deploying an Election Expert Team (EET) for the 30 May early parliamentary elections. ODIHR also encourages the authorities to consider previous recommendations that remain unaddressed.

## **ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS**

### **Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism**

Alberta Borg, Director for International Development, Economic Affairs and European Institutions  
Melanie Bonnici Bennett, Head of Unit for OSCE and Council of Europe

### **Electoral Commission**

Joseph Camilleri, Chief Electoral Commissioner  
Josianne Sultana, Secretary to the Commission  
James Handyside, Head of ICT Operations

### **National Audit Office**

Charles Deguara, Auditor General  
Noel Camilleri, Deputy Auditor General  
Rebecca Vassallo, Liaison Officer for International Affairs

### **Broadcasting Authority**

Frank V. Farrugia, Chairperson  
Joanna Spiteri, Chief Executive Officer

### **Department for Information**

Roderick Caruana, Director  
Joanne Sciortino Trevisan, Assistant Director  
Charmaine Bonnici, Senior Information Officer

### **Commissioner for Standards in Public Life**

Charles Polidano, Director General  
Sarah Pace Warrington, Investigator

### **Commissioner for Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

Rhoda Garland, Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
Bernard A. Busuttil, Executive Director for Investigations, Compliance and Enforcement

### **Malta Police**

Kenneth Haber, Deputy Commissioner  
Jurgen Vella, Superintendent

### **Political Parties and Independent Candidates**

Melissa Bagley, Deputy chair, ADPD – Green Party  
Alex Sciberras, President, Labour Party  
Louis Gatt, Vice President, Labour Party  
Leonid McKay, Chief Executive Office, Labour Party  
William Lewis, Organisational Secretary, Labour Party  
Alistair Farrugia, Executive Member, Momentum Party  
Karl Anthony Borg, policy advisor, Momentum Party  
Charles Bonello, Secretary General, Nationalist Party  
Joe Grech, Executive Committee Chair, Nationalist Party  
Ian Cilia, Member of the Electoral Office, Nationalist Party

### **Media**

Keith Chetcuti, Chief Executive Officer, Public Broadcasting Service  
Charles Dalli, Chief Operations Officer  
Herman Grech, Editor-in-Chief, Times of Malta

### **Civil Society**

Manuel Delia, Executive Officer, Repubblika  
Andre Callus, Activist, Moviment Graffiti  
Therese Comodini Cachia, Senior Lecturer, University of Malta

### **International Community<sup>31</sup>**

Representatives of diplomatic missions of Czechia, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, and Sweden.

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<sup>31</sup> The ODIHR NAM extended an invitation to representations of all OSCE participating States resident in Malta.