PLATTFORM WAHLEN in Cooperation with CeMAS

Election Observation Mission

State Parliament Election in Saxony-Anhalt of September 6, 2026

Report

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Executive Summary

On September 6, 2026, the state parliament was elected in Saxony-Anhalt. According to the findings of the PLATTFORM WAHLEN election observation mission, the election was **well organized, generally peaceful, transparent**, and reflected the collective will of the voters. Voter turnout, at just under 78 percent, was higher than at any time since German reunification.

The voting process on election day proceeded **without any significant incidents**. A partly inconsistent application of procedural rules, particularly in the verification of identity and during the vote count, did not, according to the observation, lead to any substantial loss of transparency or accuracy of the results. Observers of the election observation mission were predominantly received in a friendly and competent manner. Observation in the polling stations was, for the most part, made possible without complications.

For a systematic international or civil society observation of the entire voting process, there is as yet no legal basis, which Germany committed to creating within the framework of its OSCE commitments. The principle of the public nature of elections is limited to voting and counting on election day; election preparation by the administration, the conduct of mail-in voting, and the official determination of results are **not accessible to observation**. This urgently needs to be corrected.

The preparation of the election by the electoral bodies was well structured and suited to enabling an **orderly and transparent election process**. According to representatives of the electoral bodies, there were individual challenges in providing the voting materials due to timetable bottlenecks between the decision on constituency nominations, ballot printing, and dispatch of mail-in materials, but these could be overcome. There is, however, potential for improvement in the area of digitalization of administration and public communication.

Foreign information manipulation poses a real and well-documented threat to the integrity of elections in Germany. In the run-up to the state parliament election in Saxony-Anhalt, the Center for Monitoring, Analysis and Strategy (CeMAS) was able to identify several cases of systematic manipulation of election-related information, particularly relating to candidates from the CDU, SPD, FDP, DIE LINKE, and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and to trace their origin with high probability to Russian sources.

Regulations on the transparency of party and campaign financing in Germany do not fully comply with relevant international standards. In particular, the absence of a cap on party donations, the lack of any obligation for parties to disclose campaign donations and expenditures separately and promptly, considerable delays in the review and publication of the parties' annual financial reports, and the absence of an independent and adequately resourced oversight authority are a call for action.

PLATTFORM WAHLEN conducted a civil society election observation mission in accordance with international standards in Germany for the third time. The observation comprised its own research, semi-structured interviews with representatives of electoral bodies, and a representative observation of voting and vote counting in 209 polling stations in 37 of 41 electoral

districts in Saxony-Anhalt.

With this report, the election observation mission makes recommendations for aligning the legal and administrative regulations for the state parliament election in Saxony-Anhalt with international standards. The recommendations are addressed, depending on responsibility, to the federal government, the Bundestag, as well as the state parliament and State Returning Officer of Saxony-Anhalt.

Introduction

PLATTFORM WAHLEN, an initiative of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) and European Exchange gGmbH, conducted a civil society election observation mission for the state parliament election in Saxony-Anhalt of September 6, 2026, for the third time in Germany. The mission consisted of a core team of experts for coordination and analysis, 10 long-term observers for research and interviews, and 34 teams of two short-term observers each for deployment on election day. The observers were made up of engaged citizens and professional international election observers. Methodologically, the mission followed standards of international civil society election observation.[1]

In selected respects, the election observation mission assessed the conformity of the elections with Germany's commitments to the OSCE, other international commitments and standards for democratic elections, and the relevant legislation at the federal and state levels. In particular, it analyzed the transparency of campaign financing in the context of the state parliament election, the role of foreign information manipulation and interference in the election campaign, the legal and administrative regulations on election observation in Germany and Saxony-Anhalt, selected aspects of election preparation, and the regulation and conduct of the voting process on election day. Analogous to the methodology of an OSCE election assessment mission,[2] it did not conduct a comprehensive observation but instead visited a statistically representative number of polling stations on a sample basis.

PLATTFORM WAHLEN thanks all interview partners for the open exchange and their assessments, all polling station committees of the polling stations visited for answering our questions, and all volunteer election observers for their dedication.

PLATTFORM WAHLEN thanks Commit Global for providing the "VoteMonitor" app, which records short-term observation data in real time. It is part of the "Infrastructure for Good" developed by Commit Global.

PLATTFORM WAHLEN thanks the Center for Monitoring, Analysis and Strategy (CeMAS) for its analysis of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). Parts of the FIMI study were produced with the help of Osavul (osavul.cloud), an AI-powered platform for narrative intelligence for detecting and analyzing information manipulation, including FIMI.

[1] See the OSCE Election Observation Handbook. All election observers of the mission were trained accordingly to comply with the international GNDEM Code of Conduct.

[2] In OSCE terminology, an election observation mission (EOM) refers to a systematic and representative collection of data on election day, whereas an election assessment mission (EAM) is limited to the qualitative assessment of selected aspects of the election.

Report

Financial Transparency

The financing of political parties is regulated at the federal level. The legal framework essentially consists of the Political Parties Act of 1994 (last amended in 2024) and the Basic Law, under which political parties are required to disclose their assets, sources of income, and expenditures. There are no specific provisions on campaign financing.

In its report on the 2025 Bundestag elections, the OSCE found that the legal situation in Germany regarding the transparency of party financing, and campaign financing in particular, does not comply with relevant international standards in several respects.[3] The report cites, among other things, the absence of a cap on party donations, the lack of any obligation to disclose campaign donations and expenditures separately and promptly, considerable delays in the review and publication of the parties' annual financial reports, and the absence of an independent and adequately resourced oversight authority.

→ *In line with Germany's international commitments within the framework of the OSCE, the federal government should respond promptly and in detail to the recommendations of the OSCE election assessment mission on the 2025 Bundestag election.*[4]

The OSCE recommendations referred to are, in essence, applicable to the context of the state parliament election in Saxony-Anhalt.

There is no upper limit on the amount that a political party may accept as a donation, neither for individual donations nor for any period of time. Since January 2026 alone, parties received a total of over €5.3 million through large donations of over €35,000, of which more than €1.8 million went to the CDU. Since the Bundestag elections of February 23, 2025, parties received a total of over €11.6 million through large donations of over €35,000. Of this, a single donation of over €2 million went to the BSW, several donations totaling over €4.5 million went to the CDU/CSU, and smaller amounts went to other parties.[5] Various interview partners stated that donations of such magnitude are apt to raise doubts about the integrity of the political decisions of the parties concerned and thus to damage trust in democratic representation through parties as a whole.[6] This is a particularly sensitive point in the context of state parliament elections, since a single large donation at this level could give the recipient a decisive competitive advantage.[7]

→ *To ensure transparent campaign financing and equal competitive conditions, the federal legislature should introduce an upper limit on donations to political parties.*

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[3]See Report of the OSCE Election Assessment Mission on the 2025 Bundestag Election, last accessed September 7, 2026.

[4]See Article 25 of the OSCE Charter for European Security of 1999.

[5]See Communication from the President of the German Bundestag, last accessed September 7, 2026.

[6]See also the Abgeordnetenwatch survey of February 13, 2025, last accessed September 7, 2026.

[7]See Article 3.b.II of Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)4 and Paragraph 209 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation of 2020.

Political parties are required to submit an annual financial report to the President of the Bundestag by September 30 of each year for the preceding calendar year. It must present the party's income, expenditures and assets as a whole and by individual state associations and their subordinate regional associations.

Campaign expenditures are not published separately and must be identified in the annual financial report only as a single total. In addition, the reports are not made publicly available upon expiry of the submission deadline but only after review by the President of the Bundestag. For the year of the last Bundestag election, 2025, the reports are still not public. Timely public accountability and oversight are thus not possible.[8] Timely reporting on campaign financing is indispensable, in particular for creating transparency in digital campaigning and for preventing covert foreign influence.[9]

→ *To improve transparency, the federal legislature should introduce an obligation to provide regular, detailed, timely, and transparent reports on campaign donations and expenditures.*

The President of the Bundestag, supported by the Bundestag administration, is responsible for reviewing the annual financial reports. She has no investigative powers of her own. Moreover, no specific oversight is provided for election campaigns. In the event of allegations of inaccuracies in the annual financial report, a further review may be ordered with the consent of the party concerned. Given the lack of investigative powers and the limited staff resources of the Bundestag administration, as well as its lack of independence from the Bundestag (the same applies to the review of elections[10]), effective and timely oversight is not ensured.[11]

→ *The federal legislature should establish an independent oversight authority for campaign financing. This authority should have sufficient staff, financial resources, and investigative powers.*

[8]The most recent reports were published in February 2026 for the year 2024. Paragraph 200 of the Joint Guidelines of the OSCE and the Venice Commission on Political Party Regulation of 2020 recommends that "reports on campaign financing should be submitted to the competent authorities within a period of no more than 30 days after the elections [...]."

[9]Article 7.3 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption of 2003 states that "each state party shall also consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures [...] to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for public office and, where applicable, in the funding of political parties." See also Resolution 11/7 of the 11th Conference of the States Parties (CoSP11) to the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in Doha, Qatar, of December 2025.

[10]See Dr. Jakob Schemmel, "Sown Distrust" ("Gesätes Misstrauen"), Verfassungsblog of October 28, 2022; Dr. Martin Plum, Member of the Bundestag, "Berlin Should Leave the Field to Karlsruhe" ("Berlin sollte Karlsruhe das Feld überlassen"), LTO of September 11, 2025; Wolfgang Janisch, "Federal Constitutional Court Picks Up the Pace on Election Review" ("Bundesverfassungsgericht drückt bei der Wahlprüfung aufs Tempo"), Süddeutsche Zeitung of August 26, 2026, each last accessed September 7, 2026.

[11]Article 14(a) of Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)4 states that "states should provide for independent monitoring of the funding of political parties and of election campaigns." The issue of bias had been raised earlier by the President of the Bundestag, who said that "this (...) can seriously impair the acceptance of the legal decisions to be made, both among those affected and among the public."

Foreign Information Manipulation

Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) refers to the deliberate deception of the public or specific target groups through strategically placed false information with the aim of influencing public opinion. It is regarded as a "hybrid threat" to Germany.[12]

On behalf of PLATTFORM WAHLEN, CeMAS examined election-related communication on certain social media platforms in the run-up to the state parliament election and documented systematic campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion regarding the parties and candidates. The origin of the content could be attributed with high probability to Russian actors, including "Operation Overload" ("Matryoshka"), "Doppelgänger," "Storm-1516," and the "Foundation to Battle Injustice."

The activities of Matryoshka aimed to discredit candidates of the CDU, SPD, FDP, DIE LINKE, and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen in Saxony-Anhalt. They were alleged, without verifiable sources, to have committed criminal offenses, engaged in corruption, suffered from addictions, or disadvantaged people in eastern Germany. In addition, the campaign spread allegations that the governing CDU was planning election fraud and the disruption of the electoral process.

Storm-1516 spread defamatory statements about CDU Minister-President Sven Schulze and a forged video about alleged election fraud. Posts and articles on fake news sites of the Doppelgänger campaign contained tendentious content about various parties and addressed the perceived disadvantaging of people in the eastern German states. The Russian Foundation to Battle Injustice spread the claim in July and August 2026 that the federal government was deliberately pursuing economic repression against the eastern federal states as well as companies from these states.

The analyzed content was distributed via social media platforms, especially X. Of the 175 documented videos of the Matryoshka campaign that were related to Germany and German domestic politics and that appeared between June 30, 2026 and September 4, 2026, 83 videos made explicit reference to the state parliament elections in and politicians from Saxony-Anhalt. The forged videos bore the logos of FAZ, Die Zeit, Die Welt, MDR, SZ, Der Spiegel, DW, Tagesschau, Bild, t-online, ARD, and other German and international media organizations. Posts of the campaign achieved at least 37,000 reposts, more than 93,000 likes, and around 19.5 million views on X. However, CeMAS assumes that such figures are the result of non-authentic amplification[13] and that the organic reach as well as the impact of these posts is lower.

→ *The responsible authorities at the federal and state levels should build long-term capacities for detecting and containing foreign information manipulation and promote interinstitutional cooperation among media, fact-checkers, security authorities, and election management.*

[12]Federal Ministry of the Interior, Disinformation as a Hybrid Threat, last accessed September 7, 2026.

[13]Non-authentic amplification refers to the increase in the perceived reach of a post through likes and views that are generated not by human internet users but by bots and can therefore achieve very high numbers in a very short time.

Challenges in Election Preparation

PLATTFORM WAHLEN did not undertake a systematic observation of election preparation. As part of a limited long-term observation, interviews were conducted with representatives of several electoral bodies to identify challenges and develop contextual knowledge for interpreting election day observation data. Election preparation followed a timetable issued by the State Returning Officer, containing all legally prescribed steps and deadlines[14], as well as a detailed implementation decree that was issued to the subordinate electoral bodies on April 1, 2026.[15]

According to the unanimous account of all interview partners, election preparation at the constituency and municipal levels proceeded without significant difficulties. The division of labor among the State Returning Officer's office, the district returning officers, and the municipalities had worked well. In some cases, bottlenecks in the timetable had occurred only between the decision on the constituency nominations, the printing of the ballots, and the dispatch of the mail-in voting materials. The material and human resources of the municipalities were often limited but sufficient for effective election organization. Further progress in digitalization in election administration, particularly in the submission and processing of election nominations, was desirable. In some municipalities there were cases of mail-in voting materials being delivered multiple times, which was also reported in the media; these errors, however, had been identified and corrected in good time before the election.[16]

Several interview partners reported a markedly increased interest from the public and political representatives in the procedures of mail-in voting as well as in the casting of votes by voters in social care facilities. There was an obvious connection with the increased public speculation about the security and reliability of these processes.

PLATTFORM WAHLEN had received no substantiated reports of irregularities related to mail-in voting as of September 7, 2026. Some interview partners expressed in this context the wish for more public information about how mail-in voting works, but emphasized that there are no security concerns.

→ *In view of ongoing speculation about the security and reliability of mail-in voting, election management authorities at all levels should consider taking further trust-building measures in future elections.*

No incidents of harassment, threats, or personal attacks on representatives of the electoral bodies during election preparation were reported. In at least two cases, however, security measures for the counting of mail-in votes had been tightened.

[14]See State Returning Officer of Saxony-Anhalt, Timetable for the Preparation and Conduct of the State Parliament Election in Saxony-Anhalt on September 6, 2026, May 13, 2025, last accessed September 7, 2026.

[15]See State Returning Officer of Saxony-Anhalt, Implementation Decree for the State Parliament Election, April 1, 2026, last accessed September 7, 2026.

[16]Statement of the Magdeburg Election Office, last accessed September 7, 2026; Statement of the Halle Election Office, last accessed September 7, 2026.

Election Observation in Saxony-Anhalt

The observation of voting and vote counting on election day is open to everyone in Saxony-Anhalt and Germany. However, this does not apply to the entire administrative process of preparing the election, the conduct of mail-in voting, or the official determination of results on election night. There is as of yet no legal basis for the observation of the entire electoral process, even though Germany has committed itself to creating one within the OSCE framework. To that extent, systematic and comprehensive election observation is currently still not possible in Germany. This constitutes a significant obstacle to achieving greater transparency in elections.

→ *The federal legislature should fulfill Germany's commitments to the OSCE and adopt a comprehensive regulation on international and civil society election observation in Germany that meets international standards.*

The practical possibility of systematically observing elections is further impeded by the fact that essential information and documents are not public. This applies in particular to the distribution of polling stations as well as to the training materials and municipal guidelines for polling station committees. Of 14 district returning officers, eight complied with the request to provide lists of the polling stations in their respective areas; in 15 of 41 constituencies, the public availability of the data was incomplete. In total, just over 2,000 of the approximately 2,600 polling stations could be mapped for election observation.[17]

→ *In the absence of a comprehensive regulation on election observation in Germany, the State Returning Officer of Saxony-Anhalt should consider centrally collecting lists of polling stations as well as training materials and guidelines for polling station committees and making them available to the public in a uniform format.*

On election day, observers of PLATTFORM WAHLEN were predominantly received in a friendly manner, although in two cases they were denied access to the polling station for no apparent reason. In some cases, polling station committees refused to provide information out of uncertainty about the legal situation.

In the weeks before the state parliament elections, leading AfD figures increasingly called publicly for election observation. The statements made in this context[18] reveal motives that are incompatible with the ethical and methodological standards of citizen election observation,[19] particularly party-political neutrality. In the context of a systematic and speculative questioning of the integrity of mail-in voting by such actors and tendentious complaints filed in the election review of the 2025 Bundestag elections, election observation runs the risk of being misused for

[17] Art. 1.4 of the Venice Commission's Guidelines on an Internationally Recognized Status of Election Observers of 2009 describes the required scope of accreditation of election observers, which expressly includes access to relevant documents.

[18] Philip Stein, the founder of the organization "Ein Prozent", which has close ties to the AfD, described Saxony-Anhalt as the "federal state of election fraud" in the podcast "Lagebesprechung" of August 20, 2026. In it, he called for election observation, among other things.

[19] See footnote 1.

party-political interests.[20]

Conduct of the Voting Process

Voting and vote counting was observed in a total of 209 polling stations in 37 of 41 constituencies in Saxony-Anhalt. The observation was conducted in accordance with international standards and is statistically representative with regard to voting.

In the observed polling stations, **voting** proceeded in an orderly manner and without significant incidents. The quorum of the polling station committee was ensured in all polling stations. In 11 percent of polling stations, campaign advertising in the immediate vicinity had not been removed. In nine of 34 polling stations designated as barrier-free, limitations on accessibility were found. In 2 percent of polling stations, the secrecy of the vote was not fully ensured because voting booths were placed in front of uncovered windows or mirrors. Polling station committees were for the most part confident in carrying out their duties. In 9 percent of polling stations, minor violations of the secrecy of the vote were found, e.g., through the joint marking of ballots in one voting booth.

In one case, a voter vehemently insisted that the voting notation next to his name in the voter register was incorrect because he had not yet voted, whereupon the polling station committee called the district returning officer for mediation. In 9 percent of polling stations, the polling station committee, out of uncertainty about the legal situation, was unwilling to provide information on basic data, e.g., the number of registered voters. With the exception of two cases in which observers were denied access to the polling station for no apparent reason, the voting process was transparent and easy to observe in all polling stations visited.

The **procedure for casting votes** under Section 49 of the State Election Regulations (LWO) stipulates that voters receive their ballot upon presentation of their voter notification card as soon as their name has been found in the voter register and their eligibility to vote has been established. A check of their identity by means of a photo ID is not required. In 50 percent of polling stations, photo ID was routinely insisted upon, whereas in 9 percent of polling stations it was waived entirely.[21] Such an inconsistent practice offers a target for deliberate disinformation

[20]German Bundestag, Eighth Resolution Recommendation and Report of the Election Review Committee on Objections Concerning the Elections of the 21st German Bundestag on February 23, 2025, July 10, 2026, last accessed September 7, 2026. In it, the committee addresses 450 of the 1,041 complaints received regarding the 2025 Bundestag elections, the majority of which originate from the organization WABEO. The complaints, all of which are rejected in the report, must be assessed as vexatious in light of a habitually dishonest interpretation of the cited observations as indications of a systematic distortion of the voters' will. In addition, they have a dual effect: On the one hand, they force the election administration at various levels to conduct extensive inquiries to refute partly trivial, partly baseless allegations. On the other hand, this considerable and avoidable additional work provokes statements that are in part unfortunately worded. These are subsequently cited not only by the complainant but also by the AfD parliamentary group itself as proof of the alleged incompetence and ideological bias of the election administration. This approach is intended and suited to repeatedly scandalize election processes and thereby to permanently and wantonly damage voters' trust in elections in Germany.

[21]According to interview partners during election preparation, some municipalities had, on their own initiative, trained their polling station committees to request proof of identity as standard practice.

about election fraud.

→ *The State Election Regulations should be amended to require polling station committees to uniformly verify the identity of voters by means of an official photo ID before issuing a ballot and to verify their entry in the voter register.*

The **vote count** at in-person polling stations likewise proceeded without significant incidents but was characterized in part by considerable uncertainty regarding individual procedural steps. Adherence to procedures varied considerably from polling station to polling station. In 8 percent of polling stations, the number of voters did not match the combined number of voting notations and retained voting certificates. In 50 percent of polling stations, minor deviations from the prescribed procedure under Section 60 LWO were observed, and in 13 percent, serious ones. In particular, the prescribed stacks were not regularly formed and not counted individually and consecutively by two assessors. Moreover, the counting of those ballots that contained markings for candidates and state-wide party lists of different parties was not read out individually and audibly. In 19 percent of in-person polling stations, a recount was conducted. Decisions on the validity of individual ballots, however, were for the most part made in accordance with the rules, were comprehensible in substance at all times, and were made by the polling station committee by consensus.

In 15 percent of in-person polling stations, observers other than those of PLATTFORM WAHLEN were present, of whom just under one third identified themselves as representatives of other organizations. In 3 percent of polling stations, observers interfered in the count, without the process being compromised as a result. Finally, a heightened police presence was observed in some polling stations and mail-in voting centers.

The **counting of mail-in votes** proceeded largely without incidents. In all counting rooms observed, the return envelopes had already been checked for admissibility and the voting certificates for validity before 6:00 p.m., and the ballot envelopes had been opened and placed in the ballot boxes. Only in one case did a subsequent discussion on the admissibility of certain return envelopes lead to a delayed start of the count. In four cases, in part considerable procedural deviations were found, which, however, did not affect the efficiency and accuracy of the determination of results. In all counting rooms, multiple observers were at times present. No interference with the work of the polling station committees was observed.

The **determination of results** at the municipal level was based on telephone flash reports from the polling station committees. The process of determining results at the municipal and state levels was not accessible to observation. Complete preliminary results were available statewide on the morning of September 7, 2026. These were made available online in real time by the State Statistical Office and were broken down to the municipal level, and by first and second vote, counting status, in-person and mail-in voting, and time of receipt. A breakdown of the results by polling station was offered only by individual municipalities, which diminished transparency.

According to the preliminary result, **voter turnout** was 77.68 percent overall.

Recommendations

1. In line with Germany's international commitments within the framework of the OSCE, the federal government should respond promptly and in detail to the recommendations of the OSCE election assessment mission on the 2025 Bundestag election.
2. To ensure transparent campaign financing and equal competitive conditions, the federal legislature should introduce an upper limit on donations to political parties.
3. To improve transparency, the federal legislature should introduce an obligation to provide regular, detailed, timely, and transparent reports on campaign donations and expenditures.
4. The federal legislature should establish an independent oversight authority for campaign financing. This authority should have sufficient staff, financial resources, and investigative powers.
5. The responsible authorities at the federal and state levels should build long-term capacities for detecting and containing foreign information manipulation and promote interinstitutional cooperation among media, fact-checkers, security authorities, and election management.
6. In view of ongoing speculation about the security and reliability of mail-in voting, election management authorities at all levels should consider taking further trust-building measures in future elections.
7. The federal legislature should fulfill Germany's commitments to the OSCE and adopt a comprehensive regulation on international and civil society election observation in Germany that meets international standards.
8. In the absence of a comprehensive regulation on election observation in Germany, the State Returning Officer of Saxony-Anhalt should consider centrally collecting lists of polling stations as well as training materials and guidelines for polling station committees and making them available to the public in a uniform format.
9. The State Election Regulations should be amended to require polling station committees to uniformly verify the identity of voters by means of an official photo ID before issuing a ballot and to verify their entry in the voter register.

Imprint

PLATTFORM WAHLEN is an initiative of European Exchange and the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE).

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