



POLITICAL CHANGE IN BOSNIA

The Bosnia Focus Groups

Research and report by:

Stanley B. Greenberg and Amy Phee
Greenberg Research

A project sponsored by:
The National Democratic Institute
September 1996



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Note: This is a draft report for circulation. It is based on the notes taken at the time of the focus groups, not on the actual transcript of discussions. The report will be updated and revised when the transcripts are available.

The National Democratic Institute sponsored a focus-group research program across Bosnia-Herzegovina to assist the participation of political parties, particularly those that are disadvantaged by the current political environment, in the upcoming elections. The work was conducted under the most difficult circumstances, yet rigorous preparatory work on the ground, active participation by established and aspirant research firms from the region, and the willingness of ordinary people to give voice to their aspirations allowed this research effort to go forward.¹ In the end, we conducted 15 intensive, focus group discussions between July 9 and 13 -- four with

¹Sally Patterson's focus group work for USAID established the feasibility of conducting such research in the war's aftermath, and we were able to learn from her experience and analysis.



Bosnian Serbs in Banja Luka, four with Bosnian Croats in Mostar, and seven with Bosnian Muslims, mostly in Tuzla but also in Mostar and Sarajevo.²

While Bosnia-Herzegovina offered an inhospitable environment for conventional research, we did our best to maintain the standards that would allow people to speak freely and respond to political communications. Our first goal was homogeneity -- a commonness of ethnicity and experience that would allow us to create an environment comfortable enough for open discussion. Bosnian Serbs, Muslims and Croats participated in separate groups; so did men and women. But we also tried to bring together people with a shared experience with the war -- refugees, demobilized soldiers, rural men and rural women, urban men and urban women, and local opinion leaders (members of the intelligentsia). Local research companies recruited people at appropriate sites and, to the extent possible, chose individuals on a random basis. People were paid a modest stipend for their time and many were provided transport to ensure broader participation. Finally, the groups were conducted in the language of the area by professional moderators trained for this project. The discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed and translated to facilitate analysis.³

² Each of the three core areas for the research -- Tuzla, Banja Luka and Mostar -- is unusual in its own way. Tuzla was governed by multi-ethnic parties through the war, Banja Luka was distant from the current power centers in Pale, and Mostar just experienced local elections under the Dayton agreement. To compensate, we recruited demobilized soldiers and refugees from outside Tuzla and conducted supplemental interviews with Bosnian Muslims in Mostar and Sarajevo. In the other areas, we self-consciously recruited from surrounding rural areas and included displaced persons who came from quite distant places.

³In Mostar, Tuzla and Banja Luka, simultaneous translation was available in an adjoining room and did not disturb the focus group discussion itself.



Thus, despite the difficult war-related conditions, we were able to conduct focus groups of a very high standard.⁴

This report will focus on the attitudes and mood in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the political situation and the underlying political dynamic that sets the stage for the upcoming elections. The most striking finding in this work is the evidence that this election is dynamic. The electorate takes this election seriously and believes it will have an impact on their lives.

⁴The participants were told that this project was sponsored by the National Democratic Institute -- an American, nongovernmental organization that supports democratic institutions and assists the development of political parties. No Americans, however, were visible to the participants. The issue of sponsorship seems to have faded in most of the groups; certainly, the participants were extremely frank on issues that one would have expected greater caution.

There were two exceptions. The group of intellectuals in Banja Luka clearly never lost sight of the sponsorship issue, and that group discussion deteriorated in the end. Because groups were held simultaneously on our last day of research, Stanley Greenberg moderated the focus group in Sarajevo with translation to and from English and Bosnian, and Amy Phee publicly observed a focus group in Mostar.



ELECTIONS MATTER

The public in Bosnia-Herzegovina comes to electoral politics from a barren civic landscape. Almost none of our participants was involved in any kind of organization. Most of the Tuzla refugees (some from Srebrenica) had found their way to international relief organizations and some of the college students were involved in student associations, but that was isolated. For the most part, people face this difficult period alone, except for their fragmented families. People described themselves as powerless and unable to do anything to improve the situation of their families.

It is in that context that politics and the upcoming elections matter. The participants from all the communities looked to the election as a major event that would possibly settle or achieve some things. Voting in the election was the one thing people could do to affect the future in Bosnia. The election, itself, was by no means a remote event. In virtually every focus group, people brought up the election before we asked any question about it. People believe the election will have an impact on people's futures.

The Bosnian Muslims were the most hopeful about the election, though the hope had a desperate quality. They were hoping that perhaps the election would end the nightmare and allow Bosnia to go down a different road. With a new political configuration, maybe people could go back to their homes, maybe sanity would prevail, maybe people could go back to living together,



maybe Bosnia-Hercegovina would be normal again. Comments from participants include the following:

- A better future depends on elections in September (Tuzla opinion leader).
- If elections come out okay, things will be good (Tuzla opinion leader).
- ...they may come to their senses as their people have gone through all this suffering.... (Tuzla refugee)
- Need to wait for outcome of elections so can go back home (Tuzla refugee)
- With elections, people will come to their senses (Tuzla refugee)
- Expect the elections to change things. The right people must be elected.
(Sarajevo men)
- Democratic elections mean normalcy (Sarajevo men)

The participants from other communities were less optimistic about the results and very skeptical about the even-handedness of international supervision. That did not diminish the significance of the election. Like the Bosnian Muslims, the Croats and Serbs believe this election will matter. The participants hoped the election would bring a new clarity:

- The election will bring clear borders and partition. Union with Serbia (Banja Luka)
- New elections will legalize and legitimate new government. Need new mandates and the election will provide (Mostar educated)
- Good that they are being supervised so tomorrow we will have justification for what we decided (Mostar refugees).



VISIONS FOR BOSNIA

The signing of the peace agreement at Dayton has brought peace to the region. Although much remains to be resolved, the fact that the fighting and shelling has stopped, in an important sense, has settled the war in people's minds. We found almost nobody in these groups who was eager to return to the battlefield to resolve issues that the war failed to settle. Many people feared that a withdrawal of the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) might lead to a resumption of war, although for now, the resort to war lacks legitimacy in all communities.

Still, the consensus on the cessation of war has brought no consensus in these communities on the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The country is divided by three distinct visions. If there is some evidence of a common ground, we could not find it.

Bosnian Muslims

The Bosnian Muslims in our research were absolutely committed to a unified and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina. The view is virtually a presumption and hardly subject to debate. Even those who have lived through the embittering war experience -- refugees from Srebrenica and other towns, the demobilized soldiers and those who survived the siege of Sarajevo -- were unwavering in their commitment to the principle of unity -- "the past and future of Bosnia."



I fought for cohabitation. (Tuzla soldier)
To try to turn the dream about a unified Bosnia into reality. (Tuzla soldier)
In order to have a better life...to live the life we used to live before the war
(Tuzla woman)

The commitment to a unified and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina includes a number of inter-related elements. First, and idealistically, people still broadly accepted the idea of living in a society where members of different ethnic groups could live together in a common community. The participants in our groups, despite intervening events, held to the belief that all groups have “always lived together” and can continue to do so in the future. Pluralism is a working principle that shaped their view of Bosnia’s history and potential future, even for the refugees.

I want to go back to my own house. I don’t care who lives there.
Would like to live as before. We lived nicely.
There is no state with only one ethnic group.
Everybody should go back where they were before.
Not all Serbs think the same.

Second, the groups were characterized by a commitment to secularism and the West. The participants spoke of a secular state where no religion would dominate. There was some discomfort that because of the pressures of the war, religious elements had entered into Bosnian Muslim politics. People identified with the more secular West and, indeed, seem to be looking for evidence that the West identifies with them. And finally, people self-consciously viewed themselves and their community as tolerant. People pointed with pride to the fact that all religious institutions stood protected in the Bosnian Muslim areas. People felt their religious



traditions promoted a tolerance that did not exist in the other communities: “my tradition is to respect their religion”; “my faith is respect.”

We tested hypothetical political messages and asked people which elements mattered most to them. Support for all parties increased when they affirmed the goal of a unified and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina. Voters hoped the election would “prove to the world we can live in a multi-national state with a multi-national population.”

Solid Borders: The Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats

Outside of Central Bosnia, however, any serious discussion of a unified and multi-ethnic state has ceased. Instead, we found the opposite - a near universal commitment to separation and partition. Indeed, the subject appeared to be beyond debate.

The Bosnian Serbs view the partition of Bosnia -- with the establishment of the Republika Srpska -- as an established fact. That was the view across all four groups in Banja Luka, from the rural women to the intellectuals to the refugees who had lost their homes in the process. Partition is a certainty and the only route to a better future.

Clear border -- everybody lives in their territory.
Don't want my child to solve that problem in the future. It should be stopped
for certain.
Can't go back to the same union. It will be a monster state.

We posed a choice for the focus group participants between a unified Bosnia state and separation, only to be met by a chorus of “separation,” “separation,” “separation.”



Won't live with Muslims and Croats. Can't live together anymore.
No life together any more.
Definite solid borders. Prerequisite to peace.
Will prevent war from happening again.

And indeed, as we shall see later, with the issue of partition settled, many Serbian voters are able to move on to a range of post-war issues hardly contemplated elsewhere.

Even unresolved political issues were addressed in the context of a separate entity. On the issue of the return of refugees, people approved of only the return of Muslim refugees to Muslim areas and Croat refugees to Croat areas. People were not open to the idea of refugees returning to their original communities, obviously a first principle for the Bosnian Muslims. On the rights of the small remaining Muslim population, the participants spoke of some future civic equality in a Serb state or republic.

The commitment to solid border and separation was quite clear in Mostar, even though partition was not yet the reality that it was in Banja Luka.

It's better to be good neighbors than bad flatmates.
Separate entities would ensure our survival.
Only when separate will we have full peace.
Bosnia-Hercegovina should be divided, and I hope we will join Croatia.
After everything, it's the only solution.
Unity and fraternity brought fighting. So now, need a uni-ethnic state.
Should be split up into Serbs and Croatia and Muslims go in little bits
and pieces.



Although some participants entertained the idea that perhaps after “10 years or so” of separation, some joint political arrangements might be possible, consensus for separation was absolute in all of these groups.



CONFLICTING STATES-OF-MIND
Relating to the War

Under the current circumstances, most of the political parties in each community will likely shape their messages to fit their ethnic group's vision about Bosnia's future. But conflicts over unity and separation are not the only issues in this election. The various communities stand in distinctly different places in relation to the war, and that profoundly affects the state of mind in each community, the kinds of issues that will prove important, and the kind of leaders to whom the voters will turn.

Bosnian Serbs: Settled War and Emerging Grievances

With the issue of partition settled in their own minds, the Serbs have been left to contemplate their current material circumstances and their economic future. We found them consumed by their current material plight, miserable about their prospects, full of self-doubts, feeling alone and aggrieved about their isolation. While the Serbs achieved separation, this partition has brought them little joy.

The starting point is the economic misery which pervaded all the groups in Banja Luka. The younger women in the urban areas spoke of fundamentals.

Worse because we have no opportunity to get a job.
We don't have essential things.
Physically, we are safe, psychologically, without electricity, can't read.



What do we have to eat?
The people are refugees, nothing to eat.
A lot of suicides after the war.
People are sitting in houses; they have nothing.

Their views were reflected among the equally desperate feelings of these rural woman living outside Banja Luka:

When my husband went to war, he was optimistic, now everything is awful.
Don't know how to survive, no wood for heating.
Boyfriend has shrapnel, he has no money, can't buy cigarettes.
I don't see anything better.
All people are nervous, the financial situation is bad.
Not going forward. My husband doesn't work. I don't work. My son needs
to go to the university but I can't afford that.
I can't afford for my children to go out of the city.
With this war, we lost everything.
Selling things from my house to feed my family.
Can't afford to give my children any future.

One senses from their comments, that these are people who are focused on the collapse of a state economy -- a state administration that seems unable to take care of the disabled veterans or veteran's families and a state economy that is producing no jobs or money. The husbands and sons are returning from war, but the Serb areas seem to have no economy.

The political connection to Serbia does not seem to offer much of a life line. People take that future association for granted, but hardly anyone spoke of that political future generating hopes for material prosperity.

The feeling of hopelessness is aggravated by the isolation of the Serb people from the West, particularly the United States. "The world did not say the Serbs were right. That hurt me. Why won't they let us go? The people are not guilty." "I don't know why they hate Serbs so



much.” Many of the participants found themselves unable to accept the condemnation, lest they condemn themselves:

[Our leaders] need to be good because they are mine.

If I did not have a positive opinion of him [Karadzic], I wouldn't have a positive image of myself.

But the result is a sense of self-doubt, isolation and grievance which only compounds the sense of pessimism about the circumstances of the Serb people.

The Serbs go into this election with no great hope. They are suspicious of the international powers that may “manipulate” the election, they are uncertain about their leaders, and they are confused and scared about their future, even though for them, the political and diplomatic issues are settled. While elsewhere, the participants were consumed with unresolved political issues from the war, the Bosnian Serbs are the only ones who can afford the luxury of contemplating the future. As noted below, they are consumed with “post-war” grievances.

Bosnian Croats: Impositions and the Unsettled War

Bosnian Croats are quite certain about what they think is the proper future for Bosnia, but the current agreement leaves the future unsettled. The issues that were at the center of the war have not been resolved, so they feel they cannot move on. This is not the moment for post-war grievances. The current situation is seen as artificial, imposed from above by Zagreb and the world powers.

Peace has been imposed on us. Everything is artificial.



With all those outside forces imposing on us, future looks worse.
Imposed peace has been welcome, but think it is transient, war will come again.
The co-existence has been imposed on us.
The war is forcing co-existence. We don't look alike physically. We are
different culturally.
There are many things happening outside our will. There is much the common
man doesn't know.

That leaves the Croats feeling fully powerless, since they believe outside forces will play a larger part in deciding their fate. They believe the Europeans manipulated the recent Mostar elections to favor the Muslims. That sense of powerlessness and the uncertainty about their political future, set against the ambiguity they feel about the results of the war, has created a pronounced political unity among the Croats.

Bosnian Muslims: As Before

When Bosnian Muslims speak of a "new beginning," they are frequently imagining a future "as before." In the focus groups, people spoke almost casually about somehow erasing the war experience and going back to a time when people lived together. The elites talked about seeing their friends again, rebuilding bonds, traveling freely, "feeling young." The refugees talked of returning to the towns and villages now under Croat or Serb control: "everybody goes back to their own house." If one cannot go back, if one cannot find one's lost spouse or children, then there is no life.



The elections were viewed with a sense of hope that people “will come to their senses” -- as if they have been caught up in some trance for the last four years. After the election, one hopes things will be “normal” and “we can get over this.”



THE PARTY SITUATION

Among the Bosnian Croats, there is almost no room for opposition politics. We found absolute unity behind the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union). In their minds, the only way of guarding against an imposed future and resolving the issues not yet settled by the Dayton agreement is to unite behind the party. We found the Croat voters of Mostar hostile to the idea of multi-ethnic politics and, if it is possible, even more hostile to the specific multi-ethnic coalition (List for Joint Mostar) that has organized for the election.

But outside of the Croat areas, we found an electorate uncertain about rewarding war-time leadership of the country. In the Muslim areas, we found respect for President Alija Izetbegovic and gratitude for what the SDA accomplished during the war, but not admiration. There is discomfort with the nationalist instincts that the war has excited, and some support for the minority multi-ethnic parties in the Tuzla area. We also found respect for Haris Silajdzic, leader of the Party for Bosnia, who is poised to challenge for the post-war leadership of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Serbian politics in the Banja Luka area are very uncertain. While few would criticize SDS (Serb Democratic Party) for its role in the war, there was no presumption that Radovan Karadzic was the right leader for the future. In fact, we found people critical of the current government and divided between SDS and SPRS (Socialist Party Republika Srpska). Serb voters have



complicated views of Karadzic, but have not yet warmed to an alternative. But the party situation is clearly fluid with opportunities for the opposition if those parties are able to organize and address the appropriate issues.



ELECTION THEMES

Within the Bosnian Muslim Electorate

The focus groups in the Tuzla area, with supplemental interviews in Mostar and Sarajevo, suggest a number of openings for the opposition. These openings constitute potential themes for the election.

Time for a Change. Bosnian Muslim voters are looking for a change in this new period, and that was particularly evident among the women voters of Tuzla and among the younger demobilized soldiers (half from outside Tuzla). There was a sense that the nationalist parties that waged the war could not bring progress. There would be “no future” if the ethnic parties won again. It would be 1991 again.

At the end of the focus groups, we asked each participant to write individually and in private a postcard to selected leaders of their community and express what the participant thinks is important for the leader to know. The postcards that were addressed to Alija Izetbegovic read:

You've done a lot for this country, but it's time to transfer to somebody who's younger.

Alija, it is time for you to be retired.

Let's pass your president chair to someone who's younger with more skills.

Wish you long life and happiness.

You've done a lot of good things, but you should move to retirement.

There are younger. They know better.

Let's get your place to someone who is younger



You should take some rest and someone younger should work instead of you.
He worked well, but the world belongs to younger ones.
You fought and you've done a lot. Now it's time to give your place to
someone else. Thanks.

Better Life. In one of the groups, we asked people to design their own campaign slogans, but running through their prose, was a desire for change that went beyond leadership. People wrote of "Equality and a better life"; "We shall live together"; "Better life for tomorrow"; "Better life."

Personal Leadership. The Bosnian Muslim voter seemed very focused on personal leadership qualities that strongly turned them to the party of Haris Silajdzic, rather than other multi-ethnic parties. People described Silajdzic as "a special type," "many layered," "talented," "educated," "speaks many languages," "seen all the countries of the world." These qualities enable Silajdzic, in the view of the participants, to challenge the current leadership.

Come to their Senses. The Bosnian Muslim electorate is absolutely hostile to SDS and HDZ. These voters see no hope for change with those parties and no hope for Bosnia if those parties win the election in September. We presented the participants with such a scenario -- an SDS, HDZ and SDA victory -- and the responses were quite desperate.

No nice future for us. Leaving Bosnia.
Pickup the children and leave.
Bosnia-Hercegovina will vanish.



I would leave if nationalist parties won. The Mostar elections showed people are sick of nationalism. The West must help us.
All this war happened after these parties won in 1991.
Take passport and leave. BiH will vanish.
Disappointment. Let's go from here. War again.
I wouldn't have the strength to stay here.
Seems like previous situation.
No future.

The hope for change, as one refugee women put it, is that people "will come to their senses."

That means voting for parties that did not wage this war and that can envision a different kind of future. To create a brighter future, voters need to vote for a different outcome.

Change over Process. In one exercise, we described an electoral scenario where SDS, HDZ and SDA each won the majority of seats in their respective areas, but where opposition parties also won a substantial number of seats. We found voters almost wholly uninterested in this result. Indeed, this scenario was nearly as depressing to them as the full SDS-HDZ-SDA sweep we had described earlier. The participants listened to the scenario and were silent initially, and then quickly became exasperated. Voters found little comfort in imagining that minority parties might have greater representation in Bosnia's new democracy. Without a multi-ethnic majority, the country would still have no future. These voters are looking for real change, not an academic discussion on the value of opposition parties. They are looking for a party that can win and make a difference; the one "who solves our destiny is dearest to me," said one participant.



Openness to the Opposition in Opposition Areas. Where the opposition parties have governed during the war, like Tuzla, the multi-ethnic parties are quite strong. Mayor Selim Beslagic is popular. The fact that the opposition parties showed they can govern allows people to think of them as “normal,” not a marginal factor. People speak of the opposition parties providing some balance against nationalist forces. They think the “Tuzla example” constitutes a kind of “healthy tissue” that, if transplanted in this country ravaged by cancer, could make things well again.

The opposition has many good attitudes and ideas now, but they cannot pass. (Tuzla opinion leader)

I imagine Tuzla as a healthy tissue of BH which remained after the metastasis of cancer. I have the hope now that this healthy tissue should spread and that SDA loses in the Canton and that this process continues in other areas of BiH. That is our chance. (Tuzla opinion leader)

But even in Tuzla, the enormous popularity of Silajdzic and the focus on personalized leadership may crowd out many of the other opposition parties. People want to vote for leaders who can change things.

Within the Bosnian Serb Electorate: Post-War Thinking and Leadership

The dynamics of this election are wholly different among Bosnia Serbs, not just because of different visions of the future, but because they have come out of the war in a different place, both physically and psychologically.



Grievances. The Bosnian Serbs, unlike any of the other voters in this study, are very clear about their grievances -- the corruption, the war profiteering, the lack of pensions, the soldiers and disabled people without money, the widows left on their own, the need for jobs and wages, the "money to fulfill our expectations." This is a post-war discussion.

The post cards to Karadzic are full of cries for help:

Take better care of the refugees and their accommodation because they have no rights.

Now is time to provide conditions for life at least.

Help us.

Please take care of the Serbian people.

Please take care of the families of wounded and killed soldiers.

New Leadership. The electorate reveres the war-time leaders of the SDS, and people speak of "my president," "the "legend of the Serbian people," "an historic act," "gave us support during the war," "led us through the war." But this is a new period of rising grievances and people seem uncertain about the country's leadership. The postcards reveal a critical spirit and a desire for change. The first ones were written to Biljana Plavsic, the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) appointed by Karadzic:

Mrs. Plavsic, your five minutes. Your moment finally has come and you've become someone in this country.

Wrong woman in the wrong place! You cannot manipulate with people, you should go down among them and solve all problems with the people.



Look around yourself and notice we (Banja Luka people) also exist. Establish contacts with ordinary citizens.

I don't know what to tell her, perhaps only one thing. Sarajevo and Pale are not the center of the world.

The post cards to Karadzic were less critical, but many talked about new times:

Keep fighting for Serb people.

Take better care of refugees and their accommodation, because they have no rights.

Dear President, you've done enough so far and thank you. I suggest you to withdraw and to yield your place to younger ones.

Mister, your time is up.

There is a lot of uncertainty about whether there is an alternative candidate who can take Karadzic's place. Nonetheless, the opportunity exists to elect a post-war leader who will get the economy moving and will build bridges that reduce the isolation of the Bosnian Serbs.

Given: Serb Separatism. The Serb participants were unwilling to consider any party that did not affirm a separate Serb future. Voters are willing to consider opposition parties, but not ones that are uncertain about their Serb identity. The Serb vote "can't be divided," "can't be split"; as one of the participants concluded, "any party that wants to live with the other side is not good." Any party must promote "Serbian interests."



But in the post-war state of mind, these voters were very open to the “New Party of Republika Srpska” -- a hypothetical party created for the sake of this research. This party committed itself to the Serb people and honored those who fought in the war, yet placed its first priority on the post-war economy. The party was described, as follows:

Our first priority is jobs.
The war is over and it is time to build a better life.
Honor those who fought in the war.
Republika Srpska must be strong to protect our rights.
Live in peace with Bosnia-Hercegovina.

The participants described the party as “very good,” we will “start production again,” “we will work and survive.”

Within the Bosnian Croat Electorate

The Bosnian Croats were simply unwilling to consider any party other than HDZ. When we described the scenario of SDS-HDZ-SDA victory, the Croats responded with a sense of joy.

Expected. Normal. Satisfied. Joy. Happy. The three parties have shown they can't live together, now we can all live separately. Means lack of unpredictability. Less tension and fear. Peace. Safety and survival of Croatian people. (Educated women)

[Clapping] This is what I hoped for. We won't be refugees. We won't need to run. No war. Freedom and security. It's the best thing that Mostar becomes exclusively Croat. (Refugees)

Satisfied. This is what election will look like. No other way. (Opinion leaders)



Indeed, these voters express a begrudging admiration for SDS which has waged the war on behalf of the Serbs with the kind of consistency that they wished for in their own leaders and parties:

They know what they want. Consistency. Look after their own interests. Primary culprits, but still like their consistency. (Educated women)

Realistic. Know what to expect. Know what they want. Consistent. (Refugees)

Wrongly led. Nazi party, but loyal to people. They will realize what they set out to do. (Opinion leaders)

Fighting for their people. Fulfilling what they designed. Committed. Know what they want. Only clever ones in war. (Young unmarried men)

While the SDS offers the example of determined nationalist politics, the thought of the multi-ethnic opposition running well in the Croat areas suggests "chaos," "new war," "quarreling," "instability," "other interests." There are no other options here.

* * * * *

The research was conducted under difficult circumstances, but the project was able to give expression to the pain and conflicting wills and hopes found across Bosnia. This report makes clear that the electoral situation is dynamic, indeed potentially volatile. Despite serious challenges, parties can make inroads if they take advantage of political openings, effectively organize and address relevant issues.



APPENDICES



**Focus Group Guidelines Mostar
Bosnia
July 11-13, 1996**

I. Introduction (15 - 20 Minutes)

1. Introduction

Absolute confidentiality

Sponsorship - NDI-democratic elections

No right or wrong answers - cannot be wrong

Here to represent people not in the room - share your views

Speak up - tape recorder

Translation

Observers - colleagues will not be allowed to speak

Everyone comfortable - understand this is unusual, but I think you will find it interesting

2. Go around the room - tell us something about yourself - first name - where you're living, family situation, what you do. Just so we know enough about each other to have a good conversation.

II. Mood (20 minutes)

1. As you look around at the situation in the country, do you think things are getting better or worse?

2. Now, think ahead. Think about the future. Think about a year from now. I want you to try and use your imagination.

- Are things going to be better or worse for you and your family?

- Regardless of your overall feeling about how things are going. What is there to be hopeful about?

3. What people or organizations can make things better?

4. What groups/organizations are you involved in?

5. What people or organizations can make things worse?

6. What do you think you or members of your family can do to make things better?



III. The elections (15 minutes)

1. As you know, elections are scheduled in Bosnia in September.
 - When you think about these elections, does it make you feel hopeful or doubtful?
 - Why?
2. Will you vote? (Hand count)
 - Why will you vote? What is the best reason to vote?
 - What would need to be different, for voting to make sense to you?
3. When you think about the election and the future--
 - What result would make things better in Bosnia?
 - Could things get worse? How?

IV. Political Groups and Figures (15-20 minutes)

Now, I am going to read you some names and organizations and I want you to tell me whatever thoughts pop into your head. (Don't think too much. Whatever pops into your head.)

1. (Well-known, no political personality, example: sports or cultural figure. Gertrude Muniti, Goran Ivanisic, Vinko Pulji, Mariljan Bene, Ivica Osim)
2. (Parties, other areas)
 - Serb Democratic Party (SDS)
 - Party of Democratic Action (SDA)
3. Dominant party of area
 - What are the good thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ)?
 - What are the bad thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ)?



4. Read together: What about the Croatian Party of the Right (HSP)?
5. The List for Joint Mostar
6. Mijo Brajkovi
7. Ivo Komsic
8. Bender or Ivo Komsic - which one? Why?
9. IFOR
10. US
11. OSCE
12. UN

V. Party Future (20 minutes)

1. What kind of future do you want for Bosnia--Do you want everybody together in a single BiH? Or do you want people to form into separate entities?
2. When you are most hopeful about the future, which party best represents your hopes for Bosnia?
3. Is it better to vote for an ethnic party or a multi-ethnic party?
4. Regardless of how you intend to vote, what are the best reasons to vote for a multi-ethnic party?
5. Again, regardless of how you intend to vote, what are the best reasons to vote for an ethnic party?
6. I want you to use your imagination again. Think ahead to September and the election has already happened. The election has been won by the SDS, HDZ and SDA. They got almost all the votes, each in its own area.
 - What is your gut reaction?
 - What will the future be like?
 - What is the best thing that can happen now?



7. Please use your imagination again? Think ahead to September and the election has already happened. The election has been won by the SDS, HDZ and the SDA, but other parties have won many seats, too-- the SDP, UBSD, and Party for Bosnia (Multi-ethnic parties in the area).

- What is your gut reaction? How do you feel about the elections now?
- What will the future be like?
- What is the best thing that can happen, now that the (multi-ethnic) parties have won many seats in the government? (Probe)

VI. Party Positioning (xx minutes)

1. We're going to look at some other materials. I want you to rate each one -3 to +3 if it makes you feel more negative or much more positive about the party. Zero if it makes no difference either way.

A. Material from ethnic party (HDZ)

H is known. Yugoslavia fell. We destroyed JNA.

- rate and discuss
- what really stood out
- What do you think of these words (slogan)

B. Material from ethnic party (SDA)

Return refugees to their homes, In our faith and in our country, unified BiH

- rate and discuss
- What really stood out?
- What do you think of these words? (Slogan)

C. Material from non-ethnic party (HSP)

Bravely. With expertise. Honestly.

- rate and discuss
- What really stood out?
- What do you think of these words? (Slogan)



3. Think back on all of what we just heard from the (non-ethnic) parties. Are you seriously considering voting for them or aren't you really thinking about that?

- (If yes) Why are you considering voting for them?
- What is best about what the (non-ethnic) parties are saying?
- Would you consider voting for them in a future election?
- Would you ever work for a multi-ethnic party?

4. Now, for the moment, forget all the parties. Imagine you are the new government. You in this room, what are your highest priorities? What would you have the government do to make things better?

VII. Final Section (10 minutes)

1. Think back on all this discussion. What is the best reason to go out and vote in September?

2. (Do each one separately). This is completely confidential. I want you to write a (post card) to Bender. Whatever you think it is important for him to know.

3. Now, I want you to write a (post card) to Ivo Komsic/most influential person (best known non-ethnic party leader). Again, whatever you think it is important for him or her to know.



**Focus Group Guidelines Banja Luka
Bosnia
July 11-12, 1996**

I. Introduction (15 - 20 Minutes)

1. Introduction

Absolute confidentiality
Sponsorship - NDI-democratic elections
No right or wrong answers - cannot be wrong
Here to represent people not in the room - share your views
Speak up - tape recorder
Translation
Observers - colleagues will not be allowed to speak
Everyone comfortable - understand this is unusual, but I think you will find it interesting

2. Go around the room - tell us something about yourself - first name - where you're living, family situation, what you do. Just so we know enough about each other to have a good conversation.

II. Mood (20 minutes)

1. As you look around at the situation in the country, do you think things are getting better or worse?

2. Now, think ahead. Think about the future. Think about a year from now. I want you to try and use your imagination.

- Are things going to be better or worse for you and your family?

- Regardless of your overall feeling about how things are going. What is there to be hopeful about?

3. What people or organizations can make things better?

4. What groups/organizations are you involved in?

5. What people or organizations can make things worse?

6. What do you think you or members of your family can do to make things better?



III. The elections (15 minutes)

1. As you know, elections are scheduled in Bosnia in September.
 - When you think about these elections, does it make you feel hopeful or doubtful?
 - Why?
2. Will you vote? (Hand count)
 - Why will you vote? What is the best reason to vote?
 - What would need to be different, for voting to make sense to you?
3. When you think about the election and the future--
 - What result would make things better in Bosnia?
 - Could things get worse? How?

IV. Political Groups and Figures (15-20 minutes)

Now, I am going to read you some names and organizations and I want you to tell me whatever thoughts pop into your head. (Don't think too much. Whatever pops into your head.)

1. Ceca Raznatovic; Vlado Divac
2. (Parties, other areas)
 - Party of Democratic Action (SDA)
 - Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ)
3. Dominant party of area
 - What are the good thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words Serb Democratic Party (SDS)?
 - What are the bad thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words Serb Democratic Party (SDS)?



4. Socialist Party Republika Srpska (SPRS) (Zivko Radisic)
5. Democratic Patriotic Bloc (Predrag Radic)
6. Social Liberal Party (SLS) (Miodrag Zivanovic)
7. Independent Social Democrats (NSD) (Milorad Dodik)
8. Radovan Karadzic
9. Choose and compare these political figures.

- Karadzic and Radisic

- Karadzic and Radic

10. IFOR
11. US
12. OSCE
13. UN

V. Party Future (20 minutes)

1. What kind of future do you want for Bosnia--Do you want everybody together in a single BiH? Or do you want people to form into separate entities?
2. What kind of future do you want for Republika Srpska?
3. The Dayton Agreement provides for the return of refugees to their homes. Do you think that is a good or bad idea?
4. I want you to use your imagination again. Think ahead to September and the election has already happened. The election has been won by the SDS, HDZ and SDA. They got almost all the votes, each in its own area.
 - What is your gut reaction?
 - What will the future be like?
 - What is the best thing that can happen now?



5. Please use your imagination again? Think ahead to September and the election has already happened. The election has been won by the SDS, HDZ and the SDA, but other parties have won many seats, too-- SPRS, Democratic Patriotic Bloc, and the Independent Social Democrats.

- What is your gut reaction? How do you feel about the elections now?
- What will the future be like?
- What is the best thing that can happen, now that the (multi-ethnic) parties have won many seats in the government? (Probe)

VI. Party Positioning (20 minutes)

1. We're going to look at some other materials. I want you to rate each one as making you feel very bad, bad, neutral good or very good about the party. Zero if it makes no difference either way.

A. Material from SPRS

Original party of Bosnian Serbs
Autonomous-independent policy
Primarily cares of interests of all citizens of the region
In conflict with SDS (Karadzic)

- rate and discuss
- what really stood out
- What do you think of these words (slogan)

B. Material from ethnic party (SDS)

Union of Serbian states (joining Serbia and Montenegro)
Return to the faith-religion and tradition-Karadzordjevci Dynasty

- rate and discuss
- What really stood out?
- What do you think of these words? (Slogan)



VII. Final Section (10 minutes)

1. (Do each one separately). This is completely confidential. I want you to write a (post card) to Radovan Karadzic. Whatever you think it is important for him to know.
2. Now, I want you to write a (post card) to Zivko Radisic (best known multi-ethnic party leader). Again, whatever you think it is important for him or her to know.
3. Secret ballot - write on a piece of paper, the name of the party that you intend to vote for in September.



C. Material from opposition party - Democratic Patriotic Bloc (DPB)

Combination-synthesis of the national, ethnic and democratic
Equal access to media
Radical split with Communist past

- rate and discuss
- What really stood out?
- What do you think of these words? (Slogan)

D. Material from the "New Party of RS" (imaginary party)

Our first priority is jobs.
The war is over and it is time to build a better life.
We must honor those who fought the war and build a new RS.
RS must be strong to protect our rights.
We will live in peace with BiH.

3. What do you want to hear from the parties that is not in the party statements? What is missing?

4. Think back on all of what we just heard from the opposition parties. Are you seriously considering voting for them or aren't you really thinking about that?

- (If yes) Why are you considering voting for them?
- What is best about what the opposition parties are saying?
- Would you consider voting for them in a future election?
- Would you ever work for an opposition party?

5. Now, for the moment, forget all the parties. Imagine you are the new government. You in this room, what are your highest priorities? What would you have the government do to make things better?



**Focus Group Guidelines Tuzla
Bosnia
July 9-10, 1996**

I. Introduction (15 - 20 Minutes)

1. Introduction

Absolute confidentiality
Sponsorship - NDI-democratic elections
No right or wrong answers - cannot be wrong
Here to represent people not in the room - share your views
Speak up - tape recorder
Translation
Observers - colleagues will not be allowed to speak
Everyone comfortable - understand this is unusual, but I think you will find it interesting

2. Go around the room - tell us something about yourself - first name - where you're living, family situation, what you do. Just so we know enough about each other to have a good conversation.

II. Mood (20 minutes)

1. As you look around at the situation in the country, do you think things are getting better or worse?

2. Now, think ahead. Think about the future. Think about a year from now. I want you to try and use your imagination.

- Are things going to be better or worse for you and your family?

- Regardless of your overall feeling about how things are going. What is there to be hopeful about?

3. What people or organizations can make things better?

4. What groups/organizations are you involved in?

5. What people or organizations can make things worse?

6. What do you think you or members of your family can do to make things better?



III. The elections (15 minutes)

1. As you know, elections are scheduled in Bosnia in September.
 - When you think about these elections, does it make you feel hopeful or doubtful?
 - Why?
2. Will you vote? (Hand count)
 - Why will you vote? What is the best reason to vote?
 - What would need to be different, for voting to make sense to you?
3. When you think about the election and the future--
 - What result would make things better in Bosnia?
 - Could things get worse? How?

IV. Political Groups and Figures (15-20 minutes)

Now, I am going to read you some names and organizations and I want you to tell me whatever thoughts pop into your head. (Don't think too much. Whatever pops into your head.)

1. (Well-known, no political personality, example: sports or cultural figure. Abdulah Sidran - list others and change according to ethnic group).
2. (Parties, other areas)
 - Serb Democratic Party (SDS)
 - Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ)
3. Dominant party of area
 - What are the good thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words Party of Democratic Action (SDA)?
 - What are the bad thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words Party of Democratic Action?
4. Read together: What about the opposition coalition (Rep. Party, HSS, MBO, UBSD,



SDP?

5. Party for Bosnia
6. Selim Beslagic
7. Haris Silajdzic
8. Izetbegovic or Silajdzic - which one? Why?
9. IFOR
10. US
11. OSCE
12. UN

V. Party Future (20 minutes)

1. What kind of future do you want for Bosnia--Do you want everybody together in a single BiH? Or do you want people to form into separate entities?
2. When you are most hopeful about the future, which party best represents your hopes for Bosnia?
3. Is it better to vote for an ethnic party or a multi-ethnic party?
4. Regardless of how you intend to vote, what are the best reasons to vote for a multi-ethnic party?
5. Again, regardless of how you intend to vote, what are the best reasons to vote for an ethnic party?
6. I want you to use your imagination again. Think ahead to September and the election has already happened. The election has been won by the SDS, HDZ and SDA. They got almost all the votes, each in its own area.
 - What is your gut reaction?
 - What will the future be like?
 - What is the best thing that can happen now?



7. Please use your imagination again? Think ahead to September and the election has already happened. The election has been won by the SDS, HDZ and the SDA, but other parties have won many seats, too-- the SDP, UBSD and Party for Bosnia (Multi-ethnic parties in the area).

- What is your gut reaction? How do you feel about the elections now?
- What will the future be like?
- What is the best thing that can happen, now that the (multi-ethnic) parties have won many seats in the government? (Probe)

VI. Party Positioning (20 minutes)

1. We're going to look at some other materials. I want you to rate each one as making you feel very bad, bad, neutral good or very good about the party. Zero if it makes no difference either way.

A. Material from multi-ethnic party (SDP)

Unified BiH, Equality of all people, we are with you, come with us

- rate and discuss
- what really stood out
- What do you think of these words (slogan)

B. Material from ethnic party (SDA)

Return refugees to their homes, In our faith and in our country, unified BiH

- rate and discuss
- What really stood out?
- What do you think of these words? (Slogan)

C. Material from multi-ethnic party (UBSD)

Equality regardless of nationality, We know the way, multi-ethnic BiH

- rate and discuss
- What really stood out?
- What do you think of these words? (Slogan)



3. What do you want to hear from the parties that is not in the party statements?

4. Think back on all of what we just heard from the (non-ethnic) parties. Are you seriously considering voting for them or aren't you really thinking about that?

- (If yes) Why are you considering voting for them?
- What is best about what the (non-ethnic) parties are saying?
- Would you consider voting for them in a future election?
- Would you ever work for a multi-ethnic party?

5. Tell me whether you agree or disagree. Since the Croats and Serbs are voting for nationalist parties, the Muslims will have to vote nationalist too, for their own protection.

6. Now, for the moment, forget all the parties. Imagine you are the new government. You in this room, what are your highest priorities? What would you have the government do to make things better?

VII. Final Section (10 minutes)

1. Think back on all this discussion. What is the best reason to go out and vote in September?

2. (Do each one separately). This is completely confidential. I want you to write a (post card) to Izetbegovic. Whatever you think it is important for him to know.

3. Now, I want you to write a (post card) to Haris Silajdzic (best known multi-ethnic party leader). Again, whatever you think it is important for him or her to know.

4. Secret ballot - write on a piece of paper, the name of the party that you intend to vote for in September.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senior Staff
FROM: Lisa C. McLean and Anne Moulakis
DATE: September 10, 1996
RE: BiH Focus Group Reports

Attached is a copy of Stan Greenberg's draft report on the BiH focus groups. In addition, we have attached a memo from Beki reviewing the NDI programmatic and logistical considerations involved with these focus groups. Both of the documents can now be found in the Focus Group Binder available from the Civic/Political Organization team.

Enjoy!

TO: CEE Team, Lisa, Interested Staff
FROM: Beki Bahar-Engler
RE: Lessons Learned -- Focus Groups in BiH
DATE: August 14, 1996

From July 8-16, NDI conducted 15 focus groups in Tuzla, Mostar, Banja Luka and Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). This memo intends to discuss some of the challenges and issues the Bosnia team faced in organizing the focus groups and to draw lessons learned for other teams considering organizing focus groups.

Background

Focus groups were one component of NDI's six-month political party building program in BiH that also included party seminars and consultations, pollwatcher training and candidate forums. NDI initially envisioned conducting the focus groups as its first activity. Since NDI was new to the country, the research findings would increase our institutional understanding of Bosnian's attitudes toward political parties and help inform the party training. More specifically, the purpose of the focus groups were to: (i) gather first hand information and understanding of Bosnian's attitudes toward political parties and elections scheduled for September 1996; (ii) provide the parties with the information to help them develop an effective platform and message; and, (iii) transfer research skills to regional research organizations to gather public opinion in the future.

NDI contracted Greenberg Research to assist with conducting the focus groups. With input from the field, Greenberg Research helped identify the target participants, prepared the focus group outline, trained local moderators and oversaw the discussion sessions. Currently, they are preparing a report which will be distributed to political parties and other domestic and international groups.

Challenges/ Issues

The Bosnia team faced two broad programmatic challenges in preparing the focus groups. Given the complex nature of Bosnian society, NDI had to be sure to create a broad scope for the research. There are three major ethnic groups in the country: Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serbs. In addition to ethnicity, gender, education and war experiences needed to be taken into consideration. At the same time, there were enormous time pressures on the project. NDI opened its office in April and had a very ambitious workplan leading up to the September elections. Moreover, the information expected from the focus groups needed to be timely if it was to help the political parties. Below are some specific responses to the challenges the team faced.

Timing: The first issue the Bosnia team faced was timing of the focus groups. Initially, NDI hoped to conduct the research in May. However, the Office of Transition Initiatives at AID conducted a series of focus groups in late April. Their research findings showed that people were focused on "bread and butter" issues and that elections were not a concern. Since NDI intended

the focus group information to help political parties modify their election strategy, NDI postponed the research until early July, after the official announcement of elections and when the climate was more ripe for political discourse.

Local Moderators: NDI hired local public opinion research organizations to help conduct the focus groups. It was crucial to have moderators who spoke the local language and shared the same ethnic background of the participants in order to raise the comfort level during the focus group sessions. Accordingly, NDI hired three research groups: one Muslim, one Croat and one Serb. These groups were also instrumental in recruiting participants and organizing logistics for the focus groups. They had substantial polling experience in BiH, but had never conducted focus groups. Greenberg Research trained moderators from each group. As a result, all three now have the preliminary skills to conduct this type of research in the future.

Group Type Selection: To address the complex nature of BiH society, NDI covered a very broad scope of participants. Groups were divided according to nationality, gender, age, education, rural/urban residency and war experience. For example, refugees were interviewed as a separate group because they constitute a large majority of the voter population (a million displaced people) and their war experience supersedes their other experiences. The groups were: Muslim young women, Muslim women refugees, Muslim young men (demobilized soldiers), Muslim educated male opinion leaders, Croat young women, Croat women refugees, Croat young men, Croat educated male opinion leaders, Serb young women, Serb older women, Serb young men, Serb educated male opinion leaders.

Site Selection: NDI decided to conduct focus groups in three cities representative of the ethnic majority -- Muslims in Tuzla, Croats in Mostar and Serbs in Banja Luka. Each city is unique in its own way. Tuzla and Banja Luka are centers of opposition and Mostar had local elections prior to the focus group research. To compensate for these unique circumstances, two groups held in Tuzla, including the refugees and the demobilized soldiers, were recruited outside of Tuzla and supplemental interview with Bosnian Muslims in Mostar and Sarajevo were conducted. In other areas, NDI self-consciously recruited from surrounding rural areas and included displaced persons who came from distant places. NDI's research scope, however, did not include Croats and Serbs who live in Central Bosnia who may have different attitudes than those ethnic groups living within their own entities.

Screening Criteria Greenberg Research also developed a questionnaire to screen already recruited participants. This allowed us to eliminate individuals who did not share the same background or experiences with the rest of the group. In two cases, when the recruited group had a mixed education level, the individuals with higher education were separated from the group and interviewed individually.

Room Set-up: In order to raise the comfort level of participants, NDI staff and trainers sat in a different room than the participants. The information was simultaneously translated to NDI staff and researchers.

Research Findings: While the norm for focus group research is to read and analyze transcripts several times before coming to conclusions, Stan Greenberg and Amy Phee made an exception to present their initial findings to political parties and international groups soon after the research ended. This was instrumental in providing timely information to the political parties. Currently, Greenberg Research is finalizing its report to be distributed widely.

Lessons Learned

- **More time for training the moderators:** Due to time constraints, we had only half a day to train the moderators. This was enough time to familiarize them about moderator techniques and the draft guideline. It would have been better if another half-a-day was allocated to role playing. Despite this, moderators were very good in directing the focus groups.
- **Recruitment:** The local companies relied more on recruiting from universities which in some cases changed the balance in favor of educated groups. In order to compensate for this, NDI conducted three additional groups. In the future, we should advise the local research organizations to limit the recruitment of highly educated people to one quarter of the total sample.
- **In the future, we should also try to conduct additional groups for Croats and Serbs in Central Bosnia.**
- **NDI's sponsorship:** In order to be transparent, moderators introduced NDI as the sponsor in the beginning of each discussion. Since most participants were very frank in sharing their thoughts about the leaders, we believe that the American sponsorship did not influence the discussion. However, in one case in Banja Luka, the group broke down and began addressing the Americans in the other room and tried to send "messages to USA." In the future, we should consider whether NDI's sponsorship can be concealed.

Conclusion and Impact

Overall, the focus groups were conducted up to par with international standards, and more importantly, the research purposes were satisfactorily fulfilled. The research scope was kept quite broad in order to reflect the Bosnian society. The timing of the groups was also perfect. These focus groups took place just after the announcement of elections but before the campaign period began (July 14). NDI used this information in consultations with the parties on July 14-19 and in training sessions scheduled for July 20-28 and on August 5-11. The program also succeeded in transferring research skills to regional organizations to gather public opinion in the future. The Bosnian-Muslim group independently began using the techniques they learned to conduct their own research.