



## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S 2014 ELECTIONS

### POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS

Citizens voted in October 12, 2014 general elections with shared desires to see Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) difficult political and economic problems addressed. Almost 20 years after the war, the country's European Union (EU) integration process has stalled, leaving it behind its immediate neighbors which are also EU aspirants—Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia. Citizen frustration with the country's flagging progress escalated sharply this year, as witnessed in widespread protests in numerous cities nine months ago. Dissatisfaction with government performance rose further over the summer, when government bodies failed to respond effectively to catastrophic flooding that affected more than one million citizens. The general elections presented, then, an opportunity to alter persistently negative political dynamics, where political compromise on needed reform has been elusive.

The 1996 Dayton Accords created a highly federalized system with two distinct political entities: the Republika Srpska (RS), with a predominantly Serb population, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation or FBiH), inhabited primarily by Croats and Bosniaks. With a governance system aligning political competition along ethnic lines, most leading political parties represent the three major ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs – and political negotiations often turn on dividing power and interests among them. The main ethnic parties have mutually incompatible views about BiH's constitutional structure: Bosniaks generally support the idea of a central government; Serbs traditionally promote increased autonomy of each entity, with ruling leaders repeatedly calling for RS independence; and Croats advocate for a third, Croat entity. These competing interests have contributed to a stagnant political environment, where issues important to citizens – economic growth and corruption top among them – are often marginalized and reform efforts necessary to advance the country in its democratic transition and toward EU membership are deficient.

#### ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

As described in [NDI's pre-election report](#), a record number (98) of political parties, independent candidates, and coalitions registered for these elections, fielding 7,800 candidates competing for executive and legislative positions at state, entity, and cantonal levels of government. In the Federation, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ BiH), the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) battled it out for votes, along with Zeljko Komsic's Democratic Front (DF) and Fahrudin Radoncic's Union for a Better Future of BiH (SBB), both of which are relatively new. In the RS, the long-ruling Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) squared off against the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) and Party for Democratic Progress (PDP), which gathered under the umbrella of the Alliance for Change. The coalition "Domovina" (Homeland), which comprises seven non-Serb parties, including SDA and DF, joined the race.

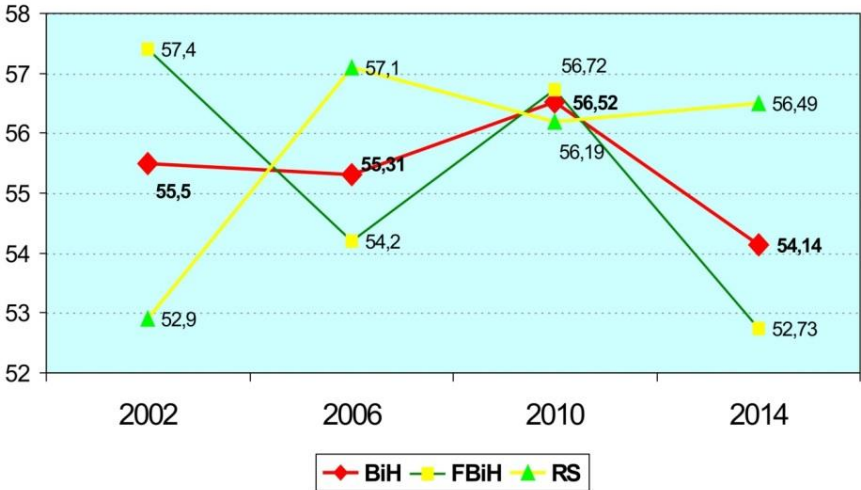
In comparison to previous election cycles, inter-ethnic tensions were relatively muted. The February 2014 nationwide protests – against, among other things, deep-seated corruption, unemployment, and controversial privatization – followed by the devastating flooding in May 2014 shifted the public's attention squarely on to government under-performance. Party

campaigns largely focused on political competition within entities and ethnic groups. Despite very high levels of dissatisfaction with governing parties, voters tended to stay with incumbent parties, with the notable exceptions of new-entrant DF and an enhanced outcome for the RS opposition.

The election results do not in and of themselves portend significant political change—such change, if it is to happen, will require deepened and expanded public involvement in the country’s governing process.

**ELECTION RESULTS**

Consistent with NDI’s public opinion research prior to election day, voter turnout did not alter significantly from the rates seen four years ago, dropping slightly from 56.6 percent to 54.1 percent (graph 1). Most political parties motivated their core supporters but did not make inroads with uncommitted voters.



*Voter Turnout (%) in General Elections*

Voter turnout suggests that citizens did not necessarily view the elections as an opportunity to change the country’s fortunes. NDI pre-election polling revealed that more than 90 percent of citizens believed the country was moving in the wrong direction<sup>1</sup> and more than 75 percent were dissatisfied with the performance of governing institutions.<sup>2</sup> Those who did vote turned to traditionally “national” parties – SDA (Bosniak); HDZ BiH (Croat); and SNSD (Serb).

These parties, especially in FBiH, won more legislative seats than in 2010. Almost all parties in the Federation were in a ruling coalition at either the state or entity level; accordingly, the opportunity to cast an opposition “protest vote” was virtually denied voters. Smaller or newer parties that offered voters multi-ethnic platforms did so with relatively weak core support, such as HDZ 1990, whose new leader, Martin Raguz, offered a more consensus-based approach to negotiating constitutional reform than its incumbent adversary, HDZ BiH.

<sup>1</sup> NDI’s polling in June 2014: 92 percent of respondents in the FBiH and 72 percent in the RS think that Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving in the wrong direction.

<sup>2</sup> Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of citizens in the RS give the entity government low job performance ratings, while eight-in-10 Federation respondents give their entity government a failing grade for implementing policies that improve the lives of citizens.

In contrast, the RS electorate had a clear choice between governing and opposition parties. While many voters in the RS demonstrated an increased appetite for alternative leadership, the credibility of the opposition coalition suffered absent a unified platform or clearly targeted voting demographics.

### *BiH State Presidency*

The race for the tripartite state presidency – with the Serb member elected from voters in the RS and the Bosniak and Croat members elected from the Federation<sup>3</sup> – took primary focus as the Croat and Serb seats were vacated by term-limited incumbents.

The main battle for the Croat member of the BiH Presidency was fought between Dragan Covic (HDZ BiH-HNS coalition) and Martin Raguz (HDZ 1990). Covic won 52.4 percent of votes, mainly concentrated in areas with predominantly Croat populations. Covic's campaign primarily focused on the so-called "resolution of Croats' question," promoting equal representation of Croats in federal and state institutions, creating a new Croat electoral unit, and establishing of a TV channel in Croatian language. Raguz offered a slightly different view to Croats and other ethnic groups, focusing instead on EU integration and the economy, in an attempt to recruit Bosniak voters who could offset Covic's favorability among Bosnian Croats.

An unprecedented 10 candidates, including four independents, ran for the Bosniak member of the presidency. The top runners were incumbent Bakir Izetbegovic (SDA), Fahrudin Radonic (SBB), Emir Suljagic (DF), and Bakir Hadziomerovic (SDP). Izetbegovic drew criticism for refusing to participate in televised candidates debates, while the other candidates mounted campaigns attacking the incumbent's performance in government, in such areas as foreign investment, and accusing Izetbegovic and his family of nepotism and corruption. For his part, Izetbegovic presented himself as a defender of Bosniak interests – a strategy which ultimately saw him take nearly one-third of the votes for the Bosniak seat, coming ahead of Radonic by more than six points, followed by Suljagic with roughly 15 percent of the vote and Hadziomerovic with 10 percent. Izetbegovic's vote tally tracks largely with that cast for SDA in the state parliament, suggesting SDA supporters voted a straight-party ticket.

In an important victory for the RS opposition, the Alliance for Change's candidate for the Serb member of the BiH state presidency, Mladen Ivanic (PDP), eclipsed Zeljka Cvijanovic (SNSD), winning 48.7 percent to 47.6 percent. After eight years, SNSD lost its primacy as the "protector of RS interests" within the BiH state presidency. Ivanic did not campaign on national issues in the traditional way of RS politicians, instead offering a different perspective through promoting economic growth and inter-entity cooperation as measures to protect interests of RS citizens. In this way, Ivanic garnered support not only from Serbs but also from Bosniaks registered to vote in the RS. Thus, Ivanic's victory, even at such a close

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<sup>3</sup> The 2009 *Sejdic-Finci* ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, in a case brought by a Roma citizen and a Jewish citizen of BiH, found that the rights of non-constituent peoples of BiH, i.e. not Bosniak, Croat, or Serb, were violated by the BiH Constitution since only members of the three constituent peoples can be elected to the BiH state presidency. The Court's ruling, which is legally binding, requires BiH to review its constitution and electoral legislation to prevent such discrimination. While the EU led negotiations among BiH's leading parties to consider changes – and has considered it a condition of the country's membership – no compromise has been reached.

margin, suggests that RS voters support the idea of productive cooperation between all actors in BiH to create economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

### *Bosnia and Herzegovina State-Level Parliament*

The SDA, SNSD, and HDZ BiH took the greatest number of seats for the three ethnic groups in the 42-member lower house of the state parliament, of which 28 are elected from the FBiH and 14 from the RS. NDI pre-election polling had shown highly motivated SDA and SNSD voters, while motivation of opposition supporters in both entities (except SDS in the RS) dropped slightly as the elections approached.

However, the elections produced some notable political changes in the state parliament. In the RS, the opposition Alliance for Change ran on replacing SNSD. This tactic appears to have had some effect: SNSD dropped in its vote totals and lost two seats, going from nine, which it held with a coalition partner, to seven in the lower house. The Alliance for Change partners secured six seats: five for SDS and one for PDP – an increase of one in total. SDA secured one RS seat, which it had lost in the 2010 elections. This win may be attributed to the ability of the Domovina coalition to gather Bosniak voters in the RS who might otherwise not have voted or seen their votes dispersed.

The campaign for the BiH Parliamentary Assembly in the Federation tracked largely with campaigns for the FBiH parliament, focusing on such issues as EU integration, stabilizing the economy, and protection of ethnic interests. SDA won the highest number of seats (10, including one from the RS), followed by DF with five seats; SBB and HDZ BiH each with four, and SDP, in a dramatic drop from 2010, with three (from eight).

### *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Federation voters elected 42 members of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of FBiH, along with members of 10 cantonal Assemblies in the Federation. Compared to the results of the 2010 general elections for this entity, the greatest change was that SDP's support dramatically decreased, with SDA, SBB, and newcomer DF capitalizing off of the party's losses.

Continuing its positive trend from 2012 local elections, SDA increased its support among voters. Both the party and Izetbegovic won the highest number of Bosniak votes in the Federation – their best result since 2006. Although SDA was part of a previous governing coalition in the FBiH with SDP, limited public visibility of SDA ministers, coupled with attack ads against SDP that went unchallenged, allowed SDA to run effectively as opposition and to paint the Social Democrats as hapless incumbents.

SDP attempts to counter perceptions that it was solely responsible for defective government fell considerably short. SDP received 9.5 percent of votes for the FBiH parliament, compared to 26.1 percent in 2010, translating to 11 seats in the FBiH parliament, down from 28. Electoral results suggest that a significant number of SDP voters from 2010 changed their

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<sup>4</sup> NDI's summer public opinion research saw RS respondents place a vastly higher priority on improving the economic situation in their entity (83 percent) than on independence (13 percent).

preferences in 2014, turning to Komsic's DF. However, with SDP and DF jointly garnering the same amount of votes in 2014 as SDP did alone in 2010, and from similar turnouts, the voter pool for non-nationalist politics remains steady.

For DF's first general elections, the party secured a substantial amount of votes, especially for the state and Federation parliaments. As the third largest party entering the new FBiH parliament, DF can play an important role in the state and entity governments. SBB, which took the second highest number of votes in the Federation and improved its position compared to its 2010 results, may also be an important factor in governing institutions.

The campaign proved once again that FBiH politics remains divided between Bosniak and Croat constituencies. Political parties gathered around HDZ BiH and the Croat National Council – a coalition of Croat parties, which counts HDZ BiH as its leading force and now excludes HDZ 1990<sup>5</sup> – targeted its campaign almost exclusively at Croat voters. It promoted such issues as the preservation of Croat language and culture; protection of veteran rights; and, most important, constitutional reform to create a Croat electoral unit. This strategy paid off, with HDZ BiH earning an additional seat out of 98 in the FBiH parliament. HDZ 1990, alternatively, promoted accelerated EU integration, appealing to moderate Croat voters. While the party's loss of a seat in both state and Federation parliaments reflect its recent transformational period,<sup>6</sup> HDZ 1990's results are a sufficient starting point to form a more credible opposition to HDZ BiH.

In a positive development, predominantly Bosniak parties – SDA, SBB – promoted more universal views and policies in their campaigns, such as EU integration, employment, and infrastructure, among others, possibly finding more support among Croat voters.

### Republika Srpska

Voters decided the race for the RS presidency and elected 83 members of the RS National Assembly (RSNA). For each of these races, essentially, voters chose between two blocs: SNSD and its governing coalition partners (Democratic People's Alliance – DNS and Socialist Party – SP) and the opposition Alliance for Change (SDS, PDP, and the People's Democratic Party – NDP).

The campaigns and subsequent results in the RS saw two important developments. First, opposition parties organized into a formal, pre-election coalition for the first time, jointly agreeing on candidates for the BiH state and RS presidency races. Second, the campaigns of most parties, especially the Alliance for Change, focused on the economy, corruption, and unemployment, in response to issues which continue to track with those identified in NDI and other public opinion research as most important. Parties that engaged in both coalition-building and the promotion of concrete policies on priority issues garnered more votes than in previous elections.

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<sup>5</sup> The Croat National Council was originally established in 2000 and revived in April 2011 to prevent the exclusion of Croat parties from the FBiH government. Six months after the 2010 elections, SDP proposed a ruling FBiH coalition without HDZ and HDZ 1990. The Croat parties in turn used procedural obstacles to block the government's formation. The impasse was ended when SDP offered government positions to two smaller Croat parties.

<sup>6</sup> Raguz took over the party's leadership in April 2014 and has since focused on rebuilding the party's organization and infrastructure.

SNSD, which has ruled the RS since 2006, won the largest number of seats in the RS National Assembly, though it registered a drop of 15 percent, from 38 to 29 seats. Its incumbent candidate for RS President, Milorad Dodik, won the elections, but did so with fewer than 7,000 votes more than the opposition opponent, Ognjen Tadic (SDS). The difference in votes between SNSD and the opposition has never been smaller.

In comparison, SDS increased its seats by 35 percent in the RSNA (from 18 to 24). Changing its tune from robust nationalist rhetoric in prior elections, SDS made economic development and the fight against crime and corruption the cornerstones of its campaign. Other opposition parties that are part of the Alliance of Change, including PDP and NDP, also had small but important increases, showing that campaigning on issue-based policies pays off.

Together, the Alliance for Change won 36 seats in the RSNA – in 2010, running on their own, these opposition parties won 28 seats. Though an important success for the coalition, it will need to pursue several steps to improve its effectiveness, including developing stronger cohesion among coalition partners, particularly in terms of how it approaches media and citizen outreach efforts; setting a joint policy platform, with clear and identifiable messages; establishing joint actions to pursue within the RSNA; and forming a more robust and consistent opposition voice if it stays united at the entity level.

NDI public opinion research indicates that the only way a transfer of power could occur in the Republika Srpska is if voter turnout increases to approximately 60 percent. At 56.9 percent, voter turnout in these elections was not enough to facilitate an opposition win. Even so, SNSD's grip has been weakened, potentially opening the door to a more dynamic political process that could see more deliberate efforts to tackle pressing social and economic problems, and perhaps soften the RS government's separatist agenda.

## **GOVERNMENT FORMATION**

In a country where polling shows an overwhelming majority of citizens to be unsatisfied, many would have expected more wide-scale change from the elections. However, voter turnout revealed low motivation among citizens, and the victories of national parties – SDA and HDZ BiH in the Federation and SNSD and SDS in the RS – showed that ethnic identity remains potent as a driver of politics. But with votes splitting among parties and a different allocation of seats than in 2010, the results offer potential change.

With final results confirmed on November 11, attention quickly turned to the formation of governments at all levels. The results of the elections allow for numerous combinations regarding the formation of entity governments and the BiH State Council of Ministers.

At least three parties from the FBiH and at least one from the RS will need to agree on a coalition to raise enough votes in the state parliament to form the State Council of Ministers. This implies that the Council of Ministers will be made up of a large combination of parties from both entities, as occurred after the 2010 elections, when it took nearly 16 months for six parties to create such a coalition. While this might signify stronger parliamentary support to the new government, it could just as likely precipitate governing complications as all parties present different goals and programs.

Initial negotiations for a governing coalition have seen an agreement emerge between SDA, DF, and the Alliance for Change (SDS, PDP, and NDP) – notably excluding SNSD. HDZ BiH, however, as the winner of a majority of Croat seats, is an inevitable force in the negotiations, and began its own talks with SNSD, expressing that it will partner with those in government in the RS. With no legal deadlines to form the governing coalition – and flashbacks to the negotiations following the 2010 elections still in citizens’ minds – citizens can only hope that the process of forming the government will be short, in the interest of setting to work on much needed reforms that have gone unaddressed over the past four years.

In the RS, both ruling and opposition parties had a chance to form the entity government. After weeks of negotiations and consultations between the two blocks, respectively led by SNSD and SDS, the first session of parliament saw SNSD secure a very narrow majority of 44 out of 83 seats, aided by defections to the SNSD by two opposition legislators. SNSD’s longstanding sway over parliament will be lessened considerably, as exemplified by the departure of longtime speaker Igor Radojicic. In negotiations with ruling and opposition blocs, members of smaller parties presumably will have power to swing legislative outcomes.

SDA took the lead in negotiations on the next FBiH government, and concluded a relatively quick agreement with DF and HDZ BiH to form a coalition—although the latter held out as it continued negotiations on the state-level government. The FBiH parliament had its inaugural session on December 2.

These developments foreshadow potentially protracted negotiations for the state government, as well as permit an arrangement that could see parties in coalition at one level of government but in opposition at another. This is of particular concern as coalitions formed after 2010 proved far from stable when changes in the state-level coalition caused FBiH-level shake-ups.

What is clear is that all levels of government are going to be faced with a dire economic situation and the country’s lack of EU progress, including required constitutional reform to implement the *Sejdic-Finci* ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. This difficult work may be further complicated by the anticipated results of the country’s first census since 1991, which may see the so-called fourth constituency, i.e. other ethnic groups that are not one of the primary three, overtake the Croat population. As the country is already seeing proposals to protect and enhance ethnic-based power-sharing arrangements with Covic’s plans for a third entity or electoral unit, the announcement of census results (Bosnia’s first since the war) expected in spring 2015 may see ethnicity continue to frame political negotiations as a high profile and divisive issue. Should such issues hold up more pressing reforms as has happened in the past, BiH cannot expect to move forward, as advancing long-needed reforms, and tackling unresolved issues, including corruption and unemployment, will require coordinated, decisive action from the new government.

## APPENDIX

### BiH State Parliament: Tabulated Results of the 2006, 2010, and 2014 General Elections

		Percentage of Votes			Mandates Received		
		2006	2010	2014	2006	2010	2014
<b>RS Parties</b>	SNSD	46.93	43.3	38.46	7	8	6
	SDS	19.44	22.19	32.64	3	4	5
	NDP		2.42				
	PDP	5.08	6.45		1	1	
	PDP-NDP			7.76			1
	SPRS	2.25	2.39	2.89			
	SDA	3.67	2.64	4.88	1		1
	SBH	4.16	2.04		1		
	RSRS	2.83	2.3				
	DNS	3.56	4.59		1	1	
	DNS-SRS-NS			5.72			1
	others	12.08	11.68	12.44			
<b>FBiH Parties</b>	SDA	25.54	19.4	27.87	8	7	9
	DF			15.33			5
	SBB		12.16	14.44		4	4
	SBH	22.99	7.25	2.61	7	2	
	SDP	15.4	26.07	9.45	5	8	3
	HDZ BiH	7.99	10.99	12.15	3	3	4
	BPS	4.41	2.75	3.65	1		1
	NSRzB	3.22	4.81	1.31	1	1	
	HDZ1990	6.1	4.86	4.08	2	2	1
	DNZ	1.9	1.45	1.31	1	1	
others	12.45	10.26	7.8			1 (A SDA)	
	turnout %	55.31	56.52	54.14	Total Mandates:		42



**FBiH Parliament: Tabulated Results of the 2006, 2010, and 2014 General Elections**

Party	Percentage of Votes			Mandates Received		
	2006	2010	2014	2006	2010	2014
SDA	25.48	20.22	27.79	28	23	29
SBB		11.89	14.72		13	16
DF			12.9			14
SBH	22.16	7.63	3.3	24	9	3
SDP	15.17	24.53	10.14	17	28	12
HDZ BiH	7.56	10.64	11.93	8	12	12
BPS	4.1	2.73	3.72	4		4
NSRzB	3.16	4.72	1.52	3	5	
HDZ1990	6.32	4.68	4.04	7	5	4
DNZ	1.87	1.47	1.37	2	1	
NS		1.27	1.54			1
SNSD	1.46	0.93	0.67	1	1	
others	12.72	9.29	6.36	4	1	3 (aSDA 2, Lab 1)
turnout %	54.22	56.72	52.73	Total Mandates: 98		

**RS National Assembly: Tabulated Results of the 2006, 2010, and 2014 General Elections**

Party	Percentage of Votes			Mandates Received		
	2006	2010	2014	2006	2010	2014
SNSD	43.3	38	32.24	41	37	29
SDS- PUP-SRS RS	18.3	18.97	26.22	17	18	24 (22+1+1)
PDP	6.9	7.55	7.37	8	7	7
SPRS	3.6	6.09	5.22	3	4	5
DP		3.41			3	
NDS		2.12			2	
NDP			5.13			5
SDA	3.4	2.66		3	2	
SBH	4	1.89		4	0	
Domovina			5.28			5
SDP	2.5	3.05	1.91	1	3	
HDZ BiH	0.9	0.45	0.27	0	0	
RSRS	2.9	2.39		2	1	
DNS	4	6.09		4	6	
DNS- SRS-NS			9.23			8 (6+1+1)
others	10.2	7.33	7.13			
turnout %	57.1	56.19	56.49	Total Mandates: 83		