

**Post-Election Analysis of
February 14, 2021
Parliamentary Elections**



Summary

On February 14, 2021, Kosovo's voters went to the polls for the fifth parliamentary election in 13 years since independence in 2008 and the second such election in the past two years. The vote elected the Assembly's 120 members, who then voted for the President and Prime Minister. In these elections, LVV won an historic 50.3 percent of the vote, the first time one party received a majority, ushering in Albin Kurti as prime minister and leading to the election of Vjosa Osmani as president. The majority may offer Kosovo its first full-term parliament since independence.

Key takeaways from this election included the following:

Fair Vote, high turnout. The vote was considered free and fair, within the framework of legal definitions and international standards, by the nongovernmental organization, Democracy in Action (DiA), and international observers, with a high turnout despite the bad weather and the pandemic. A record number of votes came from the diaspora, largely supporting LVV.

Vote for change. The vote reflected NDI research that Kosovars seek an anti-corruption agenda, an economic reform agenda, a new generation of leaders, and progress. For the first time, the government is not dominated by the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) or the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), two parties stemming from the 1999 war era.

High expectations. NDI public opinion research shows the public expects the new political leaders to more effectively address the pandemic, public service hiring practices, tackle unemployment, and focus on policies and legislation relevant to their lives.

Gender progress, but not parity. While a record number of 43 women were elected, just 35 percent of MPs are women, above the 30 percent quota mandated by law but not yet the 50 percent equality for which many civil society groups are advocating. For the second time, there are five women ministers, with a record two women appointed as Deputy Prime Ministers.

Women and youth key. Women and youth were key to the LVV win, with 61 percent of women and 61 percent of 18-24 year olds voting for LVV, according to exit polls.¹ Going forward, no successful party will be able to neglect these two important groups.

Weak information integrity, misogyny. While overall reporting was accurate and professional, online portals and social media played a considerable role in promoting false or misleading information. NDI/Kosovo's social media monitoring during the election shows that candidates for high office were the targets of disinformation campaigns, and women were subjected to sexist attacks. A new trend was the creation of "memes", spreading political and misogynistic attacks on social media.

Srpska Lista sought to garner extra votes from non-Serbian communities. Srpska Lista politicians in Kosovo pushed for the creation of new Roma and Bosniak political parties and encouraged ethnic Serbian citizens to vote for these new parties in an attempt to increase their influence in the Assembly beyond the

¹See UBO Consulting exit polls, presented on TV Dukagjini.

spirit of the constitution. The Supreme Court nullified votes and withdrew two seats from the new Roma and Bosniak parties. If seeking additional influence in this way becomes common, it could undermine the intent of constitutional mechanisms to ensure representation of non-majority communities in the Assembly.

Foreign influence. NDI/Kosovo found narratives with information disorders from the Serbian leaders in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the media, as well as Russian sponsored narratives. In some cases, the media did not make clear which news items came from outside Kosovo and failed to note that the statements were skewed or not factual.

Post-Election Analysis

On February 14, 2021, Kosovo's voters went to the polls for the fifth parliamentary election in 13 years since independence and the second such election in the past two years. The parties then selected the Assembly's 120 members, as well as the President and Prime Minister. In these elections, LVV won an historic 50.3 percent of the vote, ushering in Albin Kurti as prime minister and leading to the election of Vjosa Osmani as president.

Since independence in 2008, Kosovo has held five parliamentary elections, with the most recent in just October 2019. The February 14, 2021 snap elections selected the Assembly's 120 members, who then determined the President and Prime Minister. The elections occurred amidst the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, and as Kosovo seeks to gain its political footing in pressing forward on the Dialogue with Serbia on normalizing relations.

Elections were triggered by a December 2020 [Constitutional Court decision](#) which nullified the coalition government of Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The ruling held that the Hoti government had been seated by a one-vote majority of Assembly members that included one individual whose prior criminal conviction invalidated his mandate. This stipulation about prior criminal offenses had not been previously enforced.

The Hoti government had emerged in June 2020 following a vote of no-confidence in its short-lived predecessor, headed by Prime Minister Albin Kurti and his Vetevendojse Movement (LVV), with LDK serving as a junior coalition partner. Kurti had governed for fewer than two months in early 2020, following an extended period of government formation after the last parliamentary elections in October 2019. His ouster created resentment that helped fuel this electoral win, according to NDI public opinion research in 2020.

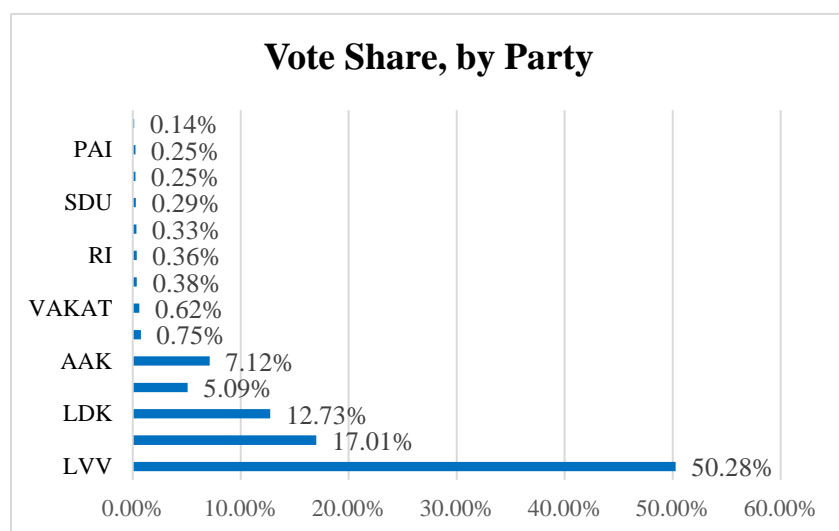
Following the court's decision, a number of potential candidates were ruled ineligible to run by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The CEC was obliged to establish a new procedure requesting the Judicial Council of Kosovo to send data about candidates who were convicted of a crime in the last three years. This enabled the CEC to verify the candidates' eligibility. It ultimately declared that 47 candidates were ineligible to stand for election because they had been convicted with a final court decision within the last three years. The CEC requested all parties to replace candidates who were not eligible to run. While other parties replaced their candidates and the CEC confirmed the updated lists, Vetevendojse Movement (LVV) (four candidates), Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) (12 candidates), Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) (four candidates), The United Roma Party of Kosovo (PREBK) (one candidate), Kosovo Democratic Party of Ashkali (PDAK) (one candidate) and Ashkali Party for Integration (PAI) (four candidates) did not, nor did they remove the ineligible candidates. Therefore, the CEC did not certify their candidate lists. These parties sent appeals to the Election Complaints and the Appeals Panel (ECAP) which validated the CEC decision. Parties continued their appeal in the Supreme Court which decided on January 28, 2021 that three of the candidates were eligible to run, but the rest were not certified. Those deemed ineligible to run included Albin Kurti, the leader of LVV. He had been convicted in 2018 for the use of tear gas in the Assembly in 2015.

While he thus did not run for parliament, Kurti was elected as a prime minister by the Assembly and has formed the government. Kosovo’s then-Acting President, Vjosa Osmani, also highly rated by the public, joined with Kurti on the LVV list in these elections.

In the November 2020 by-elections, LVV had wrested mayoral control of Podujevo, long an LDK stronghold. LVV’s candidate won the mayoral election without a run-off, with 52 percent, leaving the LDK incumbent candidate with 36 percent, with LDK losing this municipality it had held for 20 years.

Election results

On March 13, 2021, the CEC certified the final results of the elections, after all appeals before the national courts had been exhausted.



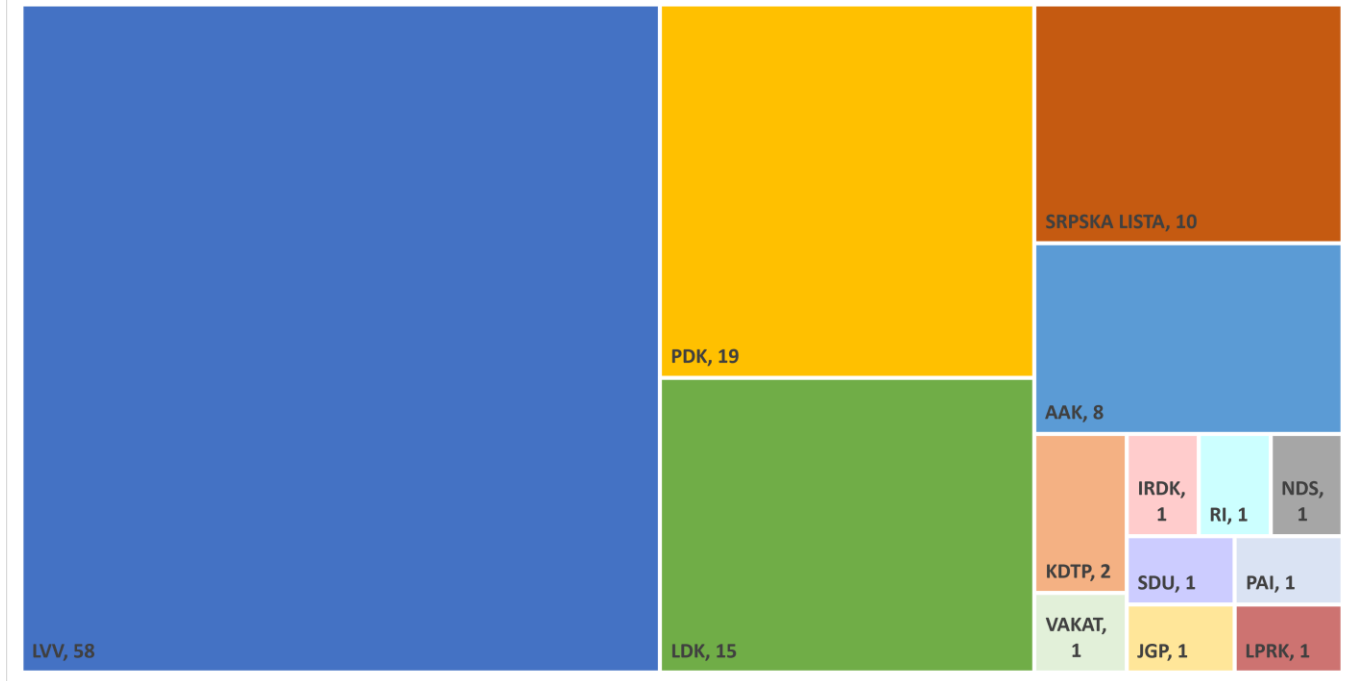
LVV won with 50.3 percent of the vote, or 438,335 votes. PDK came in second with 17 percent (148,285), followed by the LDK with 12.7 percent (110,985) and the AAK with 7.12 percent (62,111). Other parties, including NISMA, did not pass the threshold.² According to these results, LVV has 58 members in the new parliament, PDK 19, LDK 15, and AAK 8. LVV gained a majority of votes in 22 municipalities³ while PDK remained the largest only in two municipalities (Skenderaj/Srbica, Drenas/Glogovac), with AAK with a

majority in two (Decan and Junik). LDK did not receive a majority of votes in any municipality for the first time in its history. In addition, a record number of diaspora voters participated in these elections, contributing to the LVV win. In addition, 35 members of the Assembly were elected for the first time (15 women and 20 men).

² [For full results in Albanian, see the CEC data](#)

³ Dragash (Dragashi/Sharri, Dragas), Ferizaj (Ferizaj, Urosevac), Fushe Kosova (Fushe Kosove, Kosovo Polje), Gjakova (Gjakove, Dakovica), Gjilan (Gjilani, Gnjilan), Elez Han (Hani i Elezit, Deneral Jankovic) Istog (Istog, Istok), Kacanik (Kacanik, Kacanik), Kamenica (Kamenice, Kosovska Kamenica), Klina (Kline, Klina), Lipjan (Lipjan, Lipljan), Mitrovica (Mitrovica, Kosovska Mitrovica), Obiliq (Obiliq, Obilic), Peja (Peje, Pec), Podujevo (Podujeve, Podujevo), Pristina (Prishtina, Pristina), Prizren (Prizreni, Prizren), Orahovac (Rahoveci, Orahovac), Shtime (Shtimja, Stimlje), Suhareka (Suhareke, Suva Reka), Viti (Vitia, Vitina), Vushtrri (Vushtrria, Vucitrn)

Seats in the Assembly, by Party



Source: Central Election Commission final election results 2021

The elections were judged to be broadly in line with international standards for the conduct of elections, with no major irregularities in process observed by local civil society organizations (CSOs). The coalition of CSOs for citizen-based observation, Democracy in Action (DiA), found that the CEC organized election day appropriately, despite the short timeframe and the pandemic.⁴

Based on technical expertise provided by NDI, DiA introduced Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology in its observation, which involved observing a random, representative sample of polling stations nationwide to observe election day. DiA also monitored electoral processes, media, and campaign activities prior to election day. DiA found that the voting process was managed properly, despite the need for updated procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It also found the work of the CEC to have been largely transparent, and that almost all electoral activities and operations were concluded without delays. An exception to this is the diaspora voting which failed to be closed on time due to the very high number of applications and CEC's decision to verify them in a new manner. DiA also noted that, in some cases, the work of the CEC was accompanied by clashes between members and the chairwoman, as well as interference by political actors in the work and independence of this institution.

Political parties accepted the results. The leader of LVV, Albin Kurti, declared victory and called the elections a referendum for work on justice and employment. Then-acting president Vjosa Osmani stated that the election results would lead to a fight against corruption, for equality, and that the elections were a lesson on the importance of parties keeping their promises. The leaders of PDK and AAK congratulated LVV, although PDK's leader noted that the party will not join LVV in government.

⁴ [Democracy in Action, Final Election Observation Report Early Elections for the Assembly of Kosovo \(in Albanian\).](#)

Former Prime Minister and LDK member Avdullah Hoti took responsibility for the party's poor election results. LDK leader Isa Mustafa resigned his post, and committed the party to hard work and reform to make a comeback. Lumir Abdixhiku became the new LDK party leader.

Government Formation

On March 22, the new Assembly elected LVV's Glauk Konjufca as Speaker with 69 of 120 possible votes, and Albin Kurti as Prime Minister with 67 votes. Konjufca also assumed the role of Acting President from Vjosa Osmani briefly, until Osmani was elected President on April 4 for a five-year term.

To be elected, a presidential candidate must have a 2/3 quorum (80) of Members present and voting in the first two rounds of voting. However, in the third round, a candidate can be elected by just a simple majority (61) of all MPs. Thus, in the third round on April 4, Vjosa Osmani was elected president with the support of LVV and non-majority parties. She received 71 votes.⁵ The PDK, AAK and Srpska Lista boycotted all rounds, as well as some of the LDK leadership. On April 3, after two attempts, the voting was therefore halted after lack of quorum in the first two rounds of voting. Two MPs from non-majority communities were also key players in electing Osmani president.

The Political Impact: A Change Election

NDI/Kosovo's public opinion research shows that Kosovar attitudes are decidedly negative about politics, and an angry determination to see change is setting in.⁶ Citizens are decidedly frustrated that political leaders are more focused on narrow self-interests than the public interest. There is deep resentment that instead of focusing on governing, especially managing the pandemic, politicians engaged in unseating the popular government of Albin Kurti. Corruption, in particular nepotistic hiring practices, is driving frustration toward the weak economy and high employment. While corruption itself is no longer among the top three or four issues, employment and the economy are. The vote represented a desire for a fundamental change; the basis of public sentiment that fueled LVV's historic win of 50 percent of the vote.

As NDI/Kosovo's 2020 focus group research shows, this is the first election since independence in which a marked change in attitudes toward patriotism was evident. In the past, veterans of the 1998-99 war between Kosovo and Serbia were forgiven any shortcomings in politics because of their patriotic service in the conflict. Now, honest, principled public service and integrity are viewed as key to patriotism, rather than service in the war.

Citizens will expect the new political leaders to more effectively address public service hiring practices, tackle unemployment, and focus on policies and legislation relevant to their lives. They will also hold the leaders accountable to better manage the pandemic and the economy. Similar to sentiments of the Kosovar Albanian communities, Kosovar Serbs believe corruption is in every facet of life. It includes the obligatory bribes for basic government services and nepotistic hiring practices at all levels. Women are more likely

⁵ In the first round, Osmani received 69 votes, with 12 abstentions; in the second round, Osmani received 67 votes, with 11 abstentions.

⁶ NDI/Kosovo public opinion research October-November 2020.

to point to corruption in health and education, where men are more likely to talk about corrupt hiring and police.⁷

Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia

Rhetoric around the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue and the lack of perceived progress is allowing increasingly strident and intractable narratives to take hold. While the Brussels Agreement process has led to assumed progress, there is little clarity about the future or impact to the lives of Kosovars. NDI/Kosovo focus group research⁸ finds that Kosovar Albanians are increasingly strident about the conditionality of engagement with Serbia on issues such as the need to locate and return the missing, acknowledge Serbia's role in the war, pay reparations, and recognize Kosovo's statehood. Failed promises of EU visa liberalization have hardened attitudes and what they feel is acceptable in terms of the outcome of the dialogue outcomes.

Inclusion of Women, Youth, LGBTQ+, and People with Disabilities

Women and youth voters were largely responsible for the vote for change. Exit polls indicate that the majority of votes for the LVV came from women and youth, with 61 percent of women and 61 percent of 18-24 year olds voting for LVV.⁹ Going forward, no successful party will be able to neglect these two important groups.

The failure to significantly exceed the legal quota on candidate lists indicates the presence of gender bias in the parties' candidate selection processes. The situation persisted despite a concerted CSO campaign to push parties to field 50 percent women candidates and thus match the Law on Gender Equality.

These elections resulted in the highest number of women ever elected to the Kosovo Assembly, with 43 members, or 35.83 percent of all MPs, 15 of them elected for the first time. However, after the replacement by men of two women who were elevated to lead ministries, there are 41 women in the Assembly. For the second time, five women out of fifteen were appointed ministers. Donika Gervalla (Vjosa Osmani's List "Guxo") as Minister on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora; Albulena Haxhiu (LVV) as Minister of Justice; Arberie Nagavci (LVV) as Minister on Education, Science and Technology; Rozeta Hajdari (LVV) as Minister of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade; and Artane Rizvanolli (non-partisan) as the Minister of Economy. Vjosa Osmani is the second woman elected president, after Atifete Jahjaga's 2010 election.¹⁰

In addition, for the first time, there are a record two women appointed as Deputy Prime Ministers. Specifically, Donika Gervalla (Vjosa Osmani's List "Guxo") was appointed second Deputy Prime Minister (as well as Minister on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora), and Emilia Redzeqi (New Democratic Party (NDS), Bosniak Community) was appointed as third Deputy Prime Minister on Minorities Affairs and Human Rights.

Despite this significant progress, and ongoing reform within several parties to advance women's meaningful participation, party platforms poorly articulated gender equality priorities. They tended to focus on general notions of gender equality rather than concrete and actionable policy measures to improve the situation of women and girls in Kosovo. However, progress has been made in the role of women in

⁷ NDI/Kosovo public opinion research October-November 2020.

⁸ NDI/Kosovo public opinion research October-November 2020.

⁹ [See UBO Consulting exit polls, presented on TV Dukagjini.](#)

¹⁰ With the replacement of two MPs elevated to Minister-level positions, the number was reduced to 41 in April 2021.

party leadership and initiatives, with Vjosa Osmani, Duda Balje, Emilja Redzepi all in leadership positions.

In comparison to previous elections, this campaign saw a slight improvement in women candidates' representation in the media. While they did on occasion discuss economic policy, rule of law, education policy, infrastructure policy, and other substantive issues, women candidates participated in televised debates, which largely addressed stereotypical "women's issues". However, the representation of both women candidates and analysts in televised debates, in particular during the prime time shows, remained low, at around 20 percent of total coverage.

While some progress has been made in giving a greater voice to women, no progress has been made for people with disabilities. As has been the case for the last 13 years, the infrastructure to enable people with disabilities to vote continues to be weak. Although addressing the rights of people with disabilities was also lacking in the parties' political platforms, individual candidates did address the matter.

NDI/Kosovo's examination of televised debates and published party platforms during the election found that the rights of the LGBTQ+ were absent in the political party programs and the public presentations of their respective prime ministerial and Assembly candidates. None of the TV debates discussed political party programs regarding the LGBTQ+ community, a reflection of the institutional and socio-cultural neglect towards this community.

Minority Participation

Overall, the non-Serb, non-majority communities participated in the elections, putting forward competitive candidates for the seats. The campaign between non-Serbian minority parties was more competitive and dynamic than in the past: more parties competed for minority guaranteed seats. Ten seats in the Kosovo Assembly are guaranteed for Serbs and another ten for other minority communities, including Ashkali, Bosniaks, Egyptian, Gorani, Roma, and Turks.

One evolving development is the interference by Srpska Lista politicians in the election of non-Serbian communities. They pushed for the creation of new Roma and Bosniak political parties, and encouraged ethnic Serbian citizens to vote for these new parties in an attempt to increase their influence in the Assembly beyond the spirit of the constitution's 10 guaranteed seats for Serbs.

CEC data showed a significant increase in turnout of the Roma and Bosniak communities in the 2021 elections, compared to the previous election cycles, and also many votes coming from the Kosovo Serbian majority municipalities. "United Community," the newly formed Bosniak party in the North of Mitrovica, received 83 percent of its votes from Serbian municipalities, garnering one seat, with the newly formed "Roma Initiative" securing 60 percent, garnering two in the Assembly.

Minority parties negatively affected filed complaints with the ECAP which issued two decisions¹¹ which were subsequently validated by the Supreme Court.¹² ECAP nullified thousands of votes in municipalities

¹¹ ECAP decisions (in Albanian) for Roma/Ashkali/Egyptians appeal [here](#) and for Bosniak parties appeal [here](#).

¹²<https://supreme.gjyqesori-rks.org/2021/03/12/gjykata-supreme-refuzon-si-te-pabazuara-shtate-ankesat-e-fundit/>

because they did not correspond to the number of Bosniaks and Roma living in those communities. ECAP noted that these votes could otherwise run counter to the spirit of Bosniak representation as laid out in the Constitution. The result was the loss by the leader of the Bosniak Party, Adrijana Hodzic of her seat, which will now be represented by the Social Democratic Union (SDU) leader, Duda Balje. In addition, one of the two Romani Initiative seats will go to another Roma party.

If it were not for these court decisions, these actions could have seriously damaged the election process and the intent of constitutional mechanisms for the representation of non-majority communities. This will still remain an issue for the future election processes and may require reform of electoral legislation or regulation to address.

In the media, most of the non-majority communities were not well represented. They were invited to the televised debates only a few times, and only when there were topics related to the minorities specifically. There were no media appearances from any candidate from the Serbian community in the Kosovo media, although they were often represented in the media based in Belgrade.

Information Integrity

NDI/Kosovo observed the online media and social media environment around the elections. All political parties faced disinformation activity during the election period, especially candidates for prime minister and president, and the head of the CEC. The information disorders included doctored pictures and videos, false media articles, and misleading headlines and content. There appeared to have been limited fact-checking by journalists.

Online portals and social media played a considerable role in promoting false or misleading information. For instance, online news portals in some cases contributed to divisive language by creating and publishing their own direct attacks and mischaracterizing statements of politicians. Social media also spread and created doctored photos and videos.

Misogyny was present, as well. While both men and women candidates and leaders were verbally attacked for their political positions, women were also harshly criticized for their personal life choices and their appearances. Online news portals and social media reported and spread inappropriate comments about women candidates during this period. Media shared comments about the candidates' physical appearance, family life, and personal conduct without identifying the comments as harmful and misogynistic.

In particular, LVV's candidate for president Vjosa Osmani was subject to disinformation about her family's ties to Serbia and her wealth, as well as biased and sexist language. In addition, the chairwoman of the CEC, Valdete Daka, was falsely attacked as biased and corrupt over the CEC decision to not certify some candidates in accordance with the Constitutional Court's verdict barring candidates with recent criminal convictions.

While small in number, a new trend in this election were "memes" created and spread on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter involving doctored pictures and videos aiming to push forward political narratives and attacking some of the political leaders and candidates.

NDI/Kosovo found narratives with information disorders from the Serbian leaders in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the media, as well as Russian sponsored narratives. In some cases, the media did not make clear which news items came from outside Kosovo and failed to note that the statements were skewed or not factual. Media outlets in Serbia, followed closely by the Serbian population in Kosovo, reported many Serbian-language narratives biased in favor of supporting the Srpska Lista, describing grim and challenging scenarios that would unfold should Srpska Lista not win at least the ten seats reserved for the Serb community in the Assembly of Kosovo.

Russian sponsored media was active in the elections in the Serbian language media through its branch [Sputnik.rs](#) and other Russian sponsored media outlets based in Serbia, producing and spreading false and skewed narratives about Kosovo's leading politicians, especially Albin Kurti and Vjosa Osmani. Other narratives claimed leading Americans were working against the interests of Serbs.

List of acronyms

Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)
Ashkali Party for Integration (PAI)
Central Election Commission (CEC)
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
Democracy in Action (DiA)
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)
Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)
Election Complaints and the Appeals Panel (ECAP)
European Union (EU)
Kosovo Democratic Party of Ashkali (PDAK)
New Democratic Party (NDS)
Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT)
Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA)
Social Democratic Union (SDU)
The United Roma Party of Kosovo (PREBK)
Vetevendojse Movement (LVV)

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