

October 21, 2024

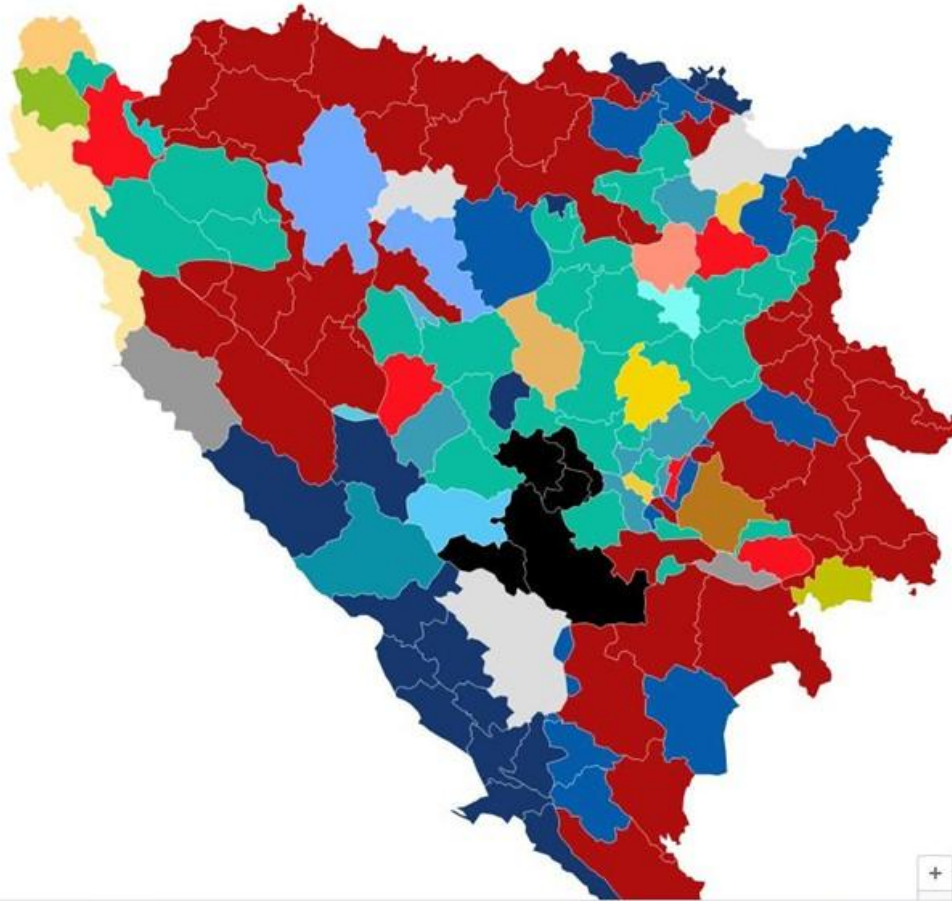
country report

Country Office Bosnia and Herzegovina

Q: <https://n1info.ba/english/news/7.10.2024>: Mayoral elections

Legend for the map showing political parties and their colors:

- BH inicijativa
- DEMOS
- HDS
- HDZ BiH
- HNP-HDZ 1990
- HSS
- NES-Zajedno
- NPS
- NS-SDP
- Nezavisni
- ODGOĐENO
- PDA
- PDP
- POMAK
- Ramska narodna stranka
- SBiH
- SDA
- SDBiH
- SDP
- SDP-NES
- SDS
- SNSD
- SP
- SRS
- Trojka
- Zajedno za Veliku Kladašu



Plurality and dominance in the regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and Others voted at the local elections for their representatives

Stephan Raabe, Director of the Sarajevo Country Office

On October 6, 2024, the quadrennial local elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Around 3.4 million citizens were called upon to elect local parliaments and mayors or community leaders in 143 cities and municipalities. At first glance, the country appears to be a colorful patchwork quilt. However, if you take a closer look, there are four parties that dominate the state as a whole and in the two entities. Overall, the Bosniak **SDA** and the Serb **SNSD** remain the strongest forces, followed by the multi-ethnic social democratic **SDP** and the Croat **HDZ BiH**.

Political structure and population

Since the Dayton Peace Treaty in December 1995, the “separate but not divided” Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has consisted of two entities: the “**Federation of BiH**” (FBiH) in the west and center and the “**Republika Srpska**” (RS) in the north and east, which have approximately the same size. The FBiH is divided into ten cantons with 79 municipalities, and the RS is divided into seven regions with 63 municipalities for statistical purposes. There is also the administratively independent **Brčko district** in the north. The largest cities in the country are the capital **Sarajevo** with almost 300,000 inhabitants, **Banja Luka**, the capital of the RS, with around 150,000 inhabitants, the industrial cities of **Tuzla** in the northeast with 120,000 and **Zenica** in the center with 115,000 inhabitants in the Federation of BiH, **Bijeljina** in the very northeast of the RS also with 115,000 and the capital of Herzegovina **Mostar** with 113,000 inhabitants.

The **local councilors** are elected using proportional representation, with the number of mandates in the council varying depending on the population. The **mayors** are elected according to the principle of a simple majority. For this reason, multi-party coalitions composed of a political or ethnic group are more common at the local level when multiple candidates could split the electorate. The HDZ 1990, for example, often forgoes its own candidates in favor of its big sister.

According to the last census in 2013, BiH had a population of 3.45 million. 2,219,220 (64.4%) lived in the **Federation**, including 1,562,372 Bosniaks (70.4%), 497,883 Croats (22.4%) and 56,550 Serbs (2.5%). 102,415 residents (4.6%) did not identify with any of the three constitutive peoples (including Roma). Only 1,228,423 inhabitants (35.6%) lived in the **RS**. The largest ethnic group here were Serbs with 1,001,299 people (81.5%), followed by Bosniaks with 171,839 (14%) and Croats with 29,645 people (2.4%); 25,640 (2.1%) people did not identify as belonging to any of the ethnic groups. The Bosniaks are mostly Muslim, the Croats are Catholic. Both use the Latin script. Serbs are generally Serb Orthodox and use the Cyrillic and Latin scripts.

Party landscape

The most important parties in the **Federation** are the Bosniak “Party of Democratic Action” (**SDA**), from which the conservative parties “European People’s Union” (**NES**) and “People and Justice” (**NiP**) emerged as splits, the multi-ethnic Social Democratic Party (**SDP**), from which the “Democratic Front” (**DF**) of Željko Komšić, the “Croat” member of the state presidency, split off in 2013, and the “Croatian Democratic Union” (**HDZ BiH**), from which the HDZ 1990 split in 2006, and finally the social liberal **NS** (Our Party).

In the **RS** the Serb nationalist “Alliance of Independent Social Democrats” (**SNSD**) with its chairman and president of the RS, Milorad Dodik (65), is the strongest force, followed by the conservative “Serb Democratic Party - The Will of the People” (**SDS -VN**), which has just been re-founded with a new name due to the ongoing US sanctions against the SDS, the EU-sceptic “Socialist Party” (**SP**), the centrist “Party of Democratic Progress” (**PDP**) and the ultranationalist party “United Srpska” (**US**). The “Democratic People’s Alliance” (**DNS**) and the “Democratic Union – **Demos**” are conservative splits from the SDS.

The **Konrad Adenauer Foundation** works across nations with the Bosniak SDA, with the Croat parties HDZ BiH and HDZ 1990 as well as with the Serb parties PDP and SDS.

The results of the elections

Election results in the country and in the two entities

The population distribution is regularly reflected in the election results. However, even two weeks after the election, not all polling stations (98 % so far) have been counted. In three constituencies in central Bosnia: Kiseljak, Kreševo, Fojnica and one in Herzegovina: Konjic, the election was held on October 20th due to the flood disaster that had previously occurred. One constituency: Jablanica is still pending due to the disaster. The results in the constituencies are documented on the State Election Commission’s website: <https://www.izbori.ba/>, but there is

no analysis concerning each party or the regions; because of that is the comparison with previous local elections difficult. The following numbers are based on our own count of the results available so far in the 142 constituencies in which elections took place. Around 3.4 million citizens were called to vote in the city and local council elections and 3.212 million citizens were called to vote in the mayoral elections; since the mayors in Mostar and Brčko are elected indirectly, there are fewer eligible voters here. The number of valid votes in the municipal elections is only 41.6 % of eligible voters, with a clear difference between the RS (47.1 %) and the Federation (38.4 %). In 2020, voter turnout in total was 50.4 %.

The balance of power in BiH as a whole is as follows:

SDA (Bosniak)	SNSD (Serb)	SDP (multi-ethnic)	HDZ BiH (Croat)
265.521 (18,83 %)	226.683 (16,07 %)	122.369 (8,68 %)	106.147 (7,53 %)

This is followed by **SDS** (Serb): 80,630 (5.72 %), **NiP** (Bosniak): 58,406 (4.14 %), the EU-sceptic Socialist Party (**SP**): 40,614 (2.64 %), the centrist **PDP** 38,034 (2.7 %), the conservative Democratic Union - **Demos**: 37,124 (2.63 %) - all three from the RS, the social democratic **DF**: 31,474 (2.23 %) and the liberal **NS**: 29,501 (2.09 %). Together, these parties have 73.3 %, the strongest four have 51.1 %.

Unfortunately, there are no comparative figures for the 2020 local elections available. However, if you compare the results of the local elections at the state level with those of the last parliamentary elections in 2022, it can be seen that the Bosniak **SDA** and the Social Democratic **SDP** made slight gains, the Independent Social Democrats **SNSD** were able to maintain their result and most others, including the current government parties **HDZ BiH** as well as **NiP** and **NS**, lost consistently.

Partei	2024	2022	Differenz
SDA Bosniak conservatives	18,8 %	17,2 %	+ 1,6 %-points, + 9,3 %
SNSD Serb nationalists	16,1 %	16,3 %	- 0,2 %-points, - 1,2 %
SDP multi-ethnic social democrats	8,7 %	8,2 %	+ 0,5 %-points, + 6,1 %
HDZ BiH Croat conservatives	7,5 %	8,8 %	- 1,3 %-points, - 18,3 %
SDS-VN Serb conservatives	5,7 %	7,1 %	- 1,4 %-points, - 19,7 %
NiP Bosniak conservatives	4,1 %	5,0 %	- 0,9 %-points, - 18 %
SP Serb socialists	2,6 %	1,5 %	+ 1,1 %-points, + 73,3 %
PDP Serb centrist	2,7 %	4,6 %	- 1,9 %-points, - 41,3 %
Demos Serb conservatives	2,6 %	1,9 %	+ 0,7 %-points, + 36,8 %
DF multi-ethnic social democrats	2,2 %	6,4 %	- 4,2 %-points, - 65,6 %
NS multi-ethnic social liberals	2,1 %	3,1 %	- 1,0 %-points, - 32,3 %
NES Bosniak conservatives	2,1 %	3 %	- 0,9 %-points, - 30 %

Blue: Federation, Orange: RS

Regarding the **Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the election result looks like this:

SDA (Bosniak)	SDP (multi-ethnic)	HDZ BiH (Croat)	NiP (Bosniak)
246.450 (31,03 %)	112.701 (14,19 %)	102.589 (12,92 %)	55.945 (7,04 %)

Together, the four strongest parties have 65.2 %. This is followed by the social democratic **DF**: 31,147 (3.9 %), the Bosniak **NES**: 29,334 (3.69 %), the liberal **NS**: 27,385 (3.45 %), the Croat **HDZ 1990**: 16,005 (2.02 %) and the Serb **SNSD**: 3,905 (0.49 %).

In the Republika Srpska (RS) the elections were as follows:

SNSD (Serb)	SDS (Serb)	SP (Serb-multi)	Demos (Serb)
217.410 (37,40 %)	78.831 (13,56 %)	37.288 (6,41 %)	37.124 (6,39 %)

The four parties achieved 59.5 %. This is followed by the centrist **PDP**: 35,912 (6.18 %), the ultra-nationalist **US**: 32,383 (5.6 %) and the conservative **DNS** 26,440 (4.6 %). The Bosniak **SDA** has only 13,528 (2.33 %) votes. The social democratic **SDP**: 7,868 (1.35 %) and the Croat parties **HDZ 1990**: 806 (0.14 %) and **HDZ BiH**: 753 (0.13 %) performed completely marginally. This is – like the insignificant result of the Serb parties in the Federation – the result of the expulsions and division of peoples caused by the 1992-1995 war.

The election results in the ten cantons of the Federation of BiH

1. **Una-Sana**: 31,8 % (northwest);
2. **Posavina**: 32 % (north);
3. **Tuzla**: 44 % (middle-north);
4. **Zenica-Doboj**: 43,2 % (middle);
5. **Bosnian Podrinje**: 55 % (east);
6. **Central Bosnia**: 29,7 % (middle);
7. **Herzegovina-Neretva**: 42,1 % (south);
8. **Western-Herzegovina**: 39,9 % (south);
9. **Sarajevo**: 36,7 % (middle);
10. **Canton 10**: 30,1 % (west).

(The percentages for the cantons indicate the proportion of valid votes from those entitled to vote. In the table: **red** means strongest, **turquoise**: second strongest, **purple**: third strongest party)

	SDA	NiP	NES	HDZ BiH	HDZ 90	SDP
1	26.211, 31,3%	4.444, 5,3%	18.344, 21,9%	130, 0,16%	84, 0,1%	10.690, 12,8%
2	1.838, 14,2%	---	---	7.688, 59,3%	401, 3,1%	472, 3,6%
3	65.976, 34,8%	14.359, 7,6%	1.548, 0,82%	2.749, 1,45%	---	32.819, 17,3%
4	48.800, 34,3%	5.418, 3,8%	4.034, 2,84%	6.578, 4,6%	959, 0,68%	21.575, 15,2%
5	2.346, 19%	1.815, 14,7%	510, 4,1%	---	---	1.652, 13,4%
6	39.557, 58,1%	3.949, 5,8%	483, 0,7%	26.970, 39,6%	3.573, 5,2%	13.906, 20,4%
7	19.143, 24,2%	518, 0,65%	658, 0,83%	30.013, 37,9%	3.590, 53%	6.380, 8,1%
8	---	---	---	21.862, 72,2%	2.876, 9,5%	291, 1%
9	41.239, 26,5%	25.442, 16,3%	3.757, 2,4%	1.036, 0,7%	---	24.225, 15,5%
10	1.340, 6,7%	---	---	5.563, 27,9%	4.522, 22,7%	691, 3,5%

The ethnic population distribution is also clear in the cantons. The Croat parties **HDZ BiH** and **HDZ 1990** are dominant in four cantons: in Posavina (2) in the north on the border with Croatia, in Herzegovina-Neretva (7) and Western Herzegovina (8) and in Canton 10 in the west. In the remaining six cantons, the Bosniak parties **SDA**, **NiP** and **NES** are the leading forces. The multi-ethnic social democracy **SDP** is the second or third strongest force in the center of BiH in the cantons of Central Bosnia (6), Tuzla (3), Zenica-Doboj (4) and Sarajevo (9).

In the **Brčko district** in the north, the three peoples still live together: the Serb parties SNSD (5,368, 15.4 %), SD+DNS (3,326, 9.5 %), US (3,186, 9.1 %)), PDP (2,122, 6.1 %) and SDS (1,687, 4.8 %) together are at **44.9 %**; the Bosniak SDA (5,543, 15.9 %) and NiP (2,002, 5.7 %) come to **21.6 %**; the Croat parties HDZ BiH (2,805, 8%) and HDZ 1990 (1,085, 3.1%) have **11.1 %** and the Social Democrats (SDP) have 1,800 votes (**5.2 %**).

The election results in the regions of the Republika Srpska (RS)

In all seven regions of the RS, the nationalist Independent Social Democrat **SNSD** became the strongest force, in six the more centrist **SDS-VN** is on second place. This is followed by the socialist party **SP**, just ahead of the conservative **Demos** party, the centrist **PDP** and the ultra-nationalist **US**. From north to east and south, the following results occurred in the regions: (1) Banja Luka (45.32 %), (2) Doboj (44.41 %), (3) Bijeljina (51.5 %), (4) Vlasenica (41.5%), (5) Sarajevo-Romanija (64.6 %); (6) Foča (53.4 %), (7) Trebinje (49.6 %):

	SNSD	SDS-VN	SP	Demos	PDP	US
1	105.993, 38,1%	28.395, 10,2%	15.730, 6,3%	11.387, 4,1%	26.778, 9,6%	16.636, 6%
2	31.039, 37,8%	13.226, 16,1%	6.862, 8,4%	5.014, 6,1%	2.029, 2,5%	3.922, 4,8%
3	15.659, 22,1%	14.951, 21,1%	1.4951, 7,4%	6.453, 9,1%	3.946, 5,6%	3.946, 3,7%
4	25.510, 52,3%	4.595, 9,4%	3.344, 6,9%	4.873, 10%	713, 1,5%	3.013, 6,2%
5	17.339, 38,1%	8.816, 19,4 %	1.523, 3,4%	6.073, 13,4%	1.400, 3,1%	2.503, 5,5%
6	8.493, 37,4%	3.130, 13,8%	1.865, 8,2%	1.597, 7%	420, 1,9%	1.784, 7,9%
7	13.377, 40,6%	5.718, 17,4%	2.713, 82%	4.873, 5,3%	1.884, 1,9%	1.884, 5,7%

The election results in the big cities

There are four distinct districts in **Sarajevo**: Center, Old City, New City and New Sarajevo with 280,215 eligible voters, but two thirds of the people living in New City and New Sarajevo. The mayors elected in the center are Srđan Mandić, the incumbent and deputy leader from the social-liberal multi-ethnic **NS** (Our Party, 50.6 %), in the old town Irfan Čengić from the Social Democrats (**SDP**, 64.4 %), in New Town Semir Efendić 74.3 % from the unitary multi-ethnic "Party for BiH" (**SBiH**, 74.3 %), a liberal split from the Bosniak SDA, and in New Sarajevo Benjamina Karić from the three-party coalition (**Trojka**) from Social Democrats (SDP), Bosniak NiP and social liberal "Our Party" (NS) with 42.2 %. The 33-year-old social democrat Karić, lawyer and historian, has been mayor of Sarajevo since 2021, who is elected by a city council of 28 delegates, each of the four districts provides seven delegates despite different population numbers. The mayor has a more representative function. Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, as constituent peoples, each have at least 20 % of the seats in the city council; the group of "others" are guaranteed two seats, regardless of the election results.

In the council elections in the four districts, 99,629 valid votes were counted, which represents 35.6 % of those eligible to vote. Approximately 10 % have not yet been counted. Overall, the "Party for BiH" (**SBiH**), a split from the Bosniak SDA, is ahead with 20,386 votes (20.5 %). This is followed by the **SDA** with 19,353 votes (19.4 %), the multi-ethnic Social Democracy (**SDP**) with 16,094 votes (16.2 %), the multi-ethnic "Our Party" (**NS**) with 12,215 votes (12.3 %) , the Bosniak **NiP** with 12,096 votes (12.1 %) and the "Democratic Front (**DF** BH), a split from the Social Democrats, with 5,921 votes (5.9 %). The three more **Bosniak parties** (SBiH, SDA, NiP) have 52 %, the two **social democratic** 22.1 % and the liberal NS 12.3%.

Banja Luka: With 193,734 eligible voters, there are 100,548 valid votes (51.9 %). The Serb nationalist **SNSD** has 32.8 %; the centrist **PDP** 21.2 %; the Socialist Party **SD** 6 %, the ultranationalist **US** also 6 % and the conservative **Demos** Party 5.1 %. **Draško Stanivuković** (**PDP**, 49.6 %) was confirmed as mayor ahead of the SNSD candidate Dr. Nikola Šobot (36%). Stanivuković is 31 years old and could run against incumbent President Milorad Dodik of the nationalist Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) in the next presidential election in RS.

Tuzla: There are 41,776 valid votes (37.5 %) out of 111,514 eligible voters. The Social Democrats (**SDP**) account for 26.4 %; for the Bosniak **SDA** 17.3 % voted; for the social democratic **DF** BH 8.7 %, the "Independent List 'Freedom'" 8.5 %, the "Alternative Tuzla" 6.6 % and the liberal "Our Party" (**NS**) 6.1 %. The **Social Democrat** Zijad Lugavić (SDP, 75.4 %) was re-elected as mayor.

Zenica: out of 101,404 eligible voters, there are 39,956 valid votes (39.4 %), although 2 % have not yet been counted. Here the Bosniak **SDA** leads with 32.1 %, followed by the "Bosnia-Herzegovinian Initiative Fuad Kasumović" (BHI KF) with 30.9 %, the party of the mayor, who has been in office since 2016. Then come the Social Democrats (**SDP**) with 8.2 %. **Fuad Kasumović** was re-elected as mayor (BHI KF, 54.4 %).

Bijeljina: There are 55,366 valid votes (49.8 %) out of 111,105 eligible voters. The Serb nationalist **SNSD** leads with 21.4 %, then comes the centrist **SDS-VN** with 17.7 %, the conservative **Demos** party with 10.4 %, the “Republican Party of Serbia” (**RSS**) with 9,3 % and the Socialist Party (**SP**) with 6.1 %. The 36-year-old doctor Ljubiša Petrović from the **SDS-VN** was re-elected as mayor with 48.9 %.

Mostar: Out of 101,098 eligible voters, there are 39,281 valid votes (38.9 %), 4 % have not yet been counted. The Croat **HDZ BiH** is clearly ahead with 41.9 % and has gained. This is followed by the coalition for Mostar led by the Bosniak **SDA** with 25.8 %, which has lost slightly, a coalition “**My City**” with 11.5 % and the three-party coalition **Trojka** led by the Social Democrats (**SDP**) with 7.1 %, which lost more.

The **mayor** is elected by the city council with 35 members. The electoral system in Mostar is intended to guarantee representation of all ethnic groups. Each of the groups of Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs should have at least four and a maximum of 15 representatives. There must be at least one representative from the “Others” group. The city is divided into six regions, three mostly Bosniak in the east, three mostly Croat in the west. The three Bosniak regions have 9 council members and the three Croat regions have 13 council members because they are more populous. Each citizen has two votes: one for the election in their city region and one for a unified list of candidates from across the city from which the remaining 13 council members are elected. An elaborately balanced system.

It is striking that the two strongest parties in BiH, **SDA** and **SNSD**, do not have a single mayor in the major cities. The Croat **HDZ BiH** will probably come into play in Mostar.

The results of the mayoral elections

In the **RS**, the **SNSD** wins: in the Banja Luka region it wins 17 of 22 offices, the PDP two, including the capital Banja Luka; in the Dobojo region, the SNSD receives six out of ten offices, the SDS two; in the Bijeljina region, the SDS wins two offices, including the city of Bijeljina, the SNSD one; in the Vlasenica region the SNSD gets all seven offices, usually with more than a two-thirds majority; in the Sarajevo-Romanija region SNSD has four out of eight offices, the SDS receives three; in the Foča region there are five out of six offices for the SNSD; In the Trebinje region three out of seven, but in the larger cities, the SDS has four offices here. Overall, the **SNSD occupies 43 of 63** (68 %) mayoral offices, losing six and winning four; the **SDS has 12** (19 %, down 4), the **PDP two**, including Banja Luka; other parties six.

In the **Federation** the Bosniak **SDA** is in the lead with **31 mayors** from 78 offices (39.7 %, 79 minus one due to flooding). It is particularly strongly represented in the northwest, in central Bosnia and in the north in Senica-Dobojo and in the canton of Tuzla, losing three offices but gaining six. The Croat **HDZ BiH** with 19 offices (24.4 %, minus one) has its strongholds in Herzegovina in the west and in the small Posavina in the north. The social democratic **SDP** has six offices, including in the old city of Sarajevo and the industrial city of Tuzla; the **Trojka** of SDP, NiP, NS has five, including New Sarajevo and Ilidža in the south of Sarajevo. The Serb **SNSD** wins three offices in the cantons of Una Sana and Ten. The other 17 mayoral positions are distributed among other parties or candidates.

Party	2020	2024	Difference
SNSD Serb	48	46	-2
SDA Bosniak	28	31	+3
HDZ BiH Croat	20	19	-1
SDS Serb	16	12	-4
SDP BiH multieth.	9	6	-3
Trojka SDP+NiP+NS		5	
PDP Serb	2	2	0

Blue: Federation, Orange: RS

Background to the election: electoral reform and election observation

The local elections are also interesting because the often-used narrative that multi-ethnic parties in BiH have no chance of becoming stronger than splinter parties in order to abolish the ethnic power cartels does not apply here, because the principle “a citizen, one vote” applies regardless of the ethnic origin of the candidates, except in Mostar, which has its own regulation. However, the electoral law guarantees at least one seat for representatives of minorities in places where they reach more than three percent. There are 20 such municipalities. Nevertheless, the elections confirm the **dominance of the ethnic parties**, although the multi-ethnic social democratic SDP takes second place in the federation with 14 %. If, after the last local elections in 2020, the Heinrich Böll Foundation assumed that “first steps” had been taken on the path that could “put an end to the monolithic ethno-blocs that have been acting autocratically for decades,” it is now more likely to assume confirmation of the leading parties of the Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats (<https://ba.boell.org/de/2020/11/18/lokalwahlen-bosnien-herzegowina-buergerinnen-stimmen-gegen-korruption-und-nationalismus>).

A total of **262 parties** or coalitions/lists took part in the elections. There were 25,703 candidates for the local council elections, including 10,983 women (42.1 %, 2020: 12,832, 41.7 %), and 386 mayoral candidates. However, as in 2020, there were only 29 women (7.5 %) among the mayoral candidates. Three **female mayors** were elected in the Federation, one in Srpska, and a total of five in 2020. These are Benjamina Karić (SDP) in New Sarajevo (69,000 inhabitants), Erna Merdić-Smailhodžić (SDA) in Zavidovići in the canton of Zenica-Doboj with 40,000 inhabitants and Iva Raguž (HDZ BiH) in Čapljina in southern Herzegovina with 28,000 inhabitants. In the RS, Snežana Ružičić (SNSD) was re-elected in the small municipality of Jezero (960 inhabitants). According to the electoral law, one of the two genders must be represented by at least 40 % of the candidates in municipal elections. The electoral roll includes 3,400,204 voters. That is more than the actual population of BiH, which is currently estimated at 3.2 million.

The **Central Election Commission** has taken a few measures in advance to ensure the transparency and legality of the electoral process. It has sanctioned political actors for premature election campaigns, with the total finance amounting to 268,000 marks (136,680 euros). Of 50 publications by political actors that were supposed to be removed from social networks, 38 were deleted. Particular emphasis was placed on legal provisions that prohibit hate speech and the use of violence or weapons at gatherings. The Election Commission has the power to sanction violations, including removing candidates from the electoral list.

Two mayoral candidates were in custody on suspicion of corruption and were nevertheless elected: **Ibro Berilo**, the mayor of the small municipality of Trnovo in the Federation near Sarajevo from the Bosniak **SDA**, who was re-elected with 78.2 %, and **Strahinja Bašević**, the mayoral candidate from the Serb one **SNSD** from Sokolac, a municipality in eastern Sarajevo in the RS, which was elected with 60.9 %. Only if a candidate is sentenced to prison for more than six months will their mandate be revoked. After all: since March 2024, due to a change in the electoral law by the **High Representative** representing the United Nations, the German CSU politician Christian Schmidt, the candidacy of convicted war criminals has been prohibited. That's why **Fikret Abdić** (85) could no longer run. The former warlord and entrepreneur, nicknamed “Babo” (little father), who comes from a Muslim farming family, rose to the position of CEO during the communist era and was part of the leadership of the Bosniak SDA in the early 1990s, led the “Autonomous Western Bosnia Region” during the 1993 to 1995 war and was sentenced to 15 years in prison in Croatia in 2002 for war crimes. Since 2016, he has been mayor of **Velika Kladuša**, a city in the northwest of BiH on the border with Croatia with around 45,000 inhabitants. Boris Horvat, who was supported by a broad party alliance, now won the mayoral election with 49.2 %. The candidate from Abdić's Labor Party got 36.5 %.

During the elections, new technologies were used on a trial basis for the first time and will be used in the 2026 parliamentary elections. These includes: biometric identification and authentication of voters, automatic counting of ballot papers, digital transmission of results and video surveillance in polling stations. Biometric authentication was used in 165 polling stations in eleven municipalities, counting scanners were used in 145 polling stations in seven municipalities and video surveillance was used in ten polling stations in five municipalities. The experiment was largely successful. In the pilot polling stations, the number of false voter identifications was only half as large. The number of cases of abuse during voting was a fifth lower.

Overall, the approx. ten **security incidents** at the elections were limited to disruptions to public order: there were some drunk voters, physical altercations and verbal attacks. There were also work interruptions in some polling stations due to conflicts between members of the electoral committees.

However, the civil society coalition for free and fair elections "**Pod Lupom**" (Under the Magnifying Glass), founded in 2014, registered **161 serious violations of election rules**, some of which could have an impact on the outcome. The number of violations of election rules has actually increased compared to previous elections. These include: influencing voting, e.g. by paying money or threats, improperly sealing ballot boxes and issuing a larger number of ballot papers than necessary. **240 international observers** monitored the election in the country, including 13 representatives from the European Parliament, 202 from the OSCE with its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which has offices in 10 locations in the country, and a 25-member Delegation from 20 countries of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. In the press release from the International Observer Mission: <https://rm.coe.int/bih-local-pr-07-10-24-final/1680b1dc20> it is said that the elections were "prepared competitively and efficiently while respecting fundamental freedoms". Then the mission criticizes the "inadequate efforts to promote public engagement", which refers to the low voter turnout, which is attributed to a lack of trust among citizens. It also noted "a significant burden of implementing the new regulations at short notice and with insufficient resources", the frequent impairment of the secrecy of the vote and "some cases of serious irregularities ... which indicate that pressure was exerted on voters". Misuse of public resources in election campaigns, the lack of representation of women and the frequent use of misogynistic language and threats, finally the need to revise the electoral register, the obvious bias of a public broadcaster combined with pressure on journalists and the segregation of the media by ethnicity, so that voters were inadequately informed. (The 20-page report from the observer mission can be found here: <https://rm.coe.int/bih-local-elections-2024-ps-07-10-2024/1680b1dc21>).

The electoral law was at least changed by the **High Representative (HR)** on March 26, 2024, as part of an "**integrity package**" in line with international guidelines. He has the task of ensuring the implementation of the civil aspects of the 1995 Dayton Peace Treaty and has considerable power to do this: he can fire elected politicians, cancel or enact laws. Previously, the country's political representatives had not been able to agree on an electoral reform to prevent manipulation and increase transparency. The Croat **HDZ BiH** made the changes dependent on a reform of the presidential elections, according to which only Croats should be entitled to vote for Croat candidates. The Serb **SNSD** did not want to accept the reform because it does not recognize the HR because he was not confirmed by the UN Security Council like his predecessors, which Russia and China rejected. However, such confirmation is not necessary at all. On April 19, 2024, the **RS parliament** therefore passed its own electoral law, which was declared invalid by the Constitutional Court of BiH because it encroached on the competence of the state institutions. The HR changes affect, among other things, the registration and verification of voters' identities, the digitization of ballot papers immediately after voting and security when handling voting materials before and after voting. Campaign and media financing should be disclosed. Above all, however, the electoral commissions should be independent at all levels. According to the international election observer commission, which explicitly referred positively to the **High Representative's reform steps**, this now appears to have been implemented quite well

in the first attempt, including in the RS. Previous elections in BiH were marred by reports of irregularities and fraud, which is why observers have been pushing for reforms for more than a decade. For example, a report from the Heinrich Böll Foundation on the 2020 local elections says: "The ballot was accompanied by massive electoral fraud." If this is true, as representatives of smaller parties complain, that votes are still documented in order to secure jobs and that there are also large numbers of fraudulent votes, then the balance will have to shift in future elections after the reforms.

Comments on the elections

The leader of the Bosniak **SDA**, **Bakir Izetbegović**, expects an increase in the number of voters, city councilors and municipal councilors for his party. The SDA is returning to its **position as the strongest force**. Elmedin Konaković, Foreign Minister and leader of the Bosniak **NiP**, which achieved 7.2 % in the Federation, said that his party, founded in 2018 as an offshoot of the SDA, was recording continuous growth. "We have great results for mayors. One of the most convincing victories in these elections was that of Nermin Muzur in Ilidža, and that of Amar Dovadžija in Ilijaš in the canton of Sarajevo with the **Trojka** with the social democratic SDP and the liberal NS.

The **HDZ BIH** achieved its election goals - despite slight losses, according to the statement by its chairman, **Dragan Čović**. He assumes that his party will also nominate the mayor of **Mostar**, who will be elected by the city councilors because they have a majority in the city council. The chairman of the Croat **HDZ 1990**, Ilija Cvitanović, which only had two percent in the Federation, said that his party is represented in all local councils in which it had nominated candidates. Nermin Nikšić, leader of the social democratic **SDP**, lamented the loss of four mayoral offices, but then focused on the cities in which his party had won, mostly in conjunction with NiP and NS as "**Trojka**", namely: Bosanska Krupa, Donji Vakuf, Bugojno, Ilijaš, Ilidža, Old Sarajevo, New Sarajevo, Srebrenik, Goražde and Tuzla.

Branislav Borenović, leader of the Serb **PDP** and member of the Parliament of BiH, was happy about the re-election of the mayor of Banja Luka. The leader of the Serb **SDS**, Milan Miličević, highlighted the victories in the larger cities of Bijeljina, Gacko and Teslić in the RS. Milorad Dodik, leader of the Serb nationalist **SNSD**, described the election as one of his party's most successful ever. Together with the coalition parties in the RS, the ultranationalist US, the conservative Demos and the socialist SP, they have 47 (43 + 4) out of 63 mayors.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

Stephan Raabe

Director of the Sarajevo Foreign Office
Sagrdžije 41A, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnien und Herzegowina
+387 33 215-240, stephan.raabe@kas.de
<https://www.kas.de/de/web/bosnien-herzegowina>



The text of this publication is published under a Creative Commons license: "Creative Commons Attribution- Share Alike 4.0 international" (CC BY-SA 4.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>