Southeast Europe
in Focus

6/2026
8. Jg.

General Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Victory for Mono-Ethnic Parties, No Gains for the Country?

Executive Summary

- Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) held its General Elections on 4 October 2026, electing the state Presidency, state and entity parliaments, the ten cantonal assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), and the President and two Vice-Presidents of Republika Srpska (RS). Despite the nationwide introduction of modern election technologies, the elections took place amid persistent constitutional and electoral reform challenges, ethnic divisions, and declining voter participation.
- The continued non-implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Constitutional Court of BiH perpetuates discriminatory aspects of the electoral and constitutional framework. The unimplemented *Sejdić and Finci* group of cases remains a central example of the failure to reconcile ethnic power-sharing arrangements with equal political rights for all citizens.
- The nationwide introduction of biometric voter identification, ballot-paper scanning, and electronic transmission of results to the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CEC BiH) represented a significant change in election administration. The election observation coalition "Pod lupom" assessed the elections as the freest and fairest to date, arguing that systemic election theft had been prevented.
- The campaign was marked by ethnic polarization, confrontational rhetoric, and limited substantive debate on socio-economic priorities, institutional reform, and EU integration. No televised debates were held between candidates for the state Presidency or between leaders of the principal political parties, limiting opportunities for voters to compare political programs.
- Preliminary results indicate that the mono-ethnic parties Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), and the Croatian Democratic Union of BiH (HDZ BiH) retained prominent positions among their respective ethnic constituencies. The Social Democratic Party of BiH (SDP BiH) also secured the Bosniak seat in the state Presidency, while multi-ethnic political alternatives continued to face difficulties in achieving comparable electoral support.
- Subsequent indirect elections and coalition negotiations will determine the composition of governments at state and entity levels. A central question is whether the SNSD, led by Milorad Dodik, will participate in the next state-level governing majority or whether an alternative coalition involving other parties from RS can be formed, as occurred during the 2014–2018 parliamentary term.
- Turnout stood at 44.29 per cent, the lowest level reported across the last four general election cycles, although the discrepancy between the registered electorate and the population *de facto* residing in BiH complicates interpretation. Also, participation of voters registered abroad dropped massively by approximately 38 per cent.
- The elections demonstrated progress in electoral administration alongside continuing challenges in political representation, participation, and institutional cooperation. The ability of the newly elected representatives to establish functioning governing coalitions, implement constitutional and electoral reforms, and overcome political deadlock will shape BiH's prospects for political stability and EU integration.

Harun Išerić is a Senior Teaching and Research Assistant at the Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo, and a PhD candidate in administrative law.

He is a member of the Local Election Commission in Sarajevo, an alumnus of the European Parliament's Sakharov Fellowship, and a ReThink.CEE Fellow at the German Marshall Fund. He also sits on the Advisory Group on Constitutional Law to a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Previously, he was a member of Bosnia and Herzegovina's national media self-regulatory body.

Contact:
harun.iseric@gmail.com

SÜDOSTEUROPA GESELLSCHAFT

Edited and Published by Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft e.V. / Southeast Europe Association

Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) held its General Elections on 4 October 2026, with voters electing members of the three-member Presidency of BiH (Presidency), which stands for the collective head of the state, the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HoR PA BiH), the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HoR FBiH, entity level), the National Assembly of Republika Srpska (NA RS, entity level), and the ten cantonal assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). Voters in RS also elected the entity's President and two Vice-Presidents.

The elections took place amid persistent constitutional and electoral reform challenges, entrenched ethnic divisions, and declining public participation. While the nationwide introduction of modern election technologies marked an important step towards strengthening electoral integrity, the campaign and preliminary results demonstrated the continued dominance of ethnically structured political competition. The subsequent indirect elections (see below "Elections that are yet to happen") and coalition negotiations will determine the composition of government at the state and entity levels and shape the country's prospects for political stability and EU integration.

The elections were held against the backdrop of the continued non-implementation of judgments of the ECtHR and the Constitutional Court of BiH concerning discriminatory aspects of the country's constitutional and electoral framework. The system combines ethnic and territorial criteria in determining access to key political offices and representative institutions, including the state Presidency and the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HoP PA BiH, which is the state/central level parliament's upper house). The landmark *Sejdić and Finci* judgment[1] (concerning the exclusion of citizens who did not identify as members of one of the three constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs – from standing for election to the state Presidency and the HoP PA BiH), delivered by the ECtHR in 2009, remains unimplemented, alongside other judgments addressing discrimination in political representation. The continued failure to implement these rulings illustrates the persistent difficulty of reconciling the country's power-sharing arrangements among its three constituent peoples/ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, with the principle of equal political rights for all citizens.

A significant development in the 2026 elections was the nationwide deployment of modern election technologies, building on pilot projects conducted during the 2024 Local Elections. These technologies included biometric voter identification, ballot-paper scanning, and the electronic transmission of results to the CEC BiH, which is the state-level body tasked with organizing and implementing elections. Their introduction represented an important institutional effort to increase transparency, reduce opportunities for electoral manipulation, and accelerate the publication of preliminary results. The domestic civil society election observation coalition "Pod lupom" ("Under the Magnifying Glass") assessed that the elections were the freest and fairest in the country's history, arguing that systemic election theft had been prevented.[2] Nevertheless, the long-term impact of these technologies will depend on their effective implementation and their integration into broader efforts to strengthen electoral integrity and public confidence.

The election campaign was characterized by pronounced ethnic polarization, confrontational rhetoric, and a lack of substantive debate on public policy. Political opponents frequently accused each other of betrayal and treason, while socio-economic priorities, institutional reform, and European integration received comparatively limited attention. Notably, no televised debates were held between candidates for the Presidency or between the leaders of the principal political parties. This absence of substantive engagement limited opportunities for voters to compare competing political programs and assess candidates' proposed responses to the country's persistent governance challenges. The campaign therefore reinforced concerns that political competition remains centered on ethnic identity and mutual accusations rather than program-based debate and accountability.

The preliminary election results indicate the continued strength of the established mono-ethnic parties SDA, SNSD, and HDZ BiH, who retained prominent positions within their respective political constituencies. These

1 ECtHR, *Sejdic and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina*, app. 27996/06 & 34836/06, 22 December 2009.
2 tvsa.ba. (2025, October 5). *Koalicija "Pod lupom": Održani najslobodniji i najpošteniji izbori do sada, spriječene sistemske izborne krađe [Coalition "Pod lupom": The most free and fair elections held so far, systemic election thefts prevented]. https://tvsa.ba/koalicija-pod-lupom-odrzani-najslobodniji-i-najposteniji-izbori-do-sada-sprijecene-sistemske-izborne-kradje/.*

parties predominantly mobilize Bosniak, Serb, and Croat voters respectively, reflecting the enduring influence of ethnopolitical alignments on electoral competition. In contrast, the SDP BiH also maintained its position in the contest for the Bosniak seat in the state Presidency, while other parties promoting a multiethnic political alternative have struggled to sustain comparable electoral support. Overall, the results suggest that political competition continues to be shaped primarily by established ethnic divisions rather than clearly differentiated policy programs. Final assessments of party performance must, however, take into account the official election results, including those of the forthcoming indirect elections.

Voter turnout stood at 42.02 per cent, with approximately 1.47 million voters participating, marking the lowest level reported across the last four general election cycles. However, this figure should be interpreted in light of the discrepancy between the registered electorate of 3.4 million and the estimated 3.1 million people actually residing in BiH,[3] of whom approximately 400,000 are minors. It follows that an estimated 2.7 million resident citizens are eligible to vote. Thus the turnout would amount to approximately 54.44 per cent.

Participation by citizens living abroad presents a further concern. The number of voters registered to participate from the diaspora reportedly declined from more than 77,000 in 2018 to just over 48,000 in 2026, representing a decrease of approximately 38 per cent.[4] According to the CEC BiH, only 48,078 voters registered to vote outside BiH in 2026, including 45,457 registered to vote by mail and 2,621 to vote at diplomatic-consular missions.[5] The decline raises concerns about the accessibility of external voting and its potential implications for political representation, particularly for pro-Bosnian political parties competing in RS, and for candidates contesting seats in the HoR PA BiH through the RS electoral constituency.

Beyond the conduct of the elections themselves, the subsequent indirect elections and coalition negotiations will be decisive in determining the composition and policy orientation of governments at state and entity levels. A central question is whether the next state-level governing majority will include the SNSD, led by Milorad Dodik, or whether an alternative coalition can be formed with other political parties from RS. The experience of the 2014–2018 parliamentary term, when an alternative state-level governing arrangement excluded the SNSD, offers a relevant point of comparison. Whether a similar arrangement could facilitate greater political cooperation and progress towards European integration will depend on the composition, priorities, and ability of any new governing majority to overcome institutional and political obstacles.

Setting the Scene: Preparing the Ground for the General Elections

Bosnia and Herzegovina's 2026 General Elections[6] took place against a complex political and institutional backdrop, shaped by changes to the electoral framework, the introduction of new election technologies, Milorad Dodik's removal from the presidency of RS, uncertainty surrounding the Office of the High Representative (OHR), and the evolving approach of the Trump administration towards BiH and the wider Western Balkans. Dodik remained the dominant political figure within the ruling SNSD, although he was no longer eligible to hold the entity's highest office. For the first time in decades, he did not appear on the ballot.

The elections comprised of contests at state, entity, and cantonal levels, with elected representatives receiving four-year mandates. At the state level, voters elected the three members of the Presidency (one Bosniak, one Serb, and one Croat) and the members of the HoR PA BiH. At the entity level, voters in the FBiH elected members of the HoR FBiH (the lower house at the entity level) and the ten cantonal assemblies. In RS, voters elected members of the NA RS (the lower house at the entity level) as well as the entity's President and two Vice-Presidents (one Bosniak, one Serb, and one Croat).

Elections to the state and entity parliaments are conducted through proportional representation in

3 Worldometar. *Bosnia and Herzegovina – population* (24 October 2026), https://www.worldometers.info/hr/svjetsko-stanovnistvo/bosna-i-hercegovina-stanovnistvo/.
4 Radio Free Europe. (2026, July 23). *Milionska dijaspora, a sve manje birača: Zašto bh. državljani u inostranstvu odustaju od glasanja? [A diaspora numbering millions, and fewer and fewer voters: Why do BiH citizens abroad give up voting?],* https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bih-izbori-dijaspora/33810664.html.
5 Izbori.ba. (2026, August 19). *Ongoing activities on the conduct of 2026 General Elections,* https://www.izbori.ba/?Lang=6&CategoryID=183&Id=6116.
6 For election results see the official website of the CEC BiH: https://rezultati.izbori.ba/#/ (includes English) & parliaments' seats projections by the most visited BiH media website: https://izbori.klix.ba/?pismo=lat (in Bosnian).

multi-member constituencies. This means voters cast ballots for political parties, coalitions, or independent candidates, with preferential voting rules (voters select one or more candidates from an electoral list, potentially influencing which candidates are elected, depending on the electoral rules) applying to candidates on party and coalition lists. In addition to constituency seats, 23–27 per cent compensatory mandates are allocated from closed lists to help ensure proportional representation.

Christian Schmidt's Interventions: Strengthening Electoral Integrity

During his tenure as the eighth High Representative (HR) for BiH (2021–2026), former German politician Christian Schmidt intervened on 24 occasions in the country's legal and institutional framework, imposing legislative and constitutional amendments, annulling legal acts, or ordering specific actions by the relevant authorities.[7] Eleven of these interventions concerned the electoral system, its functioning, funding, criminal law protection, and financing of political parties. His interventions into the electoral system pursued two broad objectives: the first was to strengthen electoral integrity,[8] and the second was to alter the framework governing the indirect election of delegates to the HoP FBiH.[9] His decisions ignored anti-discriminatory judgements of the ECtHR and the Constitutional Court of BiH.[10]

The interventions also introduced or expanded measures intended to strengthen the electoral administration and integrity. These included provisions to secure funding for election administration in the event of political obstruction, broaden restrictions on prohibited activities during the election period, strengthen the powers of the CEC BiH, and establish a legal framework for the introduction of modern election technologies. The introduction of these technologies was one of the most significant practical developments resulting from his reforms. They were intended to address longstanding concerns about voter impersonation, irregularities in ballot counting, and the manipulation of election results at polling stations. Polling Station Committees, which are responsible for voter identification, ballot handling, and the counting of votes, have frequently been identified as a vulnerable point in the electoral process. The introduction of electronic identification and ballot scanning was therefore intended to reduce opportunities for procedural irregularities and human interference, improve the accuracy and transparency of vote counting, and strengthen public confidence in electoral outcomes.

Beyond the Presidency: Dodik's Continued Political Power in Republika Srpska

Christian Schmidt's interventions were frequently prompted by actions taken by RS institutions that challenged the constitutional order of BiH. These included disputes over state property and an attempt to restrict the implementation of decisions of the Constitutional Court of BiH. In 2023, the NA RS adopted legislation seeking to prevent the application of Constitutional Court decisions in the RS entity and to restrict the publication of decisions of the HR in the Official Gazette of RS.[11] Schmidt responded by annulling the relevant legislative acts and amending the Criminal Code of BiH to criminalize the non-implementation of his decisions. The resulting confrontation between state-level institutions and the RS leadership escalated into one of the most serious constitutional crises since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement.[12]

The crisis culminated in the criminal prosecution of Milorad Dodik, then President of RS, for failing to implement the HR's decisions. On 26 February 2025, the Court of BiH sentenced Dodik to one year of imprisonment and imposed a six-year prohibition on holding any publicly funded position, which was upheld by the Appellate Court, as well as by the Constitutional Court of BiH and the ECtHR. These proceedings had direct consequences for the political leadership of RS, vacating the Office of the RS President, although they

7 For High Representative decisions see: https://www.ohr.int/decisions-of-the-high-representative/ (24 October 2026).
8 Maja, S. (2024, April 11). The High Representative Strikes Again. https://verfassungsblog.de/the-hr-strikes-again/.
9 Obligation to amend the election of the HoP FBiH determines from the Constitutional Court of BiH decision in case "Ljubić", case number U-23/14, decided on 1 December 2016. Decision available in English on the website of the Court: https://www.ustavnisud.ba/en/home.
10 For judgments of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see: the judgment concerning the constitutionality of the composition of the executive leadership of both entities (Case No. U-14/12), available at: https://www.ustavnisud.ba/uploads/odluke/_en/U-14-12-734865.pdf; and the individual human rights case concerning discrimination (Case No. AP-849/23), available at: https://www.ustavnisud.ba/uploads/odluke/_bs/AP-849-23-1422886.pdf.
11 OHR (2023, July 1). *Decision Preventing the Entry into Force of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Publication of Laws and Other Regulations of Republika Srpska*. https://www.ohr.int/decision-preventing-the-entry-into-force-of-the-law-on-amendments-to-the-law-on-publication-of-laws-and-other-regulations-of-republika-srpska/ OHR (2023, July 1). *Decision Preventing the Entry into Force of the Law on Non-application of Decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. https://www.ohr.int/decision-preventing-the-entry-into-force-of-the-law-on-non-application-%d0%bef-decisions-of-the-constitutional-court-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina/.
12 Maja S. (2025, April 28). *Constitutional Standoff in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Drama in Four Acts (So Far)*. https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/constitutional-standoff-bosnia-and-herzegovina-drama-four-acts-so-far.

did not remove Dodik from the leadership of the SNSD, contrary to the repeated requests by the Court of BiH.

Despite his removal from the presidency and the prohibition on holding that office, Milorad Dodik remained the dominant political figure within the SNSD and a central presence in its electoral campaign. His position was reinforced by the Trump administration's decision to lift US sanctions imposed on Dodik and other RS officials following steps by the RS leadership that Washington presented as contributing to de-escalation. However, the nature of any understanding between the RS leadership and the US administration, and the extent to which lobbying influenced the decision, remain unclear.

Dodik's absence from the ballot as a candidate in the 2026 General Elections represented a significant departure from previous election cycles, but not necessarily a corresponding change in the balance of political power within RS.

Sede Vacante at the Office of the High Representative

Following the submission of his bi-annual report to the UN Security Council in May 2026, Christian Schmidt resigned his position as HR. Although Schmidt initially explained his resignation as a personal decision, it was later determined that it happened under pressure of the US Administration, exercised as part of the wider agreement reached between Milorad Dodik to be removed from the list of the US sanctioned persons. Following his resignation, the Steering Committee of the Peace Implementation Council in June and July 2026 attempted to elect a new HR, with US, Turkey and Italy supporting the candidacy of the Italian diplomat Antonio Zanardi Landi and EU and UK supporting the French diplomat Rene Troccaz. In absence of the new HR, HR Deputy and Brčko District supervisor Louis J. Crishock, an American diplomat appointed by the Biden Administration, was appointed acting HR, holding that position until today. For the first time since the end of the war and establishment of the OHR, Bosnia held its election in absence of the HR, although the acting HR has repeatedly claimed to have the same powers and could act the same was as any other HR.

Elections That Are Yet to Happen

Although voters directly elected lower houses of the state and entity-level legislative bodies, the formation of their upper houses and executive leadership of the FBiH requires additional rounds of indirect elections that will take place in the following months.

The process works differently in the two entities. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, members of each cantonal assembly, organized into caucuses representing Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, and Others (national minorities and persons not affiliated with any of the three constituent peoples), will elect 80 delegates to the House of People of the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina (HoP FBiH), i.e. the entity's upper house. These delegates are distributed among the four caucuses as follows: 23 Bosniaks, 23 Croats, 23 Serbs, and 11 Others. The election of delegates is guided by two principles. The first is the principle of minimum representation, which requires each canton to elect at least one Bosniak, one Croat, one Serb, and one delegate from the Others caucus, provided that members of these groups have been elected to the respective cantonal assembly. The second is the principle of proportional representation, whereby the allocation of seats in the HoP FBiH across cantons and caucuses is determined on the basis of the latest population census.

In contrast, the process is a bit easier in Republika Srpska: Members of the NA RS directly elect 28 members of the Council of Peoples of Republika Srpska (CoP RS), the RS's upper house. These members are also distributed among four caucuses representing Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, and Others, with eight members representing each constituent people and four representing Others.

At the state level (i.e. the central level), the HoP PA BiH, that is the central level's upper house, comprises 15 delegates: five Bosniaks and five Croats selected by the respective Bosniak and Croat caucuses of the HoP FBiH, and five Serbs selected by the NA RS. Unlike the HoP FBiH and the CoP RS, the HoP PA BiH does not provide representation for the category of Others. Its composition is restricted to delegates from the three constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs – thereby excluding persons who identify as members of national minorities or who do not identify with any of the constituent peoples from direct representation in this institution.

Why do these complicated indirect elections matter? They are consequential because the HoP FBiH and the HoP PA BiH participate in the legislative process as integral components of their respective parliaments, whereas the CoP RS primarily serves for the three constituent peoples to exercise suspensive veto in order to protect their vital national interest, decision on which is ultimately made by the RS Constitutional Court. Once the direct election results get confirmed,

no later than 3 November 2026 – or, in extraordinary circumstances, by 20 November – the deadlines for constituting the newly elected parliaments and assemblies and conducting the indirect elections will begin to take effect. The experience of the 2022 elections provides an indication of how protracted this process can become. In 2022, it took approximately 70 days to constitute the CoP RS and around 107 days to constitute the HoP FBiH at the entity levels, and approximately 137 days to constitute the HoP PA BiH at the central level.

Long-Standing Strain on the Electoral Process

Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Despite the introduction of modern election technologies, the work of the CEC BiH continued to be undermined by political obstruction, inadequate resources, and limited administrative capacity. Funding for the 2026 elections was approved only at the last moment by the State Deputy Minister of Finance, after the Minister of Finance (a member of the SNSD) had refused to release the funds required to procure the new election technology. This was a significant issue as the delay compressed the time available for procurement and implementation of equipment reportedly valued at approximately BAM 100 million (EUR 51 million).

Following the delayed allocation of funds, the CEC BiH launched a public procurement procedure in September 2025. The process was subsequently affected by public controversy and litigation and was not concluded until 18 May 2026, after the elections had been called. This left again a substantially reduced period for the effective introduction of information and communication technologies, including voter education and training for election officials. It also raised concerns about whether the equipment and associated systems could be configured, tested, and deployed adequately before election day, in line with international recommendations. As ODIHR noted in its preliminary findings, the compressed implementation timeline posed challenges for the introduction of the new technology and highlighted the importance of timely preparation to ensure its effective use.[13]

Furthermore, a second line of obstruction against the introduction of the new technologies came from the Council of Ministers of BiH, i.e. the central level government. It failed to approve a revised staffing structure for the CEC BiH. This restricted its ability to expand its administrative capacity in line with its growing responsibilities, including powers introduced or strengthened through amendments to the Election Law imposed by the HR. As a result, the CEC BiH continued to depend on assistance from the international community, particularly the OSCE Mission to BiH and other international organizations, in preparing for and administering the elections. At the same time, the CEC BiH faced a growing caseload and insufficient human resources, contributing to delays in the resolution of election-related complaints and other proceedings.[14] These constraints affected its ability to exercise its responsibilities efficiently and in a timely manner.[15] The ODIHR assessment of the November 2025 early election for President of RS similarly highlighted the strain on the election administration's operational capacity.[16] Its recommendations stressed the need for adequate and predictable funding, sufficient staffing, and sustained operational support between elections. These are longstanding concerns, repeatedly raised in ODIHR reports on elections in BiH.[17]

The Dispute Over the Croat Member in the State Presidency

One of the most persistent and politically contentious disputes surrounding elections in BiH concerns the election of the Croat member of the Presidency. For four mandates (2006–2010, 2010–2014, 2018–2022, and 2022–2026) the position was held by Željko Komšić, leader of the multi-ethnic Democratic Front (DF) and formerly a senior member of the SDP BiH. His repeated election has fueled a long-running dispute over the meaning of political representation in a system that combines individual voting rights with constitutionally defined representation of constituent peoples.

13 ODIHR. (2026, October 5). *Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections, 4 October 2026: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions.* https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/668052.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 ODIHR. (2026, May 15). *Bosnia and Herzegovina: ODIHR final report on the 2025 early election for president of Republika Srpska*, https://odihr.osce.org/news/odihr/664288.
17 ODIHR. (2019, January 25). *Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections, 7 October 2018: Final Report.* https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/389537. ODIHR (2025, February 25). *Bosnia & Herzegovina, Local elections, 6 October 2024: Final Report.* https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/586806, 29; ODIHR. (2023, February 2). *Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections, 2 October 2022: Final Report.* https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/521536.

The HDZ BiH has been arguing that Komšić's election does not provide a legitimate mandate to represent Croats because, in its view, he has been elected primarily with votes from Bosniak voters rather than by a majority of Croat voters. This position has also been promoted by the HDZ Croatia. Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, for example, has declined to meet Komšić in his capacity as a member of the Presidency and has undermined the ECtHR judgement in the *Sejdić and Finci* cases, describing them as "fabricated" and "politically motivated."[18] HDZ BiH argues that, because the Presidency is constitutionally composed of one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb member, each member should enjoy electoral legitimacy grounded in the votes of the respective constituent people.

This argument, however, must be distinguished from the constitutional and legal rules governing the election. Under the existing framework, the Bosniak and Croat members of the Presidency are elected by voters in the FBiH, rather than by separate electorates composed exclusively of Bosniak or Croat voters. The law does not require candidates to obtain a majority of votes from the constituent people with whom the respective seat is associated. Accordingly, the claim that the Croat member must be elected primarily by Croat voters reflects HDZ BiH's interpretation of legitimate political representation, rather than a requirement under the current constitutional and electoral rules.

The Election Campaign: Uninspiring, Uneventful, and Marred by Violations of the Election Law

The election observation coalition "Pod lupom", has assessed the 2026 general elections as the freest and fairest in BiH to date, stating that "systemic election thefts" had been prevented.[19] This assessment does not, however, imply that the electoral process was free of shortcomings, including electoral offences, limited diaspora engagement, and a lack of substantive policy debate and meaningful campaign messages to voters. Thus, the assessment conducted by "Pod lupom" may be valid with regard to election day, but it does not cover the entire electoral process, which extends from the date the elections are called until the election results are officially declared final.

Violations of BiH Election Laws

Following the amendments to the Election Law imposed by HR Schmidt in 2024, which introduced provisions addressing premature campaigning, the misuse of public resources, the political exploitation of children, and the dissemination of false information, the 2026 general elections were the first general elections in which the CEC BiH applied these provisions. The CEC's enforcement record indicates that premature campaigning was the most frequently sanctioned category of electoral violation, while other reported violations included the misuse of public resources, the dissemination of false information, and the political misuse of children.

Table 1: **Cases of Alleged Electoral-Law Violations Recorded by the CEC as of 23 October 2026.**

The offence	Number of registered cases	Number of established violations by CEC BiH	Total sum of fines imposed by CEC BiH
Fake news spreading	23	8	66,000 BAM (ca 33,775 EUR)
Hate speech	31	1	5,000 BAM (ca 2,500 EUR)
Misuses of public funds	165	6	71,500 BAM (ca 36,590 EUR)
Child abuse for political purposes	86	27	235,000 BAM (ca. 120,262 EUR)
Premature election campaign	465	117	826,000 BAM (ca 422,710 EUR)

Source: Author's complilation based on data published by the CEC BiH.

The scale of electoral proceedings placed a substantial burden on the CEC BiH, an election administration already facing staffing and operational constraints. At the same time, concerns persisted regarding the consistency and effectiveness of its enforcement practices. Relatively lenient financial penalties may have limited deterrent effects, particularly for well-funded political parties.[20] Sanctions for disinformation concerning electoral integrity also raised concerns, highlighted by ODIHR, regarding freedom of expression and the need to distinguish harmful disin-

18 n1info.ba. (2024, September 5). *Plenkovic questions European Court rulings in BiH cases, calls them politically motivated and fabricated.* https://n1info.ba/english/news/plenkovic-questions-european-court-rulings-in-bih-cases-calls-them-politically-motivated-and-fabricated/.

19 Pod lupom. (2026, October 5). *Preliminary Assessment of Election Day (2026 General Elections).* https://podlupom.org/posmatranje-izbora/izvjestaji-o-posmatranju-izbora/preliminarni-izvjestaji-o-posmatranju-izbora/preliminarna-ocjena-izbornog-dana-opci-opsti-izbori-2026-godine/.

20 Adrian K., Stephan R. (2026, October 1). *Bosnien und Herzegowina vor den Wahlen am 4. Oktober 2026.* https://www.kas.de/de/web/bosnien-herzegowina/einzeltitel/-/content/bosnien-und-herzegowina-vor-den-wahlen-am-4-oktober-2026

formation from legitimate political criticism of modern electoral technologies, including ballot-scanning systems and biometric identification.[21] As the Constitutional Court of BiH has yet to issue its first ruling on these decisions, the boundaries of permissible political criticism and the constitutional safeguards applicable to such sanctions remain unclear.

The 2026 electoral cycle further exposed gaps in the regulation and sanctioning of the misuse of public resources. A particular concern is the period between the announcement of elections and the formal certification of political parties and candidates, during which politically motivated activities may fall outside the scope of applicable sanctions. Inconsistent treatment compared with previous electoral cycles also raises concerns, particularly where the presentation of government achievements as party successes was sanctioned in earlier cases but reportedly went unpunished in 2026. The use of social media to portray government activities and publicly funded projects as partisan achievements further risks conferring an unfair electoral advantage. Moreover, where sanctions apply only to individuals holding executive office or an elected mandate, other political actors may escape accountability for similar conduct. These shortcomings underscore the need for clearer legal provisions, consistent enforcement, and effective sanctions to protect electoral integrity and the impartial use of public resources.[22]

Messages Sent During the Campaign

Political campaigning during the 2026 elections largely followed established ethnic and political divisions, with parties primarily addressing voters within their own ethnic constituencies rather than reaching across communal lines. This reinforced the ethnic segmentation of political competition and limited opportunities for campaigns to focus on shared policy concerns or build support across ethnic groups. As a result, the campaign did little to challenge the established pattern of competition structured around the three constituent peoples, rather than substantive debate over common policy priorities.[23]

Does the Diaspora Not Care Anymore?

The number of voters registered to vote from abroad has fallen to a record low of just over 48,000, representing a decrease of 38 per cent since 2018. The main reasons for this decline are the complicated voter registration process for citizens living abroad, widespread political disillusionment, and a lack of trust among diaspora communities in BiH's political institutions and electoral process. This low level of registration is particularly striking given that an estimated 1.5 million or more citizens of BiH live abroad, making the country one of those with the highest emigration rates relative to its total population.

In the End

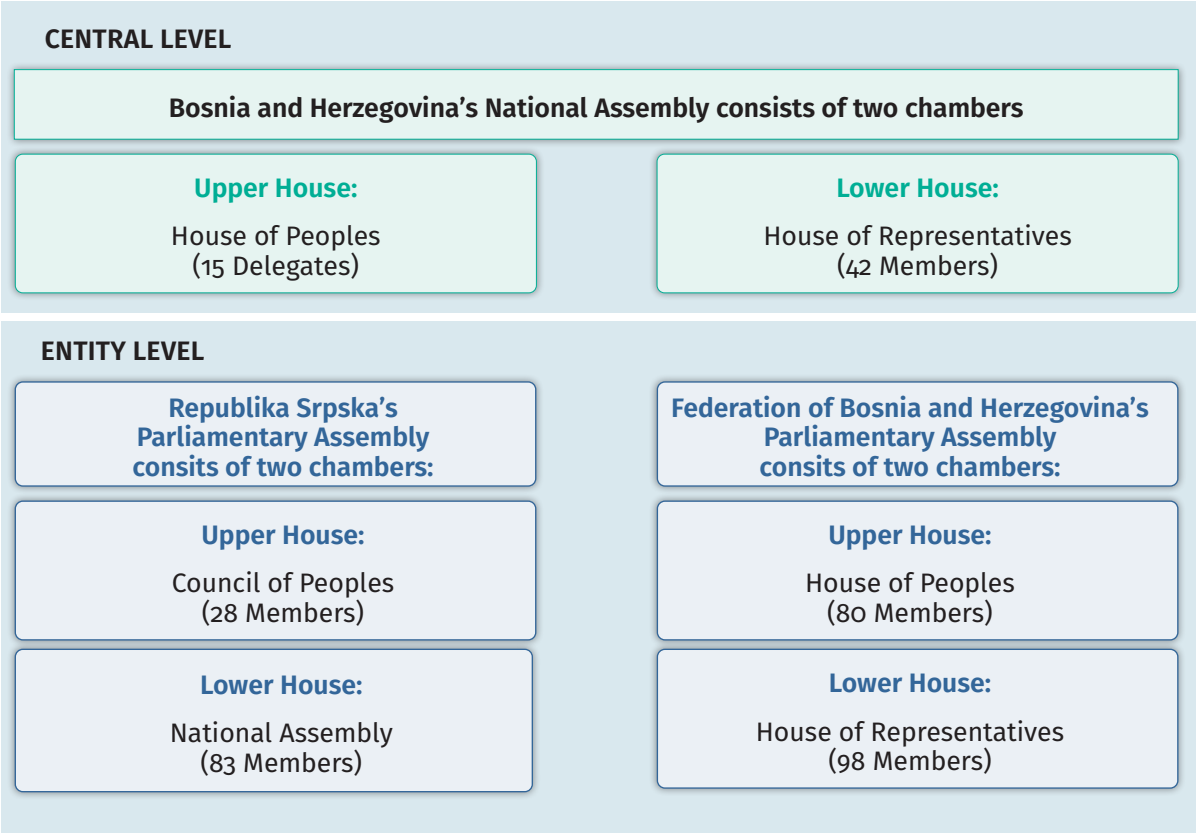
Although election procedures and modern election technologies helped safeguard electoral integrity on election day, further improvements should focus on the pre-election period, when many challenges arise. Legislative reforms, administrative practices, and the work of the CEC BiH should prioritize stronger regulation of electoral campaigning, clearer delineation of the responsibilities of all actors in the electoral process, and more effective detection and investigation of electoral irregularities. This should be complemented by sanctions for violations of electoral rules that are timely, consistently enforced, and sufficiently deterrent.[24]

Winners, Losers, and Others

Assessing the winners, losers, and other political actors after the BiH general election is a difficult task, particularly because the elections covered several levels of government and because the second part of the election cycle – the indirect election – is yet to happen. Furthermore, in BiH, coalition governments are often formed primarily on the basis of political arithmetic and the distribution of power, rather than shared programs, policy priorities, or a common governing agenda.

21 ODIHR. (2026, October 5). *Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections, 4 October 2026: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions.* https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/668052.
22 Ibid.
23 ODIHR. (2026, October 5). *Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections, 4 October 2026: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions.* https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/668052.
24 Pod lupom. (2026, October 5). *Preliminary Assessment of Election Day (2026 General Elections).* https://podlupom.org/posmatranje-izbora/izvjestaji-o-posmatranju-izbora/preliminarni-izvjestaji-o-posmatranju-izbora/preliminarna-ocjena-izbornog-dana-opci-opsti-izbori-2026-godine/.

Figure 1: **Upper and Lower Chambers Standing for Election at the Central and Entity Level**



Milorad Dodik's Continued Dominance in Republika Srpska

Looking first at RS, the results are very clear. Candidates backed by Milorad Dodik's SNSD have won the seat in the central level Presidency, as well as the office of President of RS. SNSD is also the leading party in terms of seats in the entity parliament's lower house, NA RS. Together with its partners, it will most probably hold a two-thirds majority, or close to it. This majority is significant as it is necessary to verify the veto that may be invoked by the Serb member of the Presidency once he/she is outvoted by the other two members. In previous cases, SNSD had to rely on opposition parties to secure the necessary support for the veto to be upheld.

In the upcoming indirect elections, the NA RS elects five Serb delegates to the HoP PA BiH. During the 2022–2026 parliamentary term, SNSD held three of these seats. This gave it enough delegates to prevent the HoP PA BiH from reaching a quorum if its delegates refused to attend, thus giving it the ability to block policies at the central level. The other two seats were held by opposition parties, whose votes, on the other hand, were sufficient to adopt laws in the HoP PA BiH (as long as SNSD members where there for the quorum). Whether Dodik and SNSD will increase their representation among the Serb delegates following the 2026 general elections will depend on the voting strategies and agreements reached by the political parties during the indirect elections.

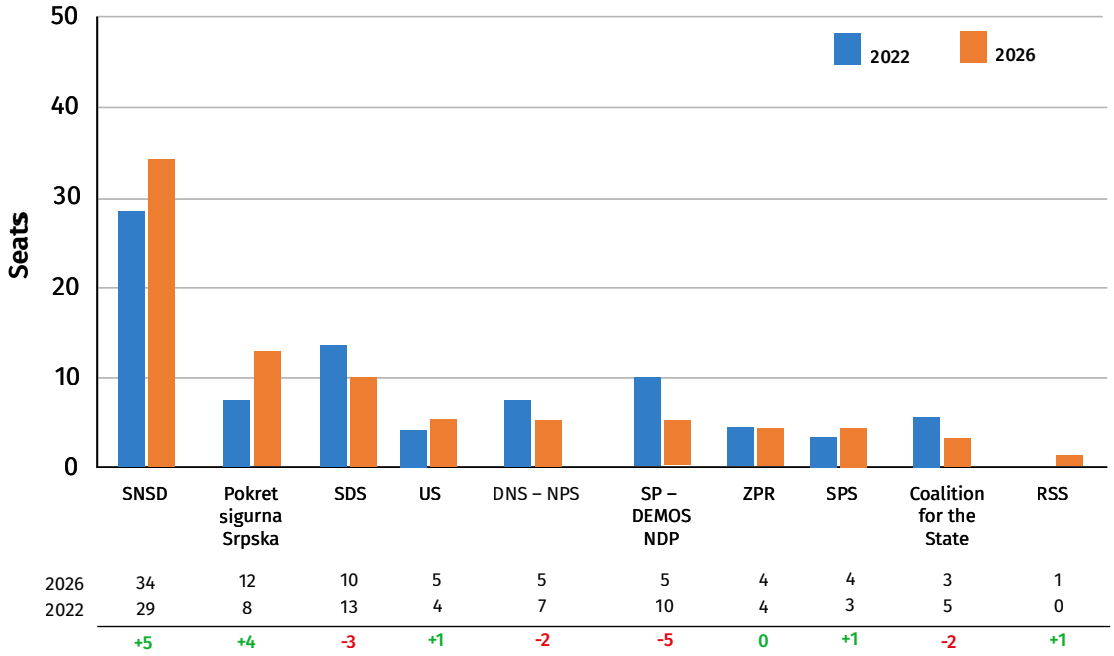
Another important development in the NA RS is the electoral decline of the "Coalition for the State", a pre-election coalition of pro-Bosnian parties. During the 2022–2026 parliamentary term, it held five seats in the NA RS. According to the current results, this number is expected to fall to three. Reasons for this decline are: 1) the fragmentation of the coalition: instead of running on a single list, its component parties presented separate lists, including the Coalition for the State, the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SzBiH), and People and Justice (NiP); 2) and the fact that the diaspora voting for RS (which is mainly composed of populations displaced from the territory of RS during the Bosnian war) has sunken to a record low level, as presented before. For these reasons, for the first time since 1996, pro-Bosnian political parties will fail to have a representative to the central level lower house HoR BiH elected from the RS electoral unit.

This decrease in the number of MPs will affect the ability of pro-Bosnian parties to influence the indirect

election of Serb delegates to the HoP PA BiH. Furthermore, the number of Bosniak delegates to the CoP RS, the upper chamber of the NA RS, elected by the pro-Bosnian political parties will be the same as the number of Bosniak delegates elected by Dodik's SNSD. That would undermine the ability of the Bosniak caucuses to invoke the mechanism for the protection of vital national interests, as well as to initiate proceedings for constitutional review before the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Finally, opposition parties in RS have demonstrated a high degree of fragmentation and a lack of consensus, postponing the nomination of common candidates for key positions – the RS President and the Serb member of the Presidency – until the last moment, following exhausting negotiations. This fragmentation was particularly evident in the race for the Serb member of the Presidency, where the opposition fielded two candidates. Internal divisions within the leading opposition party, SDS, further exacerbated the situation, with one of the party's most influential officials (Ljubiša Petrović, a major of the city Bijeljina, which is a stronghold of SDS) publicly supporting a non-SDS candidate. Additionally, the opposition failed to capitalize on the momentum generated by its candidate, Branko Blanuša, in the 2025 early election for RS President. Having lost by only approximately 9,000 votes, Blanuša appeared to have established a competitive position. However, in the 2026 general elections, less than a year later, the opposition suffered a much wider defeat, with the margin exceeding 80,000 votes.

Figure 2: **Election Results for the Republika Srpska National Assembly (entity level)**



	SNSD	Pokret sigurna Srpska	SDS	US	DNS – NPS	SP – DEMOS NDP	ZPR	SPS	Coalition for the State	RSS
2026	34	12	10	5	5	5	4	4	3	1
2022	29	8	13	4	7	10	4	3	5	0
	+5	+4	-3	+1	-2	-5	0	+1	-2	+1

Source: Author's compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

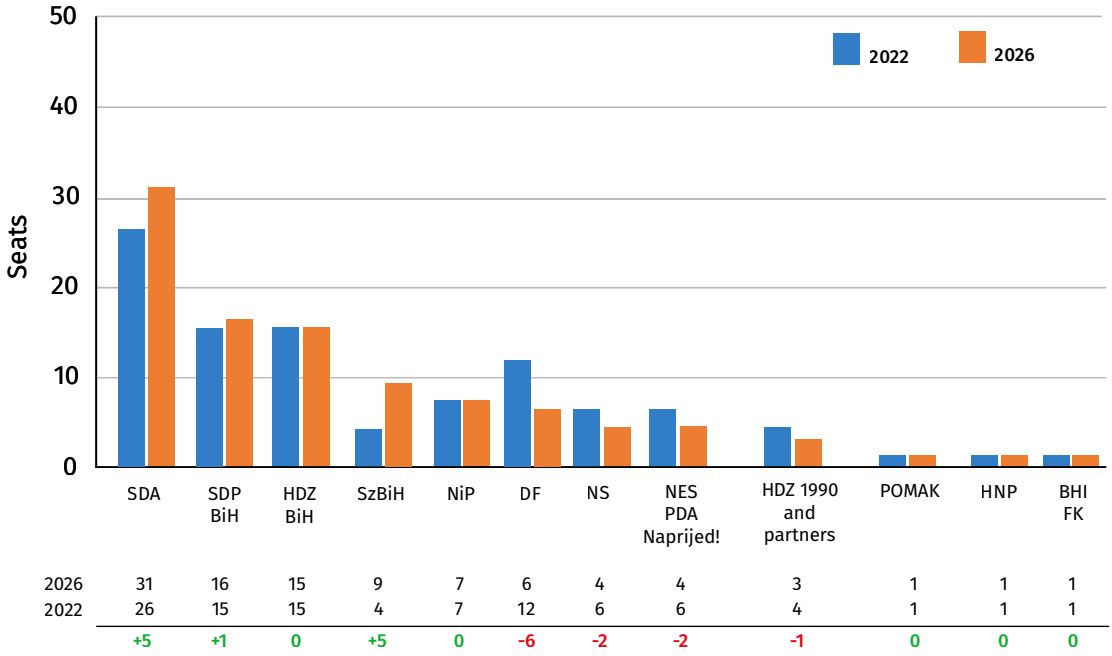
New and old winners in the Federation of BiH: SDA and HDZ BiH

The results of elections for the HoR FBiH indicate a clear electoral winner, SDA, which also emerged as the leading party in six cantonal assemblies, while HDZ BiH came first in four cantons, largely reflecting the distribution of electoral support across areas with different ethnic compositions.

However, identifying an overall political winner in the FBiH remains difficult, as the indirect elections to the HoP FBiH have yet to take place. The HoP FBiH plays an important role alongside the HoR FBiH in the legislative process and is also central to the formation of the entity's executive. The President and two Vice-Presidents of the FBiH are elected through a procedure involving both parliamentary houses, while the formation of the government depends on subsequent constitutional steps.

These indirect elections are difficult to predict because parties may pursue different strategies when nominating and electing delegates. In some cases, even a tie between candidates may be resolved by drawing lots, meaning that a seemingly minor difference in the allocation of seats can affect the eventual composi-

Figure 3: **Election Results for the House of Representatives of the Federation of BiH (entity level)**



	SDA	SDP BiH	HDZ BiH	SzBiH	NiP	DF	NS	NES PDA Naprijed!	HDZ 1990 and partners	POMAK	HNP	BHI FK
2026	31	16	15	9	7	6	4	4	3	1	1	1
2022	26	15	15	4	7	12	6	6	4	1	1	1
	+5	+1	0	+5	0	-6	-2	-2	-1	0	0	0

Source: Author's compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

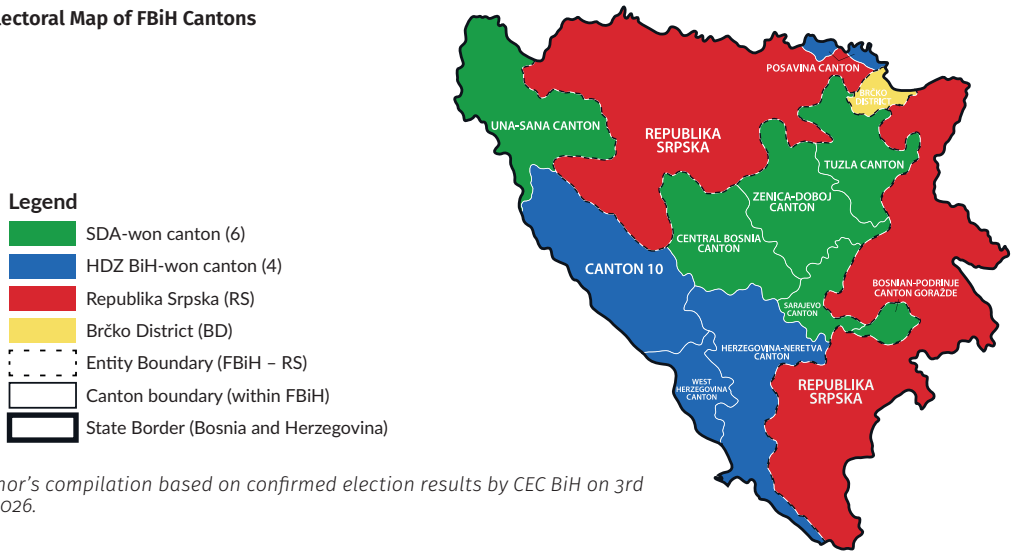
tion of the HoP FBiH. The consequences extend beyond the entity level: the Bosniak and Croat caucuses in the HoP FBiH each elect five delegates to the corresponding Bosniak and Croat caucuses in the state-level HoP PA BiH. The outcome of the indirect elections will therefore also influence the balance of political power at the state level.

The general elections have also confirmed the continued dominance of HDZ BiH in municipalities and cantons with predominantly Croat populations. The opposition coalition known as the "Croatian Five" failed to make significant gains, and its candidate for the Presidency came third.

The most significant political contest in the run-up to the general elections took place in the Bosniak-majority cantons of the FBiH: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Una-Sana, Bosnian-Podrinje (Goražde), Zenica-Doboj, and Central Bosnia (coloured green on the electoral map of figure 4).

On one side were the political parties that had formed the ruling coalition known as "Trojka" during the 2022–2026 term: the SDP BiH, NiP, and Our Party (Naša stranka, NS). Despite their differing ideological orientations – from NiP's center-right position to the social-democratic orientation of SDP BiH and the liberal orientation of NS – the parties established a political alliance based primarily on their opposition

Figure 4: **Electoral Map of FBiH Cantons**



Source: Author's compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

to SDA. The coalition first emerged in Sarajevo Canton in 2018, challenging the SDA's longstanding political dominance, before extending its influence to the entity and state levels following the 2022 general elections. The Trojka parties subsequently participated in governments at both levels during the 2022–2026 period. Although they had governed together, the parties contested the elections separately, reflecting the distinction between their previous cooperation in government and their competition for electoral support.

On the other side of the Trojka-led government was an emerging political alignment centered on SDA, SzBiH, and the Democratic Front (DF), commonly referred to as the "Alternative Trojka." SzBiH was among the most notable electoral surprises, increasing both its vote share and the number of seats won. These gains strengthened its position within the emerging opposition bloc and contributed to the realignment of political forces in the FBiH.

Across all six Bosniak-majority cantons, opposition parties led by the SDA secured a majority of seats and began negotiations on forming new cantonal governments. However, in some cantons, these majorities were narrow, as illustrated by Sarajevo Canton. The limited margins highlight the closely contested nature of the elections and the political tensions between the two competing blocs. The resulting distribution of seats also suggests that government formation will depend not only on electoral performance but also on the ability of opposition parties to maintain their alliances and reach agreements on the composition of the new cantonal administrations, as well as to prevent any political defections.

The election results also demonstrate the continued, although limited, presence of smaller, locally rooted political parties. The Movement for Modern and Active Krajina (POMAK), a party originating in the northwestern Krajina region (Una-Sana Canton); the Croatian National Movement (HNP) (Western-Herzegovina Canton), associated with the southern town of Tomislavgrad; and the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Initiative (BHI FK), which is primarily active in the city of Zenica (Zenica-Doboj Canton), each secured one seat.

State level elections

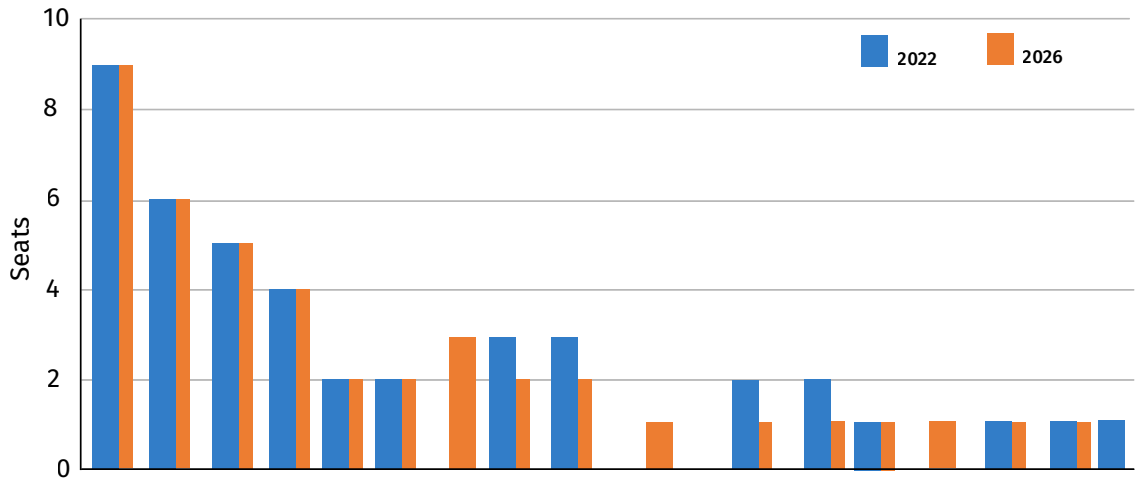
At the state level, the results for the lower house, HoR PA BiH, reflect the electoral strength of SDA in the FBiH and SNSD in RS. However, an important factor is that opposition parties from RS collectively hold five seats, the minimum number needed to meet the entity-representation requirement for decision-making in the PA BiH. This creates the possibility of forming a parliamentary majority and passing legislation without SNSD, making it possible, at least in principle, to bypass the SNSD when forming a state-level government.

This possibility is particularly significant given SNSD's political agenda, including its challenges to the authority and functioning of state-level institutions, its advocacy of greater autonomy for RS – including calls for its independence – and its obstruction of aspects of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration process. Nevertheless, forming a majority without SNSD would not necessarily guarantee effective decision-making across all state institutions.

The risk lies in the indirect elections to the HoP PA BiH, which will be crucial in determining the subsequent balance of power. The HoP PA BiH requires the presence of at least three delegates from each of its three constituent-people caucuses to establish a quorum. Consequently, the distribution of delegates may enable political parties to obstruct proceedings by withholding the attendance of a sufficient number of delegates from one caucus – a power that SNSD would be able to wield, as already mentioned above. This creates a strategic dilemma for parties seeking to form the state-level government: should they establish a government without SNSD, accepting the risk that SNSD and its allies could obstruct decision-making in the HoP PA BiH, or include SNSD in the governing coalition, while still facing the possibility of blockades in the parliamentary process? The outcome of the indirect elections and the subsequent distribution of delegates will be central to determining the extent of this risk. In order to consider the risk, it is interesting to take a look at the 2014–2018 parliamentary term, when the state-level government was formed without SNSD: during that period, it was able to function, although SNSD and its partners held three seats in the Serb caucuses of the HoP PA BiH.

The results for the three-person Presidency, the country's collective head of state, have also confirmed continuity among two of its three members while bringing a change in the Croat seat. The elected members are Željka Cvijanović of SNSD, Darijana Filipović of HDZ BiH, and Denis Bećirović of SDP BiH. Cvijanović and Bećirović have both secured a second term as members of the Presidency, while Filipović's election marks the return of an HDZ BiH candidate to the Croat seat for the first time since 2014. The sitting

Figure 5: **Election Results for the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina (central level)**



	SDA	SNSD	SDP	HDZ BiH	PSS	SDS	SBiH	NIP	DF/GS	Hrvatska petorka	Za evropsku BiH zajedno	NS	ZPR	DNS-NPS	SP-DEMOS	US	BHI FK
2026	9	6	5	4	2	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
2022	9	6	5	4	2	2	0	3	3	0	2	2	1	0	1	1	1
	0	0	0	0	0	0	+3	-1	-1	+1	-1	-1	0	+1	0	0	-1

Source: Author's compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026..

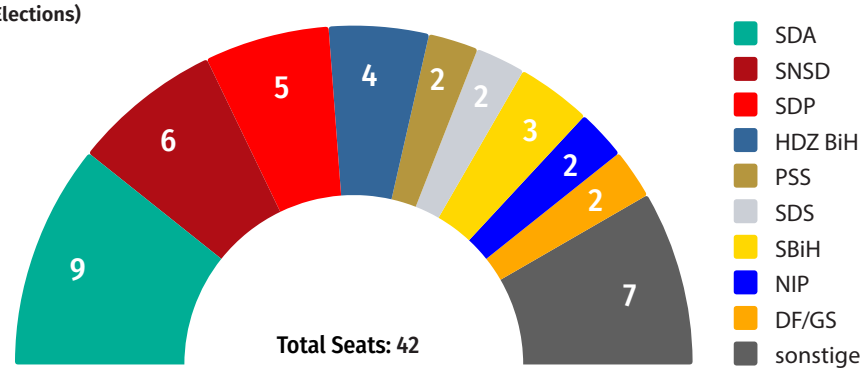
Croat Presidency member, Željko Komšić, could not run again, following his two consecutive terms.

Of particular interest was the race for the Bosniak member of the Presidency, for two reasons. First, the two leading candidates who had contested the position in 2022 faced each other again: Bakir Izetbegović, president of the SDA, the country's most powerful Bosniak party, and Denis Bećirović, the incumbent Presidency member running with the support of a coalition of 14 political parties. In 2022, Bećirović defeated Izetbegović by approximately 116,000 votes, a margin of around 20 percentage points. Despite this defeat, Izetbegović retained the SDA leadership, notwithstanding calls from outside the party for him to reconsider his position and due to the absence of an effective internal challenge to his authority.

Second, the 2026 election saw the emergence of a third credible contender, Semir Efendić, president of the opposition party SzBiH. Efendić positioned himself as an alternative for voters dissatisfied with Izetbegović's leadership of the SDA, as well as for voters disillusioned with the Trojka coalition, whose candidate they had supported in 2022. The results reflected a considerably more competitive race: Bećirović's lead over Izetbegović narrowed to approximately 23,000 votes, or less than four percentage points, while Efendić finished third with almost 150,000 votes.

According to media reports, Izetbegović, aware of Efendić's electoral potential, offered him the position of Chair of the Council of Ministers of BiH in exchange for withdrawing his candidacy and supporting Izetbegović. Efendić reportedly rejected the offer and

Figure 6: **Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH by Electoral Formation (2026 Elections)**



Source: Author's complilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

proceeded with his campaign, apparently recognizing that a Presidency bid could also increase his personal visibility and strengthen his party electorally.

Although Izetbegović lost the Presidency race for a second consecutive time, he again rejects calls to step down as SDA president. This outcome was particularly notable given that he received more than 50,000 fewer votes than the SDA obtained in the elections for the HoR PA BiH.

Women as Winners: A Historic Step Forward For Women's Political Representation

Following the publication of the final results of the 2026 General Elections by the CEC BiH, BiH has recorded encouraging progress in women's political representation, with 176 women elected across the country's legislative bodies, representing 34% of all elected representatives. This marks an important step forward in advancing women's participation in political decision-making. Women's representation has increased across all three parliamentary levels, reaching 23.81% in the HoR PA BiH, 30.61% in the HoR FBiH, and 26.51% in the NA RS. Progress is also evident at the cantonal level, where women's representation has reached 38.54%, with several cantons meeting or exceeding the Council of Europe's 40% benchmark, including Sarajevo (42.8%), Central Bosnia (43.33%), Una-Sana and Tuzla (40%). Furthermore, women hold two of the three seats in the tripartite Presidency, marking a significant milestone in women's representation at the highest level of political leadership.

Looking Ahead: Indirect Elections and Government Formation – Can It Get Any More Complicated?

Indirect Elections to Follow

Cantonal governments are generally the first to be formed following elections. Their formation will depend on the composition of the cantonal assemblies and subsequent negotiations among political parties. Based on the direct election results, the SDA is positioned to lead government formation in six cantons, while HDZ BiH is positioned to do so in four, reinforcing their established positions in cantons where they traditionally enjoy strong electoral support.

The most significant political change is expected in Sarajevo Canton, where the Trojka coalition – comprising NiP, NS and SDP BiH – lost its parliamentary majority by a single MP, after eight years in which its constituent parties played a leading role in governing the canton. The results open the way for an alternative governing arrangement lead by SDA and composed of SzBiH and DF.

Once the results of the direct elections are confirmed, deadlines for constituting the cantonal assemblies and entity-level parliaments will come into effect. Members of the cantonal assemblies will then participate in indirect elections to the entity-level upper-house HoP FBiH and subsequently in the selection of Bosniak and Croat delegates to the state-level upper-house HoP PA BiH. In RS, the NA RS will elect delegates to the entity-level upper-house Council of Peoples of RS and the Serb delegates to the central level upper-house HoP PA BiH.

The primary focus at the entity level will be the constitution of the HoP FBiH, whose constituent-peoples caucuses play a key role in nominating candidates for the FBiH President and two Vice-Presidents. Its composition is therefore central to the subsequent formation of the FBiH Government. Based on the election results, the SDA is expected to dominate the Bosniak caucus and HDZ BiH the Croat caucus, while the distribution of Serb delegates will be more fragmented, including representation from parties such as SDP BiH, SNSD, and HDZ BiH. The composition of the House, particularly the distribution of delegates among the three caucuses, will influence the available options for forming the entity executive.

Government Formation at the Entity and State Levels

The most likely governing arrangement at the entity level in the FBiH would bring together SDA, HDZ BiH, SzBiH, and DF. These parties are expected to command a stable majority in both houses of the FBiH Parliament. On the other hand, the possibility of forming a government without HDZ BiH will depend, in particular, on the final composition of the HoP FBiH and the resulting distribution of political influence within its constituent-people's caucuses.

In RS, the most credible scenario is the continuation of an SNSD-led government. The RS President elected on the SNSD ticket is expected to nominate a candidate for entity prime minister, while SNSD and its partners from the 2022–2026 parliamentary term are projected to retain the necessary majority in the NA RS. Their combined strength has the potential to approach a two-thirds majority, with approximately 56 of the 83 seats.

The formation of the state-level government, the Council of Ministers of BiH, is more complex, and three

possible scenarios merit consideration. Under the constitutional procedure, the Presidency appoints the Chair of the Council of Ministers, i.e. BiH's head of government, by a majority vote; consensus is not required. The appointment must then be confirmed by the lower-chamber HoR PA BiH. Following confirmation, the Chair nominates the ministers and deputy ministers, whose appointments must also be approved by the HoR PA BiH. The upper-chamber HoP PA BiH has no formal role in this appointment procedure. Consequently, the formation of the state-level government will depend primarily on the composition of the Presidency and the distribution of political forces in the HoR PA BiH, rather than on the balance of power in the state-level HoP PA BiH. Nevertheless, the HoP remains essential to the legislative process, including the adoption of legislation and the state budget. The dilemma is whether, despite having no formal role in appointing the Council of Ministers, the composition of the HoP PA BiH should nevertheless be considered when assessing potential government arrangements, given that the absence of at least three delegates representing any one constituent people could prevent the House from reaching a quorum and thereby obstruct its work, including the adoption of legislation and the state budget.

Scenario 1: Formation of a State-Level Government without SNSD

Under the first scenario, a state-level government would be formed without SNSD. The governing coalition would include SDA, HDZ BiH, SBiH, DF, and SDP BiH from the FBiH, alongside the opposition parties from RS: SDS, the Movement Safe Srpska, and the For Justice and Order movement. Under this arrangement, the Chair of the Council of Ministers would be appointed by a majority of the Presidency of BiH, with the votes of Denis Bećirović (SDP BiH) and Darijana Filipović (HDZ BiH) and subsequently confirmed by the HoR PA BiH.

Unlike in a more conventional government-formation process, in which coalition parties seek to secure a majority in both houses of parliament, this scenario does not prioritize securing a reliable majority in the HoP PA BiH. The reason is straightforward: there is no guarantee that, if SNSD were included in the governing majority, it would honor the coalition agreement, support the EU Integration of the country, proposed legislation and the state budget, or – most importantly – refrain from obstructing decision-making in the HoP PA BiH, as it did throughout 2025 and 2026. The underlying logic is therefore that, in the absence of credible guarantees that SNSD would act as a reliable coalition partner and implement the agreed government program, there would be little reason to grant it seats in the Council of Ministers, where it could obstruct the government's work from within.

From this perspective, the precise distribution of seats in the Serb caucus of the HoP PA BiH – whether SNSD secured all five delegates, four, or three – would be less decisive than the parties' willingness to participate constructively in parliamentary decision-making. In particular, if SNSD held three seats and the RS opposition parties held the remaining two, it could make the adoption of legislation in the HoP PA BiH possible, provided that the necessary quorum and other applicable voting requirements were met. Again, three SNSD affiliated Serb delegates could prevent the House from functioning by denying a quorum.

A major challenge to this scenario would be whether HDZ BiH would agree to exclude SNSD from the state-level governing coalition. HDZ BiH has maintained a close political relationship with SNSD and has repeatedly treated it as a key partner. The two parties continued their cooperation during the serious constitutional and institutional crisis of 2024, when actions by the RS leadership raised concerns about BiH's territorial integrity and institutional stability. Whether HDZ BiH would be willing to break with SNSD at the state level would therefore be a central political question. More specifically, it remains to be seen whether other political actors in the FBiH, as well as political actors in neighboring Croatia could exert sufficient pressure on HDZ BiH to change course. A second factor that might exert pressure on HDZ BiH is the European People's Party (EPP), to which SDA, HDZ BiH, SDS, and PDP belong, with the latter two being in opposition to SNSD. In June 2026, all these political parties, together with HDZ 1990, signed the EPP-backed Declaration on the European Path of Bosnia and Herzegovina, committing themselves to "trust and cooperation."[25] It remains to be seen whether, and how, the EPP will hold its member parties from BiH accountable for the commitments they undertook just five months ago.

Scenario 2: Formation of a State-Level Government Including SNSD

Under the second scenario, the state-level government would be formed by SDA, HDZ BiH, SBiH, and DF from the FBiH, together with SNSD from RS. SDP BiH would

25 *Joint Declaration Of the EPP-Affiliated Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina on European Values and Integration, Identity, the Social Market Economy, and the Rule of Law*, https://www.epp.eu/papers/joint-declaration.

remain outside the governing coalition. In this arrangement, the Chair of the Council of Ministers could be appointed with the support of the SNSD and HDZ BiH members of the Presidency, subject to confirmation by the HoR Pa BiH. The participating parties would secure sufficient support in both parliamentary chambers to pass legislation and establish the government.

However, including SNSD in the governing coalition would not necessarily ensure stable decision-making. The party could still obstruct legislative and appointment proceedings in the HoP PA BiH, while its participation in the Council of Ministers could also affect the appointment of officials and the government's ability to carry out its responsibilities with regards to EU integration. The principal distinction between this scenario and the first is therefore not the elimination of the risk of institutional obstruction, but the inclusion of SNSD in the executive and the political concessions that this might entail.

Scenario 3: Formation of a Broad Coalition Including All RS Parties

Under the third scenario, a state-level government would be formed by SDA, HDZ BiH, SBiH, and DF from the FBiH, together with all the political parties from RS represented in the HoR PA BiH and the HoP PA BiH following the indirect elections.

Dodik has recently called for unity among Republika Srpska's political parties in state-level institutions, including the PA BiH.[26] The proposal has received support from the former leader of the SDS, although not all RS opposition parties have publicly stated their position. It remains to be seen whether these parties would be willing to join such an arrangement and, if so, what conditions they would attach to their participation. Such a coalition could also raise questions about public trust in the RS opposition and its ability to maintain a distinct political identity and offer a credible alternative to Dodik's leadership. In particular, participation in the initiative could affect how opposition parties are perceived by voters and their capacity to challenge the ruling political establishment in future elections.

HDZ BiH as the Constant Factor

Across all three scenarios, HDZ BiH appears to be a pivotal actor in the negotiations over the formation of the state-level government. The party has repeatedly reaffirmed its political cooperation with SNSD, and their relationship has proved durable through several periods of institutional tension. This makes the second scenario – a government including SNSD – a plausible possibility, although the final outcome will depend on the results of the negotiations among the political actors in FBiH.

It is therefore too early to determine which scenario will prevail. The indirect elections will establish the parliamentary arithmetic, but political decisions by the parties will determine how that arithmetic is translated into a governing coalition. Even after a government is formed, the question of whether it can operate effectively and avoid institutional blockades will remain unresolved.

Conclusion: Any Lessons to be Learned?

The 2026 election results once again highlighted the uneven distribution of political pluralism across BiH. In cantons with a Bosniak majority, voters have demonstrated a greater willingness to punish parties that fail to deliver on their election promises (political parties of the ruling Trojka coalition – NiP, NS and SDP BiH), reconsider their political allegiances, and reward alternative political forces (SDA, SzBiH, DF). This has created a more competitive political environment in which governing parties cannot take continued voter support for granted. By contrast, in RS and in cantons with a Croat majority, the dominance of the respective nationalist parties – SNSD and HDZ BiH – remains largely undisputed. Although the political dynamics in these areas are not identical, both continue to be characterized by the strong electoral position of parties that claim to represent the interests of their respective constituent peoples.

Multi-ethnic political parties have so far struggled to establish a meaningful electoral presence in RS and in cantons with a Croat majority, with SDP BiH maintaining a presence in certain municipalities but remaining limited in its overall reach. This imbalance has consequences beyond electoral competition alone. If BiH is to strengthen social ties, rebuild trust between its communities, and overcome entrenched political divisions, multi-ethnic parties will need to expand their political presence beyond cantons with a

26 6yka.com. (2026, October 12). *Evo kada Republika Srpska dobija novu Vladu i budžet: Dodik otkrio planove i uputio iznenadan poziv opoziciji! [Here is when Republika Srpska will get a new Government and budget: Dodik reveals plans and extends a surprise invitation to the opposition!].* https://6yka.com/bih/evo-kada-republika-srpska-dobija-novu-vladu-i-budzet-dodik-otkrio-planove-i-uputio-iznena-dan-poziv-opoziciji/.

Bosniak majority. This requires more than presenting themselves as alternatives to nationalist parties: they must develop credible local structures, engage with voters' everyday concerns, and demonstrate that their political programs can represent citizens across ethnic and territorial lines. Without a broader social and electoral base, their capacity to challenge established nationalist parties and contribute to a more integrated political system will remain limited.

Political pluralism must also be accompanied by stronger intra-party democracy and greater accountability within political parties themselves. The response of party leaders to the 2026 election results offers a useful illustration of the differences in political accountability. The leader of NS, Sabina Ćudić, resigned shortly after election day, taking responsibility for the party's performance. In contrast, Bakir Izetbegović, the leader of SDA, did not step down, despite suffering a second consecutive defeat in the race for the Bosniak seat in the Presidency. These contrasting responses raise a broader question of inter-party democracy and accountability as well as disparity in democratic culture.

Leadership accountability, however, is only one dimension of intra-party democracy. The ability of party members and voters to influence candidate selection is equally important. The electoral amendments introduced by the former HR, Christian Schmidt, changed the rules governing candidate lists and the allocation of preference votes. In practice, these changes may have made it more difficult for candidates placed lower on party lists to overtake those ranked higher, increasing the importance of the initial list order determined by party leadership. This can reinforce the power of party elites over candidate selection and weaken the connection between individual candidates and their electorate. In this context, stronger intra-party democracy is essential to ensure that candidate selection is transparent, and that party members have a meaningful voice.

The experience of the 2022–2026 mandate also raises a fundamental question for the formation of the next state-level government: what would be the political rationale for including SNSD in the governing coalition without credible guarantees that it would respect the coalition agreement and refrain from obstructing state institutions? During the previous mandate, SNSD repeatedly used its position within state-level institutions to obstruct decision-making and exert political pressure, not only in the HoP PA BiH but also in the Council of Ministers of BiH. Its inclusion in the next Council of Ministers would therefore not, in itself, guarantee political stability or effective governance. On the contrary, if SNSD were to continue using institutional participation as leverage for blockades, its presence in the executive could provide it with an additional means of obstructing the work of state institutions from within. Given SNSD's close political alignment with Russia as well as Dodik's ties with Putin, its obstructionist approach also has implications for Bosnia and Herzegovina's Euro-Atlantic orientation and its progress towards EU and NATO membership.

The experience of the 2014–2018 mandate offers a relevant, although not conclusive, point of comparison. During that period, SNSD was excluded from the state-level governing coalition, while BiH made progress in its European integration process and experienced a comparatively less confrontational political environment at the state level. During the 2014–2018 parliamentary mandate, SNSD and its political partner DNS held three of the five Serb seats in the HoP PA BiH, giving them the capacity to prevent the House from reaching a quorum. Although they briefly exercised this leverage in March 2015, when a boycott prevented the House from convening, the obstruction was short-lived.[27] This suggests that, while the composition of the Serb caucus can create a risk of institutional paralysis, the extent to which that risk materializes depends on the political decisions of the parties concerned. This does not mean that excluding SNSD would automatically resolve the country's institutional problems or guarantee more effective governance. Nevertheless, it challenges the assumption that SNSD's participation in the Council of Ministers is indispensable for political stability. The central question for the parties negotiating the next coalition should therefore not be whether SNSD must be included, but whether its participation would help the government deliver on its program – or instead give it another institutional platform from which to obstruct decision-making.

Ultimately, BiH faces three interconnected challenges. The first is to broaden political pluralism by encouraging multi-ethnic parties to establish a stronger

27 OHR. (2015, May 11). *47th Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.* https://www.ohr.int/47th-report-of-the-high-representative-for-implementation-of-the-peace-agreement-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-to-the-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations/

presence across the country, including in areas where nationalist parties remain dominant. The second is to strengthen intra-party democracy and leadership accountability, ensuring that party membership can pursue political liability of its leadership, and that party members have a meaningful influence over candidate selection as well as government coalition choices. The third is to form a state-level government capable of functioning effectively, implementing its commitments, and advancing EU and NATO integration.

More than thirty years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the country should be consolidating its democratic institutions, advancing towards Euro-Atlantic integration, and catching up with its regional neighbours. Instead, it continues to struggle to establish a stable and functional political system, overcome entrenched ethnic and political divisions, and counter malign Russian political influence. The persistence of institutional blockades, the dominance of nationalist political structures, and the limited accountability of political leaders raise serious questions about the country's ability to move forward. The 2026 elections have not, by themselves, provided a clear indication that this trajectory will change. Ultimately, progress will depend on whether Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders are willing to put institutional functionality and the country's strategic objectives ahead of narrow party or ethnic interests. Without such a shift, the prospect of EU and NATO integration risks remaining a formal foreign policy ambition rather than a tangible political reality.

Appendix

Table 2: **Election Results for the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (central level)**

Party Acronym	Political party/list full name	Number of seats won in 2026	Number of seats won in 2022	Seat Change
SDA	Stranka demokratske akcije/ Party of Democratic Action	9	9	0
SNSD	Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata/ Alliance of Independent Social Democrats	6	6	0
SDP	Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine/ Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina	5	5	0
HDZ BiH	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH (i partneri: HSP BIH, HKDU, HSP AS, HDU, HSP HB, HRAST)/ Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and partners)	4	4	0
PSS	Pokret sigurna Srpska/ Safe Srpska Movment	2	2	0
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka/ Serb Democratic Party	2	2	0
SBiH	Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu/ Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina	3	0	3
NIP	Narod i pravda/ People and Justice	2	3	-1
DF/GS	Demokratska fronta/Građanski savez / Democratic Front/Civil Union	2	3	-1
Hrvatska petorka	Hrvatska petorka (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica 1990, HRS, HNP, HDS i HSS)/ Coalition "Croatian Five" (Croatian Democratic Union 1990 and partners)	1	0	1
Za evropsku BiH zajedno	Narodni evropski savez BiH, Partija demokratskog progresa, Naprijed – za evropsku BiH zajedno/ Independent European Alliance of BiH, Party of Democratic Activity, and FORWARD! – Together for a European Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	2	-1
NS	Naša stranka/ Our Party	1	2	-1
ZPR	Za pravdu i red/ For Justice and Order	1	1	0
DNS-NPS	Demokratski narodni savez – Narodna partija Srpske/ Democratic peoples' alliance – Peples' Party of Srpska	1	0	1
SP-DEMOS	Socijalistička partija Srpske Petar Đokić - Demokratski savez/ Socialistic party - Democratic Union	1	1	0
US	Ujedinjena Srpska/ United Srpska	1	1	0
BHI - FK	Bosansko-hercegovačka inicijativa – Fuad Kasumović/ Bosnian-Herzegovinian Initiative – Fuad Kasumović	0	1	-1

Source: Authors compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

Table 3: **Election Results for the Republika Srpska National Assembly (entity level)**

Party Acronym	Political party/list full name	Number of seats won in 2026	Number of seats won in 2022	Seat Change
SNSD	Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata/ Alliance of Independent Social Democrat	34	29	+5
-	Pokret sigurna Srpska/ Movement Safe Srpska	12	8	+4
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka/ Serb Democratic Party	10	13	-3
US	Ujedinjena Srpska/ United Srpska	5	4	+1
DNS – NPS	Demokratski narodni savez – Narodna partija Srpske/ Democratic People's Alliance – People's Party of Srpska	5	7	-2
SP – DEMOS - NDP	Socijalistička partija – DEMOS – NDP/ Socialist Party – DEMOS – NDP	5	10	-5
ZPR	Lista za pravdu i red/ For Justice and Order	4	4	0
SPS	Socijalistička partija Srpske – Pokret Ujedinjena Srpska/ Socialist Party of Srpska – Movement United Srpska	4	3	+1
-	Koaliacija za državu/ Coalition for the State	3	5	-2
RSS	Republička partija Srpske/ Republican Party of Srpska	1	0	+1

Source: Authors compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

Table 4: **Election Results for the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of BiH (entity level)**

Party Acronym	Political party/list full name	Number of seats won in 2026	Number of seats won in 2022	Seat Change
SDA	Stranka demokratske akcije/ Party of Democratic Action	31	26	+5
SDP BiH	Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine/ Social Democratic Party of BiH	16	15	+1
HDZ BiH	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine/ Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina	15	15	0
SzBiH	Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu/ Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina	9	4	+5
NiP	Narod i pravda/ People and Justice	7	7	0
DF	Demokratska fronta/ Democratic Front	6	12	-6
NS	Naša stranka/ Our Party	4	6	-2
NES, PDA, Naprijed!	Koalicija za evropsku BiH zajedno	4	6	-2
HDZ 1990 and partners	Koalicija "Hrvatska petorka"/ Coalition "Croatian Five"	3	4	-1
POMAK	Pokret za modernu i aktivnu Krajinu/ Movement for modern and active Krajina	1	1	0
HNP	Hrvatski naconalni pomak/ Croatian national movement	1	1	0
BHI FK	Bosanskohercegovačka inicijativa/ Bosnian and Herzegovinian Initiative	1	1	0

Source: Authors compilation based on confirmed election results by CEC BiH on 3rd November 2026.

List of Acronyms

BAM	Bosanska konvertibilna marka / Bosnian convertible mark (currency of BiH)
BHI FK	Bosanskohercegovačka inicijativa / Bosnian and Herzegovinian Initiative
BiH	Bosna i Hercegovina / Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEC BiH	Centralna izborna komisija BiH / Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina
CoP RS	Vijeće naroda Republike Srpske / Council of Peoples of Republika Srpska
DF	Demokratska fronta / Democratic Front
DNS	Demokratski narodni savez / Democratic People's Alliance
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EPP	European People's Party
FBiH	Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine / Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
HDZ	1990 Hrvatska demokratska zajednica / Croatian Democratic Union 1990
HDZ BiH	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH / Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina
HNP	Hrvatski nacionalni pomak / Croatian National Movement
HoP PA BiH	HDom naroda Parlamentarne skupštine BiH / House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH
HoR FBiH	Zastupnički dom Parlamenta Federacije BiH / House of Representatives of the Parliament of Federation of BiH
HoR PA BiH	Predstavnički dom Parlamentarna skupštine BiH / House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH
HR	High Representative
NA RS	Narodna skupština Republike Srpske / National Assembly of Republika Srpska
NDP	Narodni demokratski pokret / National Democratic Movement
NES	Narodni evropski savez / People's European Union
NiP	Narod i pravda / People and Justice
NPS	Narodna partija Srpske / People's Party of Srpska
NS	Naša stranka / Our Party
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PA BiH	Parlamentarna skupštine BiH / Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
PDA	Pokret demokratske akcije / Movement of Democratic Action
PDP	Partija demokratskog progresa / Party of Democratic Progress
POMAK	Pokret za modernu i aktivnu Krajinu / Movement for Modern and Active Krajina
RS	Republika Srpska
RSS	Republikanska stranka Srpske / Republican Party of Srpska
SDA	Stranka demokratske akcije / Party of Democratic Action
SDP BiH	Socijaldemokratska partija BiH / Social Democratic Party of BiH
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka / Serb Democratic Party
SNSD	Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata / Alliance of Independent Social Democrats
SP	Socijalistička partija / Socialist Party
SPS	Socijalistička partija Srpske / Socialist Party of Srpska
SzBiH	Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu / Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina
US	Ujedinjena Srpska / United Srpska
ZPR	Lista za pravdu i red / For Justice and Order