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ELECTORAL VULNERABILITY INDEX 2025-2026

COUNTRY ANALYSIS

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

GENERAL ELECTIONS: EXPECTED BY OCTOBER 2026



BACKGROUND

The political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unique. The Dayton Accords, which marked the end of the Bosnian War, created a position of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, who holds ultimate political authority in the Country, with the power to fire Bosnian officials. National Executive power lies in the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which consists of three members- one Croat, one Bosnian, and one Serb- who collectively serve as Head of State, rotating in the position of Chair of the Presidency every eight months for a four-year term. The other executive Body is the **Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina (or Cabinet)**, chaired by a Prime Minister who is appointed by the Presidency and who appoints Cabinet members.

The main Legislative Body is the Parliamentary Assembly, consisting of two Chambers- the House of Representatives, whose 42 members are elected by proportional representation in each main ethnic group, and the House of Peoples, whose 15 members are appointed by the parliaments of the two political entities into which the country was divided in the Dayton Accords – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska.

State elections are managed by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), which also oversees the Municipal Electoral Commissions (MEC). The CEC and MECs largely enjoy the confidence of voters, managing previous elections efficiently and professionally.

The Electoral Law provides a solid legal basis for the conduct and administration of elections, however important electoral reforms have been identified both by previous electoral observations missions as well as the EU Commission in its consideration of BiH for membership of the EU. Lack of agreement amongst political parties undermined any reform effort and in the last set of elections- the local elections in 2024 the High Representative was forced to impose extensive amendments unilaterally.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Like previous votes, the next elections in 2026 will take place against a backdrop of deep political and ethnic divisions, weak institutions, and unresolved historical grievances. Without significant progress on electoral reforms, transitional justice, and inter-ethnic reconciliation, the risk of election-related violence remains high, according to the EVI. Furthermore, the current political dispute over authority between Republika Srpska (RS) and Bosnia-Herzegovina's central government may escalate in the months ahead and remain unresolved ahead of the 2026 vote.

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UPCOMING ELECTIONS CONT.

Since March 2025, the leadership of the Republika Srpska has taken a series of decisions that undermine BiH's sovereignty and constitutional order, prohibiting state-level judicial and law enforcement institutions from operating in RS, while establishing local entities, such as the RS Border Force, which usurp State authority. While presented as a reaction to the arrest warrants issued against the President of RS for ignoring decisions of the High Representative, the steps taken are in fact in line with a long-articulated separatist agenda which threatens the integrity and constitutional order of BiH. *"The outcome of this crisis will ultimately shape BiH's future trajectory, either reinforcing its European aspirations or leading to deeper division and prolonged instability."* - Kanlić/Petrić

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

According to the Electoral Vulnerability Index (EVI), these are the factors that contribute most to the increased potential for violence:

- Government intimidation during the last election
- Voting irregularities during the last election
- Vote buying during the last election
- Limited autonomy of the Electoral Management Body
- Number of consecutive previous elections with moderate violence
- Restrictions on opposition parties during the last election.

RECOMMENDATIONS

REASSESS CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

The current political crisis presents an opportunity to reassess BiH's constitutional structures on the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Accords, as well as the role of the international community. However, any outcome must reinforce BiH's sovereignty and constitutional order, as well as its trajectory towards EU membership.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Central Electoral Commission](#)
- [International IDEA Democracy Tracker](#)
- [V-Dem Country Data](#)

ELECTORAL REFORM

Priority areas for electoral reform have been identified and should be acted upon in an inclusive manner and with the agreement and support of all political parties. These include:

- Further enhancing the capacity of the CEC and MECs
- Lifting discriminatory residency and ethnic restrictions on suffrage rights
- Taking steps to address the under-representation of women in politics, particularly by addressing gender-based political violence.
- Protecting media personnel and journalists, and improving the integrity of the information eco-system,
- Increasing the transparency around CEC processes and decision-making.