

## Second COUNTRY REPORT: Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

Update Thematic Dossier #2:

Youth Participation in Politics

Topic to be explored:

# Youth participation in the Elections

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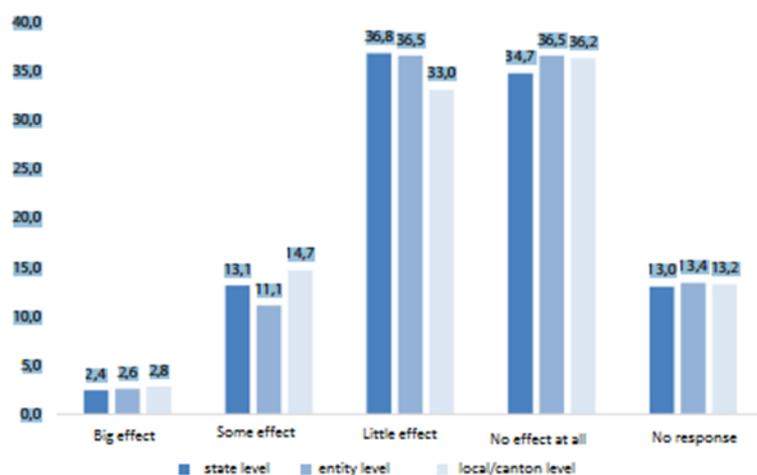
**“Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making at local, national and global levels.”**

## INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has approximately 777 000 young people (according to the law young are persons between the age of 15 and 30). That number is 315,000 less than in 1991 when it was 1,091,775, as a direct result of war and economic instability during the last two decades. There are more males than females within this age population. There are about 607 100 people under the age of 15 in Bosnia today.

Young people in BiH are today more than ever involved in the global communications networks, and better informed about political developments in country, region and the world. They are able to through channels of digital technology together much easier than previous generations, communicate and discuss, including communication about and discussion of political events. On the other hand, although they are well informed, they show far less interest in politics, discussion about politics, and a smaller volume of political action. Young people do not show great interest in political events, regardless whether it is a world, the Balkan, the EU or policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Graph 1:** The perception of the effect of voting on the management of the various levels of government (%)



According to the Study on Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015) by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) between 47.8% and 54.4% of respondents, young people, are usually not interested or not at all interested in political events. The highest interest is shown for the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU, and the lowest for the region of Balkan and the world. Those

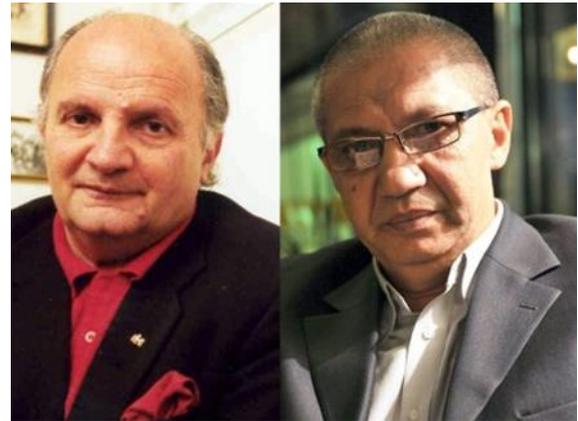
respondents who are older and with higher level of education show higher level of interest toward political events at all levels.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Legal framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very complex because it abounds with unique constitutional solutions and decisions. The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is Annex IV of General framework agreement for peace in BiH (aka the Dayton agreement), which gives limited authorities to the institutions of the country, while most of the authorities are given to the entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republic of Srpska (RS), but also cantons in FBiH. Brcko District has a special status as a local government unit, under the sovereignty of BiH and represents condominium of both entities. The specificity of constitutional solutions in BiH is in the concept of ‘constituency’ of nations (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs), while other citizens who do not belong to the constituent nations are marked as “Other”.

This represents the discrimination toward those who declared themselves as national minorities, as well as those who decide not to declare their nationality.

Namely, the Annex IV included power-sharing provisions which provided that posts in the tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the House of Peoples (upper house of the national parliament) were reserved for ethnic Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats only. *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* (27996/06 and 34836/06) was a case (merged from two) decided by the European Court of Human Rights in December 2009, in the first judgment finding a violation of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights taken in conjunction with Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 thereof, with regard to the arrangements of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in respect of the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 with regard to the constitutional arrangements on the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The plaintiffs were two citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci, who are of Bosnian Roma and Bosnian Jewish ethnicity, respectively. Even though it's been 6 years since the judgment, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina still haven't changed the Constitution and Election Law and still discriminate against all citizens who do not declare themselves as Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs.



## CURRENT SITUATION AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

The attitude of youth towards politics and democracy requires special attention, since it is about a specific social group with peculiar and distinctive political needs. Policies of education, upbringing, entrepreneurship and employment especially affect young people, so it is important to acknowledge and the impact they (should) have on the creation of these policies. In addition, the integration of young people in political life is the foundation of development, democracy and a guarantee of democratic future state.

Democracy is not stable or unchanging category of socio-political life. It is constantly recreated through views, experiences and actions of each generation that has to fight for the preservation and promotion of its values. Today's young people in BiH have grown exclusively in democratic society. They have no experience with autocratic socialist regime of Yugoslavia that shaped political attitudes of the older generation, including the views of the elected political representatives.

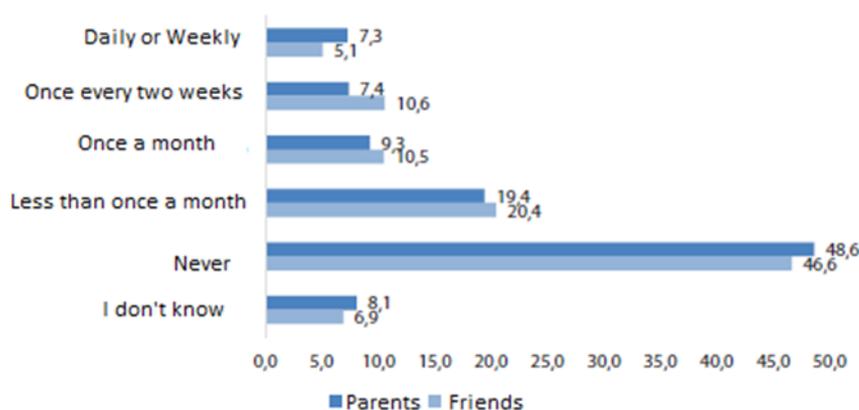
**Picture 1:** A billboard in BiH during the pre-election time “People have a government that they deserve – CHOOSE!”



Conversations about politics, either with their parents or with friends, are very rare among young people. The largest number of young people, almost half of them, do not talk about political events with their closest, while those who do so daily are the smallest group. While it is not possible to tell the difference between

respondents in connection with frequency of conversations about political developments with their parents, differences exist when the question is about conversation with friends. Thus, those who are older tend to have a more frequent discussion about politics with friends, as well as those who have a father with a higher degree in education, who have urban-type settlements and a higher degree of their own education. This can be linked to cohort of growing up and the construction of collective (generational) attitudes on social and political phenomena.

**Graph 2:** The conversation frequency of young people about political events with parents and friends



Political leaders do not affirm full participation of youth, or process of generation change with greater involvement of young people in decision-making process. As a direct result, young people in BiH show less and less interest in gaining knowledge about political system in BiH, functioning of the institutions of

government and participating in election-making process in general as well as active participation in decision processes.

Passivity of youth in BiH can be seen through their low turn-out during the elections on all levels (cantonal, entity, state and district).

According to the Central Election Commission only 16-21% of youth voted in period between 2002 and 2012, depending on the election year. 2010 on the elections, 49% of young people voted. Young people make up 21% of the electorate of the total population eligible to vote. Young men and women are oblivious to the fact that they have the power and obligation to question, investigate and find solutions to social, political, cultural and economic problems in cooperation with representatives of the authorities, civil society, science and economy.

There are around 25.000 high school seniors every year and they have a chance to vote for the first time in their life, and it's very important that they get a habit to vote based on their critical opinion and not under the influence of their friends and family. Also, almost 45 percent of young people from urban and 51 percent of young people from rural areas tend to vote for the party for which they believe will bring them some gains.

The fact is that only 7% of young people are members of youth nongovernmental organizations, 10% of volunteers, and over 95% in the last year took part in political events, protests or contacted some politicians. In addition, only 1% thinks they can influence the changes.



**Aleksandar Talijan, 24:** Many young people in my country decide not to vote in the elections. They don't think they can change anything by voting and that their vote matters. Not having someone to vote for is a usual excuse. I believe that being a member of society obliges me to choose. Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not understand the importance of being an active citizen. The essence of democracy is to have the right to

vote, because that is one of the main ways to protect your rights. If I do not choose, I let others to choose for me. That way, I am not part of the potential change. I want to be asked and I want my opinion to be considered. Those are the reasons I VOTE.



**Dario Kalamanda, 25:** I DON'T VOTE. I know that many people will say that it is my obligation to vote and that if I choose not to vote, others will create my future. However, I honestly believe that my future in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the same, no matter which current political option is part of the government. Since 2013, 68,000 young people left BiH believing the same as I do. If I had a political party I agreed with, who would represent the interests of young people, and forget nationalism rhetoric I would probably start voting.

## GOOD PRACTICES

Coalition "Pod Lupom" formed by 7 civil society organizations, has started monitoring the electoral process in Bosnia and Herzegovina on July 1, 2014, through main and seven regional offices with 42 long-term observers in the field. Coalition "Pod Lupom" was founded by the following NGOs: the Center for Civic Initiative, FTC, CGS, INFOHOUSE Sarajevo, OIA Sarajevo, Perpetuum Mobile Institute Banja Luka and DON Prijedor.

On Election Day 2,890 observers were deployed at 1,355 polling stations and 134 local electoral commissions, covering over 25% of the total number of polling stations. For the first time the SMS reporting was used with automated software processing the acquired data, and compare the results of elections from polling stations in the sample compared to those published by the Central Election Commission (CEC).

**Picture 2:** Coalition "Pod Lupom" (Under the Magnifier)



Observers and mobile teams of the Coalition "Pod Lupom", reported to the Central Election Commission (CEC) about 80 situations on the field which were characterized by critical, and that immediate action was required by the local election commissions. At the same time, the regional offices of the Coalition received more than 370 complaints, the majority of which were related to agitation to voters near polling stations, a deceased person on the voter lists, vote-buying, distributing copies of ballots marked with political subjects and distribution of promotional material about the parties near polling station.

# **POD LUPOM**

Koalicija za slobodne i poštene izbore

To ensure that the process goes as democratic and fair spirit, the Coalition has introduced a free phone line, through which the Citizens could report election irregularities, but also to apply for observer position. In the pre-election period, on Election Day and during the post-election, the Coalition has been actively working in the field to contribute to holding free and fair elections,

preventing election fraud, raising awareness about election manipulation, encouraging free expression of the will of the voters, objective and timely reporting on the election process, as well as making recommendations for changes to the electoral law and improving the electoral process. The project is supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the Dutch Embassy, the British government, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the EU Delegation in BiH. In the election campaign the Coalition focused on monitoring the work of the election administration (central, city and municipal election commissions), the process of voter registration, election campaigns of political entities, and reporting irregularities and act upon them. On Election Day, the Coalition was monitoring the opening of polling stations, the voting process and the processing of votes, and the work of the election administration throughout the country. In the post-election time, the Coalition has conducted monitoring of the received comments and complaints about the electoral process, and a number of them forwarded to the CEC. The coalition also, as part of the final report, provided a set of recommendations which seeks to advocate for the improvement of electoral legislation and processes in BiH. In contrast to the international observers in the country who mainly come a few weeks before the elections, domestic non-partisan observers were able to monitor all stages of the electoral process and on a much larger area.

**Picture 3:** Young people who were participating in observation of elections in 2014 in BiH



Coalition “Pod Lupom” until Election Day carried out a special campaign for young people which seeks to motivate young voters and those who are first-time voters, to think about their real interests and interests that can be achieved by voting and choosing their political representatives in authorities.

This campaign took place under the slogan “The first time you’ll remember! Be mature and vote!” and young people throughout the country were exposed to it. Through the regional offices of the Coalition “Pod Lupom” 75,000 leaflets were distributed to motivate them to go to the polls and vote for their interest, but also promotional materials that consist of useful objects for everyday use with printed slogans campaign.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Coalition “Pod Lupom” published several recommendations as part of the Final Report. Those recommendations consist of steps that should be taken for better situation in the country and ensuring greater youth participation in the elections. Some of those are:

- To enable non-political observers, as candidates of political subjects, to submit complaints to CEC;
- To improve the system of control of financial management of political parties, during the election but also non-election year, not just by the CEC, but also other relevant institutions;
- To increase the transparency of work of election commissions at all levels;
- To create a system (quota or other) for bigger presence of young people on election lists;
- To prevent discrimination of young people in all election processes;
- To engage as much young people as possible in public campaigns about raising awareness on importance of participation in elections;
- To provide young people with more media coverage so they can express their views and needs more easily.