



Croatia's Parliamentary Elections

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NDI/Croatia will produce several reports on the November 23 parliamentary elections. With two NDI teams traveling through all of Croatia's electoral districts, the reports will relate staff observations on campaign activities and party campaign material at the district level. As the election period officially began on November 5, this first report presents the context of the campaign and reviews important events in early November.

Key Political Parties

Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Croatian Peasant's Party (HSS), Croatian People's Party (HNS), Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLs), Democratic Center (DC), Istrian Democratic Congress (IDS), Liberal Party (LS), Party of Liberal Democrats (Libra), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).



Richard Pinnock of the British Liberal Democrats accompanies a group of door-knockers during a training with Libra-Hrast in Dakovo, Slavonia.

The Political Context

Will the current government receive a second mandate to continue Croatia's democratic reform and integration into Europe, or could Croatia's democratic momentum backslide with the election of an HDZ-led government? This question is vital, as it's political and economic reform, and not the legacy of the war, which is on the minds of citizens.

Prior to October, voter apathy was high. But as the elections approach, with polls showing for the first time that HDZ could win the elections, governing parties are beginning to realize the stakes of these elections.

This sense of urgency forced a series of new pre-election coalition agreements. The SDP signed an

agreement with the IDS in early September, and in an 11th hour deal broadened the agreement to include Libra and LS—both liberal parties. This coalition could prevent a scattered liberal vote benefiting HDZ through the redistribution of votes for parties not clearing the threshold to enter parliament.

Although HNS has formed some regional coalitions, it has maintained its original intention to contest the elections separately. The party however is committed to a post-election governing coalition with SDP. HSS will go it alone, hoping that it will be the wildcard that determines the next government no matter who wins. Further to the right, HSLs and DC have united, thus overcoming their respective problems of passing the 5% threshold. Their presence in parliament could provide the seats necessary for HDZ to form a government.

With polls forecasting a close race and the HDZ turnout usually solid, the key variable is whether or not the governing parties will turn out their voters on election day.

The Parties' Slogans



"Yes! for Croatia"



"100% liberal"



“Answers to important questions”



HRVATSKA
NARODNA
STRANKA



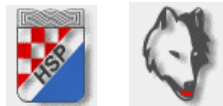
“Together we build our future”



“Let’s move Croatia”



“New strength for Croatia”



“Believe in yourself”



“I love my country”

The Week in Review

- On the eve of the campaign, the Croatian Conference of Bishops issued its get-out-the-vote message. It invited citizens not to vote for any party that supports abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage. The Bishop’s statement was seen as criticism of the government’s consistent support of a woman’s right to choose and its legislation for same-sex marriage.
- Candidate lists released during the week showed new faces. However, this necessarily means that the parliament will have a large number of inexperienced MPs. For example, in the case of the SDP, only 27 of its 140 candidates for parliament are current MPs. Moreover, there are a disappointing low number of

women in high positions on the lists, which creates no reasonable expectation that the current 23% of women in the Sabor will significantly increase. On a positive note, many young people will find their way to the Sabor.

- The HDZ candidate suggests a lack of change within the party. This is exemplified by the prominent positioning of Branimir Glavas, who continues to claim parliamentary immunity to avoid answering questions in queries by the investigators from the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY).
- There is a genuine and novel attempt by the media to profile parliamentary parties and their programs, which leaves one hoping that discussion about policy issues will become more significant in the upcoming weeks.

GONG

NDI civic partner GONG has seen its election monitoring work endorsed by the OSCE, which has decided not to have an international monitoring mission for these elections. This demonstrated the international community’s confidence in GONG’s proven track record to effectively and fairly monitor and assess election processes. This year, GONG’s campaign, entitled “But that’s not all!”, is oriented toward voter education about the election process, parallel collection, and processing of election data for additional verification of official results. GONG will field a team of more than 3,500 volunteer monitors on election day.

NDI Work with Political Parties

Over the past year, NDI trained more than 800 people in its partner parties’ headquarters and regional offices. Working with the party leadership, campaign coordinators, activists, and youth membership, the trainings touched on a broad range of issues such as the phases and planning of a campaign, and message development. NDI/Croatia also developed voter identification software (GOTV) that parties can use to track potential voters.

The training included the use of practical scripts for activists and volunteers to help them communicate with voters face-to-face and over the telephone. NDI’s team of trainers often took participants to the street to experience direct voter contact directly.