

Change amidst Continuity?
Assessing the 2018 Regional Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

Looking at regional elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a complex task. It requires a simultaneous discussion of nationalization and congruence in Bosnian elections, the role of civic parties, the role of regional elections in overall party system fragmentation, and the impact of federalism and power-sharing on peace-building and state-building. For this paper, we use two primary analytical lenses. The first and most emphasized lens will be on developments in political competition within cantons and entities, and therefore largely within ethnic blocs. Due to limits imposed by power-sharing at the central state level, regional elections are where competition is most dynamic and responsive to voters. Of particular interest are challenges to SNSD's (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats- Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata) predominant position in Republika Srpska in light of very visible popular protest against Milorad Dodik and his party, as well as the impact of ongoing fragmentation of civic parties in the Federation and canton elections. The second lens is the analysis of continuity and change in the linkage between canton and entity elections on the one hand and BiH-level elections on the other. This interaction is the driving force behind the distinctive features of the Bosnian party system, namely its high degree of congruence within regions and low congruence across regions, which results in a highly fragmented party system at the central state level. This paper includes a discussion of entity and cantonal elections in Bosnia in 2018, embedded in the discourse of party system change and continuity as well as congruence and fragmentation. However, we also link this discussion to BiH-level elections to demonstrate how peculiar the country is, but also how the elections at a regional and cantonal level help explain some of the problems of Bosnia as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina has one of the most complex political systems in contemporary Europe. Its current constitutional structure is the result of a 3.5-year long war (from 1992 to 1995)

between different ethnic groups within Bosnia and also involving its two big neighbours – Serbia and Croatia. The result was a constitutional framework drawn up by the US State Department, based on substantial decentralization and strict power-sharing between the elites of the main ethnic groups, representing Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs (which are listed as constituent peoples in the Constitution) (Bieber 2006, Bose 2002, Keil 2013).

Bosnia is extremely decentralized. The country is divided into two entities (the Republika Srpska - RS and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina- FBiH), one of which (the FBiH) is further divided into ten cantons. All territorial units in Bosnia are based on ethnic criteria, with the exception of two cantons in the FBiH and the independent district of Brčko in the North of the country. While Serbs make up more than 80% of the population in the RS according to the most recent census, Bosniaks hold the majority in five of the FBiH's cantons (as well as an overall majority in the country) (Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine 2016). Croats have a majority in three cantons and are the larger group in two mixed Croat-Bosniak cantons. This ethnic make-up and the combination of ethnic homogeneity and territorial control are essential when looking at both national and regional elections, because it explains why the FBiH and the RS have completely different party systems at the regional level, and why the party systems between Croat and Bosniak cantons are also different. Indeed, when comparing national to regional elections in Bosnia, one can observe a mirror image, while ethnic parties tend to compete with each other in homogenous ethnic territories (the RS, Bosniak/Croat cantons), at the BiH-level, what we find is a plurality of parties that are forced to work together due to the strict power-sharing mechanisms enforced by the 1995 Constitution (Bahtić- Kunrath 2011, Hulseley 2015). As a result of this, real party competition and most obvious changes to party dominance do not occur in national elections at BiH-level, but in regional elections. It is at this level of governance, in the entities and cantons, that we can observe party competition between different parties representing the same ethnic group. Hence, it is also the regional level that will tell us more about fragmentation and stability of parties, party coalitions and ruling elites in Bosnia. Finally, it is the regional level at which another phenomenon of Bosnian politics can be discussed and explained best – the existence of several multi-ethnic parties (also referred to as civic parties), which break with the logic of ethnic politics and voting according to certain constituent peoples' preferences.

In order to assess these dynamics at the local level, this paper will proceed in the following way. In the first part, we will look at regional governments and regional elections. Here, we will look at the organization of the two entities and the different party systems in the entities and the different electoral frameworks for the entities and the cantons. In the second step, we will look at the 2018 regional elections, which included elections for the two entity legislatures, elections for the Presidency of RS, and elections for the ten Canton legislatures in the FBiH. As there are 13 regional elections that took place in Bosnia, we will present general information for all elections and select a representative handful for detailed analysis. Finally, the Conclusion will not only summarize our findings, but also engage with the question of Bosnia's political development more than 20 years after the end of the war in the country. It will be highlighted how regional elections give us a picture of post-war dynamics, and how they reflect and demonstrate the impact of internal and external processes that have shaped Bosnian politics and substantially influenced the political development in this post-conflict country in Southeastern Europe.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS

As a result of power-sharing requirements and the role of ethnicity at the state level of Bosnian politics, electoral competition and electoral change is most visible at cantonal and entity level, rather than at the central BiH-level. Indeed, as demonstrated by Hulseley (2010, 2015), there has been an important consistency at Bosnia's central level in terms of dominant parties and party coalitions in power. While this does not mean that no change is visible at the central level, this change is a result of alterations at entity and cantonal level, not the other way around. Entities and the cantons are used as electoral districts, which has substantial consequences for the kind of party competition – and electoral outcomes we can find in Bosnia -and which are discussed in the next section of this paper in more detail.

The regulatory framework of the elections in the two entities goes back to the Electoral Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was agreed upon in 2001. During General Elections held every four years, voters simultaneously take part in state-level, entity and cantonal elections. Proportional representation is used for the parliaments of the cantons, the entities and also Bosnia's national House of Representatives. There have been experiments with open and closed lists at different levels since 1997 before settling on open list ballots. The President of the RS, as well the members of the Presidency of BiH are elected in plurality elections. The President and

the Vice-Presidents of the FBiH are indirectly elected by the FBiH parliament. The entities serve as electoral districts for Bosnian central institutions, while the cantons in the FBiH are used for FBiH elections. This means in practice that electoral districts are based on territorial units created by ethnic cleansing, which explains the dominance of ethnic parties at regional, entity and central level in Bosnia (Hulsey 2010). As a result, ethnic parties compete for votes amongst members of their constituent peoples' group, not from voters across the country. Hence, Bosnia does not have a *Bosnian* party system, but a segmented party system with three sub-party systems (Kapidžić, 2017). There is a Bosniak sub-party system, with parties mainly focused on the FBiH and the Bosniak majority cantons and mixed cantons; there is the Serb sub-party system, with parties nearly exclusively focused on the RS; and there is the Croat sub-party system, with parties competing mainly in the three Croat-majority cantons, as well as in the two mixed cantons (Manning 2004, Toal and Dahlman 2011). In short, political competition between the two entities, but also between different cantons within the FBiH looks very different. The dominant parties in the RS are virtually non-existent in the FBiH and vice versa. This is most directly visible in the elections for the Bosnian Presidency, in which the Bosniak and Croat candidates are elected in the FBiH and the Serb candidate is elected in the RS, and in which no party ran candidates for all three seats in 2014 and in 2018. Another example for the dominance of ethnically-exclusive parties can be found in the current composition of the central House of Representatives, which consists of 14 parties, ten of which have a direct or indirect nationalist focus. As will be demonstrated below, there are many more parties in cantonal and entity parliaments. In short, there is an absence of state-wide elections for any of Bosnia's institutions. Regional as well as state-level (central) elections in Bosnia are always an arena mainly for ethnic parties, with often diametrically opposed political agendas. The requirements for cooperation and power-sharing at the FBiH and BiH-level explain the lack of political progress in Bosnia, in which the discourses of the war and the contradistinctions between the elites representing ethnic parties continue to be highly visible, and dominant in day-to-day politics (Kapidžić 2019).

What is more, the dominance of these nationalist parties at local, cantonal, entity and BiH-level over time has meant that each of these parties has developed strong patronage systems. In some cases, such as SBB (Savez za Bolju Budućnost – Union for a Better Future of Bosnia), there is a directly visible connection between business interests and politics. In others, such as the SDA (Stranka Demokratske Akcije – Party for Democratic Action) and the HDZ-BiH (Hrvatska

demokratska zajednica – Croatian Democratic Union), these links go back to the parties' establishment and dominance during the years of the violent conflict. They include links to businesses, banks and also involve control over publicly owned companies and employment in the public sector (Perry and Keil 2018). Bosnia has a very large public sector, with government expenditures equivalent to 40% of GDP. While this level is similar to other countries in the region, a higher proportion of government expenditures is spent on compensation for government employees than other Western Balkan countries (IMF 2015). In addition, cantons and entities receive a guaranteed portion of the country's VAT revenue and have important competencies in education, agriculture and industry as well as publicly owned companies. As a result, regional governments are valuable political positions both in terms of policy outcomes and patronage. Parties that are not competitive at state and entity levels can nevertheless be sustained by success in cantonal government. In this context, elections become a competition over different patronage networks, and different parties fight over access to key resources, including budgets, employment opportunities and control over state-assets (Hulsey 2018, Piacentini 2019). This is even more obvious when comparing the ideological differences between the different ethnic parties, which are negligible. Elections are an arena for parties and their elites to highlight why they offer a better patronage system, which will directly or indirectly benefit more voters, and how other ethnic parties in power have failed to deliver satisfactory patronage and clientelism. The exception to this are numerous non-nationalist, self-declared civic parties, which have received approximately a quarter of the vote from FBiH. These parties compete with ethnic parties for votes, but they tend to focus much more on ideological issues such as unemployment, welfare, education etc. The biggest and oldest civic party in this context is the SDP (Socijaldemokratska Partija Bosne i Hercegovine – Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina), which is the successor of the former Bosnian League of Communists, itself a member of the Yugoslav League of Communists, which ruled Yugoslavia after the second World War until the break-up of the country began in 1991. The SDP has been part of several government coalitions at cantonal, entity and even at BiH-level since 1995. However, as part of larger coalitions with other nationalist parties, the SDP found itself in a position in which it was competing over access to resources and assets, and altogether unable to push for wider changes in the system that would overcome the institutionalized ethnic divisions and the strict power-sharing mechanisms. Especially the participation in a government coalition after the 2010

elections at the BiH-level has been very costly for the party, and it lost nearly 70% of its vote at central level in 2014. So, as the data analysis will show below, 2018 was also a re-building exercise for the SDP in light of its poor performance in 2014.

The SDP is mainly elected by Bosniak voters, and as such competes with other Bosniak parties such as the SDA and the SBB. It is remarkable that the SDP and other non-nationalist parties summon support mainly from Bosniak voters, who also tend to jump between ethnic and civic parties in elections. However, there is a stable bloc of voters (mainly but not exclusively Bosniak voters), who reject ethnic parties and continue to support civic parties, despite their inability to change the system of ethnic power-sharing and the dominance of ethnic parties at all levels. The SDA is the oldest of the Bosniak ethnic parties, and it remains the most important one. It was the sole representative of the Bosniak population after the first free elections. However, since then, the SDA had to cope with two important developments. On the one side, several splinter parties formed, and due to the low entry level especially at cantonal and entity level, successfully challenged the dominance of the SDA. The SBB is one of these parties, and so is the SBiH (Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu – Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina), which challenged the dominance of the SDA in the Bosniak camp between 2006 and 2014, although more recently its support has fallen. In its place, three new splinter parties made up of former members of SDA have successfully launched parties and received mandates. These parties, Pokret Demokratske Akcije (Movement of Democratic Action -PDA), Nezavisni Blok (Independent Bloc - NB), and Narod i Pravda (People and Justice - NiP), have further fragmented opposition to SDA while not dramatically weakening the dominant party's support. On the other side, parties such as the SDP and the NS (Naša Stranka – Our Party) have become alternatives to the SDA within the Bosniak camp, despite promoting a civic, at times non-nationalist (or even anti-nationalist) agenda. Moreover, parties such SDP and NS secure the vast majority of their votes in areas with a Bosniak majority such as Tuzla or Sarajevo (and could therefore be counted as Bosniak, rather than civic parties), nevertheless, the parties explicitly deny association with one of the constituent peoples and include representatives of other constituent peoples and minorities within their organizational leadership. The third important civic party to highlight here is DF (Demokratska fronta – Democratic Front), which was created after Željko Komšić, a leading politician of the SDP, left the party in 2012.

In the Croat camp, there are two main parties, the HDZ BiH and the HDZ 1990. The HDZ BiH was set up with support from the HDZ in Croatia (and its leader former Croatian President Franjo Tuđman) in the run-up to the first free elections in Bosnia in the early 1990s. It was the dominating party amongst Bosnian Croats until 2006, when a disagreement over constitutional changes resulted in the split of the party and the creation of HDZ 1990. While the two parties have since worked together and tried to bridge the divide between them, they have been unable to re-unite.

Finally, the Bosnian Serb party system has seen the most dramatic changes of all three party systems in Bosnia in that the dominant wartime party has been replaced as the leading party. In the years 1991 to 2000, the dominant party was the SDS (Srpska Demokratska Stranka – Serbian Democratic Party), whose first leader was the convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić, who, with support from Serbia and the Yugoslav army, was responsible for the secession of the Republika Srpska and the ethnic cleansing campaign across more than 70% of Bosnia's territory (Burg and Shoup 2000). The SDS dominated Bosnian Serb politics and the RS until 2000, when a new party, the SNSD (Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata – Alliance of Independent Social Democrats) challenged SDS dominance, helped by substantial support from international actors in Bosnia, including the USA, the European Union (EU) and the OSCE. While the SNSD leader Milorad Dodik was initially praised as a moderate alternative to the SDS elites (and former allies of Karadžić), he became more radical after 2006, when important discussions on constitutional changes and police reform failed, and international actors reduced their engagement substantially. Since 2006, SNSD has been the dominant force in the Bosnian Serb party system. In 2018 Dodik was elected as the Serb member of the Bosnian Presidency, serving as President and long-term Prime Minister of the RS before that. He remains the most influential Bosnian Serb politician, despite a slight revival of the SDS in recent years.

In addition to the main parties discussed for each constituent peoples, there are multiple smaller parties that have, at different times played an important role at regional and national levels in Bosnia. For example, the PDP's (Partija demokratskog progresa – Party of Democratic Progress) Mladen Ivanić was elected as Serb Member of the Bosnian Presidency in 2014, defeating the candidate of the SNSD. These smaller parties often play a role at cantonal and entity levels, because they offer coalition opportunities for the dominant competing parties. It is therefore not uncommon that at cantonal and entity level coalitions are formed, which do not necessarily

include the biggest parties representing Bosniak, Croat and Serb voters, but representing parties which have been able to form coalitions with other smaller parties. An example of this can be found in the FBiH where the requirement for Bosniak and Croat parties to work together has meant that at occasion both the SDA (in 2000) and the HDZ BiH (in 2014) have been excluded from entity governments, despite their electoral success in the regional elections. Within each of the three blocs, there is meaningful competition, and change has been observed over time, as witnessed by the changing dynamics of dominance within the RS between the SDS and SNSD. Likewise, the dominance of the SDA has been severely threatened multiple times, both by the SDP and by the SBiH, in particular in 2006. The reasons why we can find so many parties representing the same group of constituent peoples (either Bosniak, Serb or Croat) lies in the electoral rules on the one side and in the power-sharing requirements on the other. The electoral rules, as discussed above, favour nationalist parties, because of the homogenous electoral districts. However, low barriers (at points a 3% threshold which has been abolished at numerous levels) mean that it is relatively easy to get access – especially at cantonal and entity level. New parties have therefore been created not for ideological reasons, but because of personal disputes between elites within the dominant party, and disagreements over the distribution of the benefits from the patronage system (Hulsey 2015, 2018, Piacentini 2019). It is important to highlight that this dynamic has played out amongst ethnic parties (for example the split between HDZ BiH and HDZ 1990 in 2006) and non-nationalist parties (DF is a split from the SDP). When looking at the outcome of elections, it is therefore important to look at how well specific parties have done, but also to locate these parties within the different camps (Bosniak, Serb, Croat, civic) in order to assess if there are significant changes amongst these blocs. Previous research on this topic (Hulsey 2010, 2015) has demonstrated that these blocs are relatively stable, although some changes can be observed over time (for example, in 2010 there was a substantial increase in voters voting for civic parties, especially the SDP). With the main blocs remaining stable over time, it is competition within these blocs that is most meaningful. This observation is particularly important from a theoretical angle. Democratic competition between parties takes place at the regional (and local) levels in Bosnia, but not at the central level. The strict power-sharing institutions implemented as part of the Dayton Agreement have enabled party competition within ethnic groups but not between them, and by doing so have contributed to both, state capture

within each of the sub-systems, and also continued stalemate at the central level, where parties with opposing agendas are forced to work together.

The next section will provide an overview of the outcomes of the regional elections in Bosnia in 2018, before a further discussion about the party system dynamics goes back to some of the initial points raised above.

ANALYSIS OF THE 2018 REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN BOSNIA

This section analyzes the results of the 2018 entity and canton elections in Bosnia in light of the most important characteristics of the Bosnian party system: high fragmentation, poor nationalization, and competition within as opposed to across ethnic party blocs. This section first presents a summary analysis across all twelve regional elections before examining the entity and canton elections in detail.¹

Table 1: Summary of 2018 General Election Results for Large Parties in Entity and Canton Elections (Percent of Vote)²

Election	SDA	SBB	SDP	D		HD		SNS	SD	PDP	Other
				F	NS	Z	D	S	RS	Partie s	
Federacij	25	7	15	9	5	14	0	0	0	0	25
a											
Republik	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	19	11	11	39

¹ In addition to the entities and cantons, Bosnia has a 13th administrative unit, the Brčko District. Brčko district elections occur during local elections as opposed to general elections, so they are not considered in this analysis.

² For reasons of space and clarity, not all parties receiving votes can be included in the results presented here. Table 1 includes results for all parties receiving 2 or more seats in the state-level parliament in 2018. Full names of the parties included in the paper are in the Appendix. All election results presented in this paper are from the Bosnian Election Commission website (www.izbori.ba). The data files underlying this analysis are available at <https://hulseyjw.github.io/Izbori2018/>.

a Srpska

Canton 1	28	7	11	7	4	0	0	0	0	42
Canton 2	10	4	5	3	0	51	0	0	0	27
Canton 3	23	6	23	7	4	3	0	0	0	34
Canton 4	28	8	17	7	3	7	0	0	0	30
Canton 5	19	9	7	6	5	0	0	0	0	54
Canton 6	32	6	14	5	0	30	0	0	0	13
Canton 7	23	6	10	4	2	38	0	0	0	18
Canton 8	0	0	0	0	0	65	0	0	0	34
Canton 9	25	9	10	6	13	1	0	0	0	35
Canton	7	0	3	2	0	31	0	0	0	57

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Table 1 summarizes the results for the largest parties in Bosnia across entity and cantonal elections in the 2018 general elections in order to illustrate these broad themes. The first two rows show the results for the entity elections in the FBiH and Republika Srpska. The results in the table demonstrate clearly how poorly nationalized regional elections are in Bosnia. The SNSD and SDS, the two most important parties in Republika Srpska only received votes in that entity, while the parties prominent in the FBiH are not influential in Republika Srpska. So, there is little homogeneity of party strength across regional elections in Bosnia (Bochsler 2010). A similar dynamic plays out when you consider the cantons. HDZ and its electoral coalition partners received 14% of the vote in the overall Federation Parliament election, but their results vary between zero and 65% percent of the vote in cantonal elections. Republika Srpska is dominated by Serb-oriented parties like SNSD and SDS. The Federation is dominated by Bosniak and Croat-oriented ethnic parties as well as parties with a non-national, civic approach. There is significant heterogeneity in the local party systems of the cantons. They can be roughly divided into Bosniak-dominated cantons, Croat-dominated cantons, and cantons that are mixed. The cantons also vary in the degree to which civic parties are successful, although civic parties have tended to be most successful among Bosniaks.

Table 2: Party System Characteristics

Election	Seats	Effecti	Total	Percen	Volatili	Volatili	Volatili	Majority
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	Contested	Effective Number of Parties	Valid Votes ³	Turnout	2006-2010	2010-2014	2014-2018	Ethnicity
Federacija	98	7.86	969818	51	33	31	25	Bosniak
Republika Srpska	83	5.52	650520	57	20	31	23	Serb
1 Canton	30	5.86	92299	40	34	41	23	Bosniak
2 Canton	21	3.32	17710	47	23	21	27	Croat
3 Canton	35	6.44	210582	53	26	28	39	Bosniak
4 Canton	35	6.93	161409	53	37	31	27	Bosniak
5 Canton	25	9.52	14998	67	28	38	41	Bosniak
6 Canton	30	4.58	114594	55	32	27	22	Bosniak
7 Canton	30	4.60	101410	55	34	23	17	Croat/ Bosniak
8 Canton	23	2.18	36047	52	34	25	19	Croat
9 Canton	35	7.96	21801	56	40	38	33	Bosniak

³ Effective Number of Parties by Votes (ENPV) is a standard measure of party system fragmentation. The results for ENPV in all tables are based on author calculations using the formula in Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Total Valid Votes is the sum of all votes cast in the election. The turnout percentage divides the Total Valid Votes by the number of registered voters reported by the election commission. Volatility measures throughout the paper use the Pederson (1979) method, which is the net percentage of vote changes from one election to the next.

9
 Canton 25 6.51 5 27494 45 40 29 33 Croat
 10

Table 2 shows the effective number of parties, total valid votes, turnout percentage and volatility for entity and cantonal elections. Fragmentation as measured by the effective number of parties by vote is very high generally but also variable (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979). While the electoral system is permissive with low formal thresholds to representation in all elections, these rules interact with societal cleavages in the region in order to produce lower fragmentation in cantons dominated by a few ethnic parties and very high fragmentation in cantons that support parties representing multiple ethnic groups as well as non-nationalist parties. The number of votes required to gain access also varies dramatically. In Canton 5, Goražde, for example the smallest party that won a mandate received 572 votes in order to clear the 3% threshold.

Table 3: Pederson Volatility Scores Within and Between Party Groups in the 2018 General Elections⁴

Election	Within Bosniak Ethnic	Within Croat Ethnic	Within Non- Nationalist	Within Serb Ethnic	Between Party Groups
Federacija	13	2	8	1	3
Republika Srpska	0	0	3	14	5
Canton 1	13	0	7	1	2
Canton 2	3	20	2	1	2

⁴ The results in Table 3 are based on author calculations of election results from the Bosnian Electoral Commission website (www.izbori.ba). For Table 3, all parties were coded as Bosniak Ethnic, Croat Ethnic, Non-Nationalist and Serb Ethnic. For the “within” party group measures, the authors calculated volatility using only parties of that type. For the “between” party group measure, the authors took the sum of all parties from a party group in an election, then calculated the volatility using those aggregate groupings.

Canton 3	23	0	13	0	2
Canton 4	15	1	9	0	2
Canton 5	21	0	9	1	10
Canton 6	9	7	5	0	2
Canton 7	4	7	4	1	2
Canton 8	0	13	4	0	7
Canton 9	17	1	12	1	8
Canton 10	0	9	6	16	5

Table 2 shows that the overall level of volatility across elections is very high, and there are no obvious trends over time (Pederson 1979). Table 3 considers volatility within and between types of parties in order to how the nature of political competition in Bosnia’s party system plays out. Similar to Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Kapidžić (2017) we code parties according to the ethnic group they claim to represent or whether they offer a non-nationalist approach. Subsequently, volatility is calculated according to the Pederson (1979) method within those groups as well as across those groups for each region between the 2014 and 2018 elections. The results shown in Table 3 are difficult to interpret in a straightforward way because some entities and cantons have very low volatility for a party type because that party type is not represented in that election. However, for each election the volatility score across party types is much lower than the volatility score within one or more party type. This reflects that there is much less change in support over time between party types than within party types. This is clear evidence that party competition takes place between parties aiming to represent the same group of people as opposed to across those parties and groups. Kapidžić (2017) uses a similar analysis on state-level results to argue for the presence of a segmented party system in Bosnia. The results in Table 3 show that the pattern extends to regional elections, whereby the overall aggregate results for party types are much less volatile than individual parties within those same groups. This suggests that there are few voters who shift their vote from group to group across elections and therefore little competition between party groups for voters.

Table 4: FBiH Assembly Results 2010-2018 (Percentage of Votes)

	SD	SD	HD	D	SB	N	PD	N	A-		NI	ENP
Year	A	P	Z	F	B	S	A	B	SDA	HDZ 1990	P	V

2010	20	25	11	0	12	1	0	0	2	5	0	25	7.19
2014	28	10	12	13	15	2	0	0	2	4	0	15	6.87
2018	25	15	14	9	7	5	4	4	3	2	2	10	7.86

The FBiH Assembly is one election in which all of the Bosniak and Croat-oriented parties, as well as civic parties are represented. Table 4 shows the results for the past three election cycles for all the parties that received seats in the 2018 election cycle. For elections in the FBiH, it is useful to think of parties falling into one of three families: Bosniak-oriented ethnic parties, Croat-oriented ethnic parties and civic-oriented parties. The ethnic parties portray themselves as representatives of one of the three constituent peoples in Bosnia and only seek votes from within that ethnic group. The non-nationalist or civic parties put forward more ideological programs that eschew ethnic representation. The civic parties have leaders and leading candidates from multiple ethnicities and seek support across ethnic lines. The definition of some parties as civic or non-nationalist is sometimes controversial, particularly due to the fact that most support for civic parties comes from areas where many Bosniaks live.

Table 5: FBiH Assembly Results 2010-2018 by Party Type (Percentage of Votes)

Year	Bosniak Ethnic	Croat Ethnic	Civic
2010	34	15	26
2014	45	16	25
2018	45	16	29

The largest Bosniak ethnic parties in the 2018 election for the FBiH Assembly are SDA, SBB, PDA, NB, (NIP) and Stranka Demokratska Aktovnosti (A-SDA). The SDA continues to be not only the largest Bosniak ethnic party but also the largest party of any kind in Bosnia. The other Bosniak ethnic parties show clearly two of the key features of Bosnian party politics, the fragmentation of political parties based on leadership as well as the emergence of personalized parties. PDA, NB and NIP are all parties formed by former officeholders of the SDA during the year before the 2018 elections. A-SDA similarly split off from SDA more than ten years ago. The remaining Bosniak-ethnic party, SBB, is heavily centralized around its founder and leader, Fahrudin Radončić, owner of a large media company. The Bosniak ethnic parties campaign

⁵ For readability, only results for parties that received mandates in 2018 are reported in the table.

against each other mostly on the basis of providing alternative leadership rather than differing ideologies and party programs. They are all to a great extent conservative, center-right parties. In addition to the results for the individual parties, Table 5 also shows the results for the party type as a whole. Bosniak ethnic parties receiving seats tallied 43% of the vote for the FBiH Assembly in 2018, down from 45% in the prior election. This stability for the bloc as a whole took place in the context of significant volatility for parties within that group, including three new parties gaining votes and seats. Support for SDA was only three percentage points lower while the three parties that recently broke off of SDA accumulated 10% of the vote. Much of this gain came at the expense of SBB, which fell from 15% to 7%. Overall, support for Bosniak ethnic parties remained constant, SDA remained the largest Bosniak ethnic party, and there was a redistribution of votes among the alternatives to SDA away from SBB and toward the new splinter parties.

The results for Croat ethnic parties show less fragmentation and similar levels of stability. While Table 2 only lists the lead party, both HDZ BiH and HDZ 1990 formed election coalitions with other Croat ethnic parties. In contrast to the SDA among Bosniak parties, in recent years HDZ BiH has been able to consolidate its support. Overall support for Croat ethnic parties has crept up while support has slowly shifted toward HDZ BiH after the split of the Croat vote that began in 2006.

The overall pattern for civic and non-nationalist parties is similar to results for the Bosniak ethnic parties with the exception that there is no dominant party. The SDP had been the dominant non-nationalist party before a series of party splits starting before the 2014 election. As mentioned above, DF split from the SDP and performed very well in the 2014 elections before returning support it had gained from the SDP in the 2018 election. NS is a civic, liberal party that has slowly been gaining support and made significant gains in FBiH Assembly elections in 2018. Overall support for civic and non-nationalist parties in the FBiH has been constant despite significant changes in support for individual parties.

Government coalitions in FBiH have been notoriously difficult to form, it took over a year after the 2014 elections to form a government for the entity, mainly because of differences between the SDA and the SBB as the two Bosniak-focused parties. Their cooperation became necessary after DF left the ruling governing coalition after less than 100 days – a decision which further weakened the already fragile entity institutions, and which has been punished by voters in 2018,

with DF amongst the losing parties in the FBiH. As mentioned in the previous section, participation in government at cantonal, entity and central level means access to resources and is therefore highly desirable for parties of any category. Discussions often focus much more on personnel decisions (such as the politically-appointed Directors and Heads of state-owned companies) rather than on real policy issues. What is more, participation in the FBiH government has been a key bone of contention for civic parties. The SDP first led a FBiH government in 2000, however, its participation in government at entity and central level has not favoured the party's electoral success, instead it consistently lost support after participation in regional and BiH-level government coalitions. The same can be said about the DF, which joined the FBiH government briefly in 2015, but left after less than 100 days. For civic parties, participation in government appears to be associated with electoral decline, owing to the mismatch between their party programs and the practice of party patronage of parties in power.

The FBiH in this respect is a microcosm of Bosnia as a whole, because the entity itself is ethnically mixed (mainly between Bosniaks and Croats), there are substantial differences across the ten cantons when comparing electoral outcomes. In the three cantons in the FBiH, in which the Croats have a majority, the HDZ BiH and the HDZ 1990 remain the two main dominant Croat parties, although there is a clear indication that the HDZ BiH has been able to re-establish itself as the leading party representing Croats in Bosnia at local, cantonal, entity and national level. Whereas only two Croat-ethnic parties gained seats in the Federation Parliament, five such parties are represented in Canton 10. Canton 10 sustains so many Croat ethnic parties because of the dominant situation of the Croat ethnic group in the area in the context of a permissive electoral system. The formal threshold is set at 3%, so even small parties can gain representation. This illustrates one of the drivers of party fragmentation throughout the Bosnian system. While the effective barriers to entry are higher for entity and state-level elections, parties can gain representation in Canton 10 with fewer than 900 votes. So, even parties far too small to be meaningful at higher levels are sustained by success in cantonal elections where their participation makes sense in terms of the electoral rules and the ethnic breakdown of the population.

Table 6: Election Results for Canton 10 2010-2018 (Percentage of Votes)

Year	HDZ		Other Parties					ENP				
	HDZ	1990	S	HN	SD	SN	NSRZ		HR	ZN	SD	
2010	26	13	0	0	6	0	10	0	0	5	40	7.66
2014	31	15	0	8	7	0	6	0	0	4	29	6.50
2018	31	14	12	11	7	5	0	4	4	3	10	6.51

Likewise, in the five Bosniak-majority cantons, SDA remains the biggest political party, followed by SDP, SBB and DF. In the two mixed cantons in Bosnia (Central Bosnia and Herzegovina-Neretva), SDA and HDZ BiH remain the two respective dominant parties (with the HDZ BiH slightly stronger in Herzegovina-Neretva and SDA stronger in Central Bosnia). While SDP and DF did well in Central Bosnia, in Herzegovina-Neretva civic parties performed poorly, which also demonstrates the continued existence of tensions in the latter, in which the divided city of Mostar remains of symbol of ethnic divisions and the results of the war in the country.

Table 7 : Election Results for Sarajevo Canton 2010-2018 (Percentage of Votes)

Year	SD	NI	N	SD	SB	D	NB	BOS	Other	ENP
	A	P	S	P	B	F	L	S	Parties	V
2010	18	0	5	24	17	0	0	3	33	7.10
2014	25	0	8	9	17	17	0	4	20	7.12
2018	25	14	13	10	9	6	5	4	14	7.96

There are two further cantons to highlight, whose results are outliers in the Bosnian regional election. Table 7 summarizes the results from Sarajevo canton. What the election outcome demonstrates is that, while SDA is still the biggest party in the city and the canton, there is much stronger support for civic parties in Sarajevo than in many other parts of the FBiH and indeed the country. This has several reasons, Sarajevo has a long history of ethnic and religious tolerance, voters in Sarajevo tend to be more educated, and earn higher incomes and parties such as NS and DF in 2014 also focused specifically on the younger population in Sarajevo. As a result of the more or less even split between ethnic and civic parties across the Sarajevo canton, coalition politics in the cantonal assembly can be difficult. Following the 2018 elections, the civic parties succeeded in forming a coalition that excluded SDA for the first time. However, this coalition was broken by DF as a condition of their participation in the state-level coalition alongside SDA (Vijesti.ba 2019).

Table 8 : Election Results for Tužla Canton 2010-2018 (Percentage of Votes)

Year	SDP	SDA	PPD	DF	SBB	NS	SzBiH	Other	
								Parties	ENP V
2010	31	25	0	0	10	1	8	40	5.47
2014	14	32	0	11	12	1	8	29	6.12
2018	23	23	18	7	6	4	4	10	6.44

The second canton worth examining is Tužla in the centre of the country. It is an old industrial town, and in 2014 was the centre of protests of workers, which were unpaid for several months. These protests quickly spread within the FBiH, and also to the RS, and forced cantonal governments to resign before ebbing down after several weeks (Hasić and Karabegović 2018). These protests were remarkable, not only because for a period they really threatened those in power, but they were the most organized and largest form of public unrest and symbol of dissatisfaction across Bosnia since the end of the war in 1995. They resulted in the formation of several plenums in the FBiH, in which people from all background discussed the problems of the country and a way forward (Keil 2014). The original protests in Tužla were directed against the cantonal administration led by the SDP, it is therefore surprising that in 2018 the SDP once again won the election in the canton. However, it should not be forgotten that Tužla remains an SDP stronghold, where the party emphasizes its social democratic profile and its support for the working class. Tužla therefore is a canton in which the SDP has been the dominant party since the end of the war, it is also a canton in which political stability and continuity has existed despite a high degree of political dissatisfaction, as articulated during the 2014 protests.

Table 9: Election Results for RS Assembly 2010-2018 (Percentage of Votes)

Year	SNSD	SDS	DNS	PDP_RS	SP_RS	ZZ_B	NDP	US	Other	
									Parties	ENPV
2010	38	19	6	8	0	0	0	0	29	5.07
2014	32	26	9	7	5	0	5	0	15	5.09
2018	32	19	15	11	8	4	4	3	5	5.52

In comparison to some of the changes in the FBiH, where there is real competition between different and multiple parties within the Bosniak, Croat and civic camp, and where over time changes have taken place, albeit as a result of intra-group shifts, politics and electoral outcomes in the RS is much more dominated by continuity. The SNSD has been in power in the entity since 2006 continuously, and despite a short revival of the SDS, which dominated the entity after the end of the war, in the 2014 entity elections, 2018 has reconfirmed the dominance of SNSD within the entity. The party is mainly focused on Milorad Dodik, its leader. Dodik is known for his radical course, his demands for Serb separation from Bosnia, and his closeness to Russia's Vladimir Putin, who has supported the fragile economy in the RS several times in recent years (Perry 2019). The SNSD has been working in coalition with a variety of smaller parties in recent years, first with the PDP, however more recently with a number of smaller parties, including the Socialist Party. Having said this, it is also important to highlight that in the RS, we cannot as such observe the same degree of party system fragmentation as we can see in the FBiH. This can be explained by two key circumstances – on the one side there is only one major ethnic group in the RS, so there is only fragmentation amongst Serb parties, while in the FBiH there are Bosniak and Croat parties. On the other side, civic parties have been unable to gain substantial ground in the RS elections over the years. While they pose a key challenge to Bosniak and to a lesser extent Croat parties in the FBiH, in the RS, they are not represented at all. This can be explained by continued contestation amongst Serbs in Bosnia – even moderate Serbs are more likely to vote for Serb parties, albeit not necessarily the largest ones but smaller Serb parties, some of which (such as the PDP), have at times been moderate alternatives to the SNSD and SDS.

There are eight parties in the RS parliament, which indicates a degree of fragmentation, however SNSD and SDS have more than 50% of the seats combined, and the three biggest parties have more than 2/3 of the seats. This allows for three important conclusions – First, RS politics remains dominated by the conflict between the SNSD and the SDS. Both parties are equally radical, both parties promote more autonomy, even secession, of the RS, thereby confirming that not programmatic issues but personality and access to resources are key motivations for voter choice. Second, in the RS there are no strong civic parties. This is in some respects surprising, because unrest and public demonstrations against the RS government have taken place in Banja Luka and other RS cities, too. Serb ethnic parties have been able to prevent a wider discourse on inter-ethnic cooperation and non-ethnic issues to play a major role in the elections in the RS (Hulseley 2010, 2015). Third, while a degree of fragmentation is visible within the RS parliament, which can be explained by the low entry barriers, both the SNSD and the SDS have managed to fight off major party splits and the rise of rival parties. The simultaneous election of the RS President by plurality vote reward the two large parties and keeps fragmentation in RS lower than fragmentation in the FBiH. However, the rise of the Democratic National Alliance (Demokratski Narodni Savez DNS) in the 2018 elections, when the party came third and won 11 seats in the RS Assembly, might demonstrate that RS politics is moving towards more fragmentation and thereby moving closer to the situation in the FBiH.

Popular pressure threatened the dominance of SNSD in ways that it has not before due to the explosion of the “Justice for David” movement sparked by the apparent murder of David Dragicevic in March 2018. Dragicevic’s father, Davor, lead daily protests against the authorities in Banja Luka, claiming that the police were involved in and had covered up his murder (Surk 2019). Despite daily protests, which at their peak included thousands of participants, the results of the legislative elections in Republika Srpska did not show a dramatic change relative to previous years. This feature has also been discussed above in the case of protests in Tuzla canton – there is a lot of public dissatisfaction and unrest, political elites are confronted by numerous protests, yet electorally such public anger is not visible. This can be explained by the low-level turnout at regional and cantonal elections, where mainly dominant ethnic parties have been able to mobilise their supporters consistently. What is more, both the plenum movement in the FBiH in 2014, and the “Justice for David” movement in the RS in 2018 protested against the ruling

elites without siding with opposition or civic parties. In fact, both social movements purposely distanced themselves from party politics.

While the RS elections, and the dominance of the SNSD, have demonstrated more continuity within the entity, it does not mean that there have been no changes in this part of Bosnia. In local elections, there is a clearly visible split between the East of the entity which continues to support the SDS, while the West of the entity and the city of Banja Luka are strongholds of the SNSD. What is more, the importance of personality in RS politics became visible in 2014, when the SNSD candidate for the Bosnian Presidency, Željka Cvijanović lost against the more widely known former RS Prime Minister Mladen Ivanić from the PDP. This was also seen as a personal defeat for Dodik, and explains his standing in the 2018 elections for the Serb seat in the Bosnian Presidency. There is no doubt across the entity, and indeed throughout Bosnia, that he will remain the Serb strongman and despite his move to Sarajevo and into Bosnian politics, he will remain a key figure within the RS, not least because his allies now occupy the office of the Prime Minister and the President of the RS.

Conclusion

Bosnian regional elections in 2018 demonstrate that the country as a whole continues to suffer from the results of the conflict in the 1990s. The ethnic cleansing committed then explains the dominance of ethnic parties today. Electoral rules put in place to ensure power-sharing and ethnic self-governance in homogenous territories explain Bosnia's continued stalemate – the country remains dominated by ethnic parties who are mainly focused on their own patronage networks. As the discussion above has demonstrated, Bosnia's elections remain competitive mainly at a regional level, in ethnically homogenous areas, where competition between ethnically exclusive parties can be observed. There is, however, no competition for votes across ethnic groups, and the dominance of ethnic parties explains the continued lack of agreement on fundamental policy issues at central level.

In addition, the policy and patronage importance of regional government sustains parties that are not able to achieve success at the state level. There are no processes currently in place that are likely to change the relative ethnic composition of the entities and cantons. Therefore, the

only pathway to greater congruence between canton, entity and state-level elections would be the emergence of parties that successfully win votes from members of all ethnic groups, and by doing so overcome some of the tensions that have been paralyzing Bosnian politics since the end of the war. While civic parties have ideologies that are open to such broad, cross-ethnic electoral coalitions and diversity in leadership, they have not enjoyed the large-scale success outside of urban, Bosniak areas that would be necessary for greater congruence of the party system or broader systemic political change. Despite heavy electoral engineering and interventions by international actors into the country, the electoral situation of Bosnia very much reflects the situation of post-war Bosnia in 1995 – it is ethnically divided amongst parties with completely opposing agendas.

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APPENDIX

Political Parties in Bosnia

Abbreviation	Party	Translation	Party Type
BOSS	Bosanska Stranka	Bosnian Party	Bosnian Ethnic
DF	Demokratska fronta	Democratic Front	Non-nationalist
DNS	Demokratski narodni savez	Democratic National Alliance	Serb Ethnic
HDZ	Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica	Croatian Democratic Union	Croat Ethnic
HDZ 1990	Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - 1990	Croatian Democratic Union - 1990	Croat Ethnic
HNL	Hrvatska nezavisna lista	Croatian Independent List	Croat Ethnic
HRS	Hrvatska Republikanska Stranka	Croatian Republican Party	Croat Ethnic

NiP	Narod I Pravda	People and Justice	Bosniak Ethnic
NSRZB	Narodna stranka radom za boljitak	National Party with Work for Betterment	Non-nationalist
NDP	Narodni Demokratski Pokret	National Democratic Movement	Serb Ethnic
NS	Naša Stranka	Our Party	Non-nationalist
NBL	Nezavisna bosanskohercegovačka lista	Independent Bosnia and Herzegovina List	Bosniak Ethnic
NB	Nezavisni Blok	Independent Bloc	Bosniak Ethnic
PDP	Partija demokratskog progresa	Party of Democratic Progress	Serb Ethnic
PDA	Pokret Demokratske Akcije	Movement of Democratic Action	Bosniak Ethnic
SNSD	Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats	Serb Ethnic
SBB	Savez za bolju budućnost	Union for a Better Future	Bosniak Ethnic
SDP	Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine	Socialdemocratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Non-nationalist
SP_RS	Socijalistička Partija	Socialist Party	Serb Ethnic
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka	Serbian Democratic Party	Serb Ethnic
SL	Srpska lista	Serb List	Serb Ethnic
SNS	Srpska Napredna Stranka	Serbian Progress Party	Serb Ethnic
SDA	Stranka Demokratske Akcije	Party of Democratic Action	Bosniak Ethnic
A-SDA	Stranka demokratske aktivnosti	Party of Democratic Activities	Bosniak Ethnic
SzBiH	Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu	Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosniak Ethnic
US	Ujedinjena srpska	United Serbia	Serb Ethnic
ZZ_B	Zajedno za BiH	Together for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Non-nationalist
ZNL	Županijska Neovisna Lista	District Independent List	Croat Ethnic