Country Brief
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Electoral democracy

COUNTRY INDICATORS

Population: 3,210,847 million (WB)

Urban population: 50 % (WB)

Urban population growth (annual): 0,3 (WB)

Access to water: 87% (WHO-UNICEF)

Access to electricity: 100% (WB)

Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 births): 6 (WB)

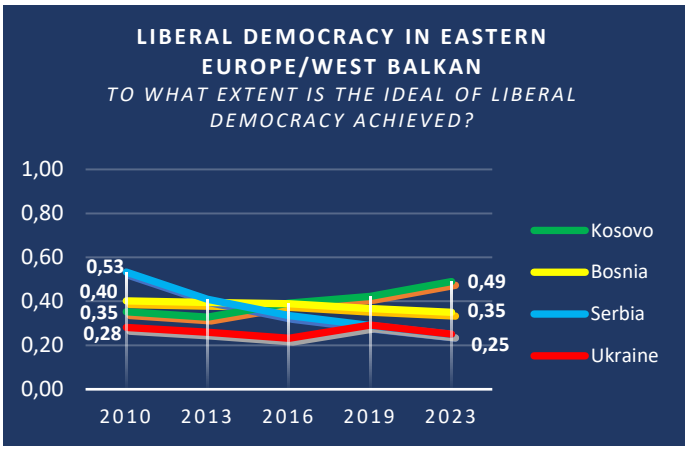
GDP (current US$): 24,47 billion (WB)

GDP per capita, PPP (current Int$): 7,568.8 (WB)

Global Freedom Status: Partly Free, Score 51 (FH)

Human Development Index: High 0.779 (UNDP)

Figure 1



Source: V-Dem Institute (2024

***Clarification**: The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a 'negative' view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account.*

Decentralisation

While the BiH constitution does not mention the autonomy of local governments, it sets the power of the three constituent entities to organise their own territories. As a result, three parallel systems of local self-government exist. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a federation composed of 10 self-governing cantons and local authorities at the municipal level.

The Republic of Srpska was established by its 1992 Constitution as a unitary state, a territorially unified legal entity, with a single-tier of subnational government, composed of municipalities. The RS Constitution recognises local self-government as one of the fundamental principles of the Republic and assigns a set of responsibilities to the municipalities although it does not address their autonomy.

The District of Brčko is a former municipality, established in 1991 by an international arbitration tribunal, over a territory that used to be divided between the two entities (FBiH and RS). Since then, it is a condominium over which FBiH and RS formally agree to share equal dominium and exercise their rights jointly, without owning it. State legislation directly applies to the district, and its fields of competences are nearly the same as the ones of the entities (SNG-WOFI, 2022).

Local Autonomy

Mandates
The degree of local autonomy in Bosnia and Herzegovina varies significantly between entities and municipalities. While entities have considerable powers, local governments often face challenges in decision-making and resource allocation due to interference from higher levels of government and political patronage networks.

Local government in Bosnia and Herzegovina operates at multiple levels, including municipal and city councils within the entities and the Brčko District. Each level has its own elected representatives and executive bodies responsible for local governance, public services, and infrastructure development. However, the effectiveness and authority of local governments vary widely due to political fragmentation and inter-ethnic tensions (SNG-WOFI, 2022).

Table 1

Main sectors	**Cantonal level (only Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina)**	**Municipal level**	
		Bosnia and Herzegovina	**Srpska**
1. General public services (administration)		Assessment of the implementation of policies in healthcare, social welfare, education, culture and sport	Civic affairs registry; Management of natural resources
2. Public order and safety	Police forces	Advisory role regarding public order and safety of people and property; Recovery from natural disasters	Firefighting; Municipal police
3. Economic affairs / transports	Cantonal tourism policy	Economic development and employment; Maintenance of local roads and bridges; Public car parks; Local public transport	Trade and tourism; Employment; Local roads and streets; Gas supply
4. Environment protection	Environmental policy	Parks; Wastewater treatment; Solid waste disposal	Environmental protection; Sanitation
5. Housing and community amenities	Housing policy; Land-use; Building regulations for residential buildings	Spatial Planning; Urban and implementation plans; Zoning; Housing policies and construction; Cemeteries; Street lighting; Water supply	Spatial, urban and regulation plans; Land-use planning; Construction sites; T=Regulations on building and business premises
6. Health	Health policy	Public hygieneMaintenance of Primary Health (Ambulatory) and Secondary Health Care (1st tier Hospitals) Facilities	Public health (geriatric centres)Maintenance of Primary Health (Ambulatory) Care Facilities

7. Culture & Recreation	Development and implementation of cultural policy	Management of cultural institutions (shared); Construction of cultural and sport facilities	Theatres and galleries; Sport and culture halls
8. Education	Development of educational policy	Pre-school educational policy; Public institutions for preschool education and elementary educational institutions	Maintenance of facilities of pre-schools and special art/sport schools
9. Social Welfare	Social welfare policy	Support to orphanages (shared); Social welfare payments (shared); Maintenance of homes for people with disabilities (shared)	Centres for social work

Source: SNG-WOFI Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022)

Budgets

The budget process in Bosnia and Herzegovina is regulated by the Global Framework of Fiscal Balance and Policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (GFFBP), adopted by the Fiscal Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina every three years. Given the strong fiscal decentralization in BiH, the structure of expenditures presented in the GFFBP is indicative for each level of government, and each entity determines the final structure of expenditures and revenues in its own Framework Budget Documents and annual budgets. The fiscal powers of the central government in BiH is relatively weak compared to the two entities of FBiH and RS, although they have been increasing over the past decades, with good revenue performance ahead of the COVID-19 crisis. At the subnational level, each entity has its own Ministry of Finance and laws concerning financial and fiscal rules. In FBiH, the bulk of fiscal power lies in the cantons, while it lies in the entity in RS (SNG-WOFI, 2022).

2020	US $ PPP / inhabitant	% GDP	% General Government	% Subnational Government
Total expenditure	777	4.9%	10.5%	100%
Inc. current expenditure	575	3.7%	8.9%	74.1%
Compensation of employees	220	1.4%	12.2%	28.4%
Intermediate consumption	140	0.9%	11.9%	18.1%
Social expenditure	78	0.5%	3.1%	10.1%
Subsidies and current transfers	125	0.8%	14.9%	16.1%
Financial charges	11	0.1%	9.4%	1.4%
Others	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Incl. capital expenditure	202	1.3%	21.7%	26.0%
Capital transfers	48	0.3%	41.0%	6.2%
Direct investment (or GFCF)	153	1.0%	18.9%	19.7%

Local Democracy

State of Election

Bosnia and Herzegovina have had a steady level of democracy in the last fifteen years, however somewhat declining in the last years (see Figure 1). This is also reflected in V-Dem's Clean Elections Index (see appendix 1).

Table 3

Elections	2020
Voter turnout	50 %
Female Councillors	631
Male Councillors	2 556
Proportion of elected seats held by women	19,6 %

Source: UN Women (2021)

Women representation

The Electoral Act Amendments Act of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its harmonization with the Gender Equality Act from 2013 ensure a 40% quota for the underrepresented gender on political party lists. However, women continue to remain underrepresented in local politics with 19,6 % of the seats in local councils (OECD/UCLG, 2022).

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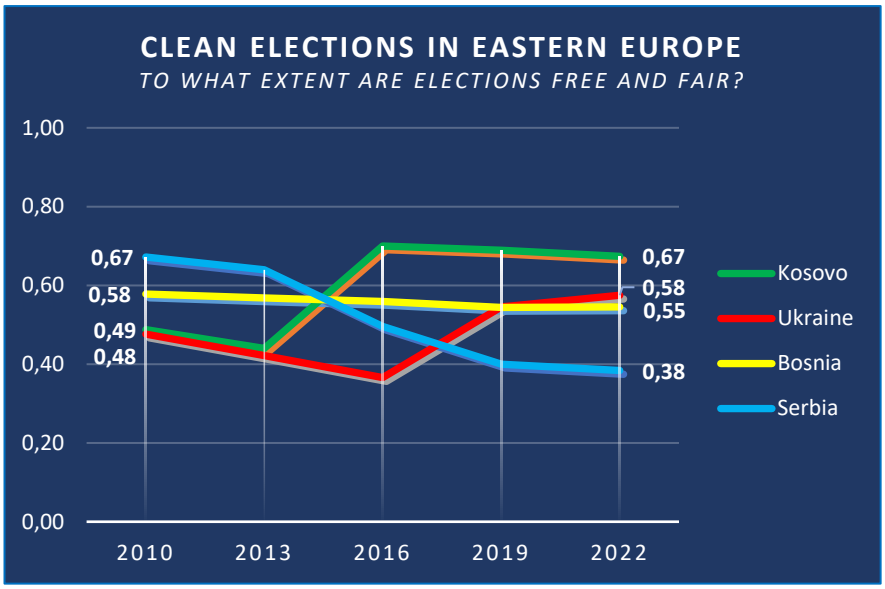
About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organisation is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments. This Country Brief is part of a publication series that investigates the state of decentralisation and local democracy in countries where ICLD programmes operate.

This Country Brief covers events up to March 2024.

Appendix 1: Clean Elections Index

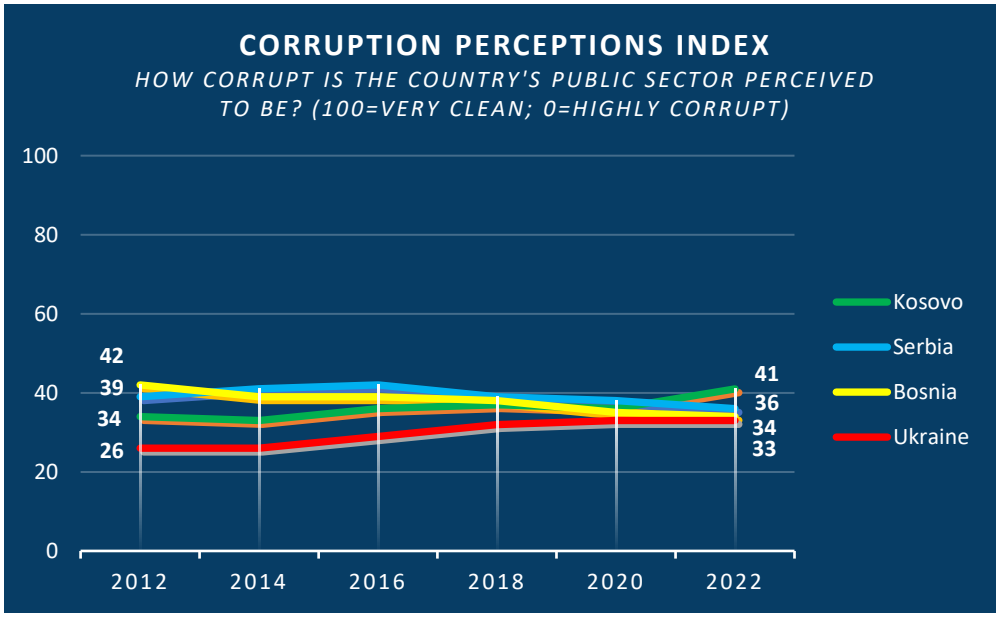
Research Question: To what extent are elections free and fair? (Low to High; 0-1)
Clarification: Free and fair connotes an absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence.



Source: V-Dem Institute (2024)

Appendix 2: Corruption Perceptions Index

Clarification: CPI measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, according to experts and businesspeople.



Source: V-Dem Institute (2022)