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Elections in Montenegro

2020 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | www.IFES.org

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Montenegrin elections authorities as of August 20, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

On June 20, 2020, the president of Montenegro set the date for parliamentary elections and local elections in five municipalities for Sunday, August 30, 2020.¹ Voting will take place from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.² in 1,230 polling stations staffed with approximately 12,300 poll workers plus party representatives from each of the 11 confirmed candidate lists. These elections were initially expected to be held in October 2020 but are now taking place earlier due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is at stake in these elections?

The parliamentary elections on August 30, 2020, are the fourth elections to take place in the Balkans region following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent wave of election postponements. Serbia, Croatia and North Macedonia have all held elections, with varying degrees of mitigation measures and special procedures put in place to assure voter safety. To date, Montenegro is facing a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, and concern over the safety of elections is growing. Aside from the epidemiological situation, Montenegro continues to suffer from political polarization, as the country's political parties define themselves by their pro-Western or pro-Serbian/Russian orientations.³

The country has been led by the Democratic Party of Socialists and leader Milo Djukanovic since before its independence in 2006. National identity will play a large role in the elections, especially following the passage of the controversial Freedom of Religion Law. The law has led to protests by tens of thousands of Serbian Orthodox community members and has exacerbated political party divides on pro-Western versus pro-Serbian/Russian sentiments.⁴

Montenegro is also facing a pressure from the European Union for its endemic corruption and lack of judicial independence, which continues to deteriorate despite dedicated support and assistance.⁵ This pressure is heightened due to continued malign influence by Russian and related Serbian actors. According to the 2019 publication *Vulnerabilities to Russian Influence in Montenegro* by Kremlin Watch, Russia is one of the major foreign influencers in the country, especially after Montenegro's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2017. The impact of this influence is most apparent in the economic, political, civil society, media and religious spheres. The high level of corruption and weak institutions provide fertile soil for Russia's spread of disinformation and permeation into all aspects of Montenegrin society.⁶

What is the electoral system?

There are 81 seats in Montenegro's Parliament, and each member is directly elected by secret ballot in a single nationwide constituency for a four-year term under a proportional representation system with

¹ Decision on calling elections for deputies in the Parliament of Montenegro, June 20, 2020.

² Article 70, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³ Election Observation Delegation to the Presidential Elections in Montenegro, European Parliament, 2018.

⁴ Samir Kajosevic, "Church Accuses Montenegro of Abusing Talks in Disputed Law," BIRN, July 22, 2020.

⁵ Samir Kajosevic, "Montenegro's DPS Will Play Identity Card in 2020 Election," BIRN, January 6, 2020.

⁶ Kremlin Watch Report, *Vulnerabilities to Russian Influence in Montenegro*, European Values, 2019.

closed lists.⁷ Lists that receive at least 3 percent of valid votes are eligible for parliamentary representation, though special rules apply for candidate lists representing national minority communities.⁸ Seats are assigned according to the order of candidates in the lists.⁹ Seats are allocated according to the highest average system, using the d'Hondt method.¹⁰

What is the campaign timeline and expenditure limit?

There are contradictory provisions in the legal framework that dictate when the election campaign starts. While the election law provides the start from the candidate registration deadline, 23 days before the date of elections, the new provisions of the Law on Financing of Political Entities and Election Campaigns states the campaign officially begins following the publication of the Decision on Calling Elections for Deputies in the Parliament of Montenegro in the Official Gazette of Montenegro, which is 80 days before the election.¹¹ The election campaign ends 24 hours before Election Day.¹²

Appointed public officials and elected representatives are not permitted to participate in election campaign activities during working hours, and police and National Security Agency members are not permitted to engage in campaign activities at all.¹³ State-owned radio, television and regional and local public broadcasters must provide free and equal presentation of registered candidate lists at intervals and timeslots as prescribed by law.¹⁴

The National Audit Office oversees political party finance, while the Agency for Prevention of Corruption oversees campaign finance. Under the new provisions of the Law on Financing of Political Entities and Election Campaigns, individuals can donate up to EUR 5,000 (about USD 5,880) and legal entities up to EUR 20,000 (about USD 23,525). The campaign expenditure limit is EUR 1.05 million (about USD 1,235,130).¹⁵

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Any voter who is at least 18 years old, has legal capacity and has been a permanent resident for a minimum of two years ahead of Election Day can stand as a candidate.¹⁶

Registered political parties – individually or as a coalition – and groups of voters can propose candidates in a candidate list, as long as submitted lists receive the required number of signatures.¹⁷ In the 2020

⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Needs Assessment Mission Report, Montenegro Parliamentary Elections, August 30, 2020.

⁸ Article 94, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

⁹ Article 96, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

¹⁰ The d'Hondt method of seat allocation in a closed list system uses the formula: $quotient = V/(s+1)$, where "V" is the total number of votes a party receives, and "s" is the number of seats that party has been allocated. The d'Hondt method tends to slightly favor larger parties and coalitions.

¹¹ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Montenegro Parliamentary Elections, August 30, 2020.

¹² Article 6, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

¹³ Article 50a, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

¹⁴ Articles 51-53a, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

¹⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Montenegro Parliamentary Elections, August 30, 2020, page 9.

¹⁶ Article 11, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

¹⁷ Article 38, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

parliamentary elections, the minimum number of signatures is 4,261, except for minority lists, which may either receive a minimum of 1,000 signatures or 300 if they constitute up to 2 percent of the total population of Montenegro.¹⁸ To promote equal gender representation, candidate lists are subject to a quota of at least 30 percent of candidates of the less-represented gender, as well as at least one candidate of the less-represented gender being placed among the top four on the list.¹⁹

Candidate lists can be submitted as early as 20 days following the announcement of elections, in this case July 11, 2020, and no later than 25 days ahead of the Election Day, or August 4, 2020.²⁰ A total of 778 candidates are competing for 81 seats in the 2020 elections.

Who is eligible to vote and how many registered voters are there?

Any citizen who is at least 18 years old, has legal capacity and has been a permanent resident for a minimum of two years ahead of Election Day has the right to vote in the parliamentary elections.²¹ Out-of-country voting will not be permitted for these elections.²²

On June 22, 2020, the Ministry of the Interior confirmed there were 541,232 eligible voters on the electoral roll, of which 270,839 are women,²³ out of a total population of 621,873.²⁴ There are 23,177 newly registered voters, of which 20,608 will be first-time voters who are 18.²⁵

On Election Day, voters must present their biometric identification card or passport to verify their identity.²⁶

What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

To promote equal gender representation, candidate lists are subject to a quota of at least 30 percent of candidates of the less-represented gender, as well as at least one candidate of the less-represented gender being placed among the top four on the list.²⁷ Minority political parties and coalitions are also

¹⁸ Decision on the required number of signatures of voters to support the electoral list in the elections for the election of deputies to the Parliament of Montenegro, which will be held on August 30, 2020.

¹⁹ Article 39a, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

²⁰ Article 46, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

²¹ Article 11, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

²² OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Montenegro Parliamentary Elections, August 30, 2020, page 2.

²³ State Election Commission of Montenegro.

²⁴ Jovo Martinovic and Stanko Radulovic, "Army of 'Phantom Voters' Casts Doubt over Fairness of Montenegro Vote," BIRN, July 23, 2020.

²⁵ Numerical tabular presentation of data on changes in the voter list as a whole and by local self-government units, in relation to the voter list according to which the previous presidential elections were held on April 15, 2018, published on June 22, 2020.

²⁶ Article 80, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

²⁷ Article 39a, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

afforded special exceptions in the number of signatures needed for submitted candidate lists²⁸ and for the minimum threshold to receive seats in Parliament.²⁹

Voters with disabilities or who are illiterate are eligible to vote with the assistance of a designated individual. Voters who are blind or have low vision can receive a special ballot from their respective election commission.³⁰ Voters with disabilities, who are older or receiving medical treatment may also apply to their polling board to vote by mail. This application is due by 1:00 p.m. on Election Day and must be submitted at the designated polling station.³¹

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

According to the Article 18 of the Law on Election Councillors and Members of Parliament, election management bodies should operate in their permanent (standard appointed members) or extended composition (including candidate list representatives). Election commissions are appointed by the newly elected Parliament, while polling boards are appointed ahead of each election.³² There are 21 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and 1,200 polling boards.³³ Candidates are ineligible for appointment to an election commission.³⁴ The main election management body is the State Election Commission (SEC) of Montenegro, comprised of 10 members and the chairperson, as well as a representative of each candidate list.³⁵ The composition of the SEC equals four members from the parliamentary majority, four from the parliamentary opposition, one from the minority entity that received the most votes in the previous elections and one from civil society.³⁶

The SEC's main responsibilities include coordinating MECs, overseeing election materials, reviewing and publishing official candidate lists and ascertaining and publishing election results.³⁷

What are election authorities doing to safeguard the elections and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic?

As per state authority mandate, all polling stations are required to implement the following measures on Election Day:

- Hand disinfection before entering the polling station and during the voting process;
- Face coverings at the polling station, except when establishing the identity of voters; and

²⁸ Decision on the required number of signatures of voters to support the electoral list in the elections for the election of deputies to the Parliament of Montenegro, which will be held on August 30, 2020.

²⁹ Article 94, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³⁰ Article 84, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³¹ Article 85, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³² Article 19, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³³ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Montenegro Parliamentary Elections, August 30, 2020, page 6.

³⁴ Article 20, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³⁵ Article 30, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

³⁶ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Montenegro Parliamentary Elections, August 30, 2020, page 6.

³⁷ Article 32, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

- Maintaining the prescribed physical distance of one meter before, during and after voting at the polling station.³⁸

When will official results be announced?

The official results from the August 30 elections will be known once all votes cast have been counted. Final results are published by the State Election Commission within 15 days of Election Day in the Official Gazette of Montenegro.³⁹

³⁸ State Election Commission of Montenegro.

³⁹ Article 98, Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament.

Resources

- [Constitution of Montenegro](#)
- [Law on Elections Councillors and Members of Parliament](#)
- [Parliament of Montenegro](#)
- [State Election Commission of Montenegro](#)
- [Candidate lists for the 2020 parliamentary elections](#)
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, [Needs Assessment Report, Parliamentary Elections in Montenegro 2020](#)
- European Values Center for Security Policy, Kremlin Watch Program, [Vulnerabilities to Russian Influence in Montenegro](#)
- Statistical Office of Montenegro, [Social and Political Statistics of Montenegro](#)
- European Parliament, [Election Observation Delegation to the Presidential Elections in Montenegro](#)

IFES in Montenegro

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) engages the State Electoral Commission of Montenegro through its “Regional Election Administration and Political Process Strengthening” (REAPPS) program. REAPPS seeks to develop and strengthen democratic leadership skills among election officials and civil society and increase government oversight, political participation and institutional and public resilience to anti-democratic foreign influences through capacity building in cybersecurity and information integrity.

IFES is also working with the Center for Monitoring and Research (CeMI) in Montenegro to identify priority anti-corruption measures, assist in implementing reforms and monitor social media for evidence of the abuse of state resources by electoral contestants, campaign violations and problematic content, including disinformation, in the runup to the 2020 parliamentary elections.