



Demokracia në Veprim
Demokratija na Delu
Democracy in Action

**Report on the 2021 local
election campaign**

TWO ROUNDS OF LOCAL ELECTIONS - TWO TYPES OF CAMPAIGNS

December, 2021





Report on the 2021 local election campaign
Two rounds of local elections - two types of campaigns

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The publication of this report was made possible with the support of the Olof Palme International Centre (OPIC).

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Design: Envinion

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Introduction

Kosovo this year organized the seventh regular local elections in history, and the fourth since the declaration of independence. On 15 June, President Vjosa Osmani announced the 17 October as the date for holding local elections, after preliminary consultations with political entities¹.

Despite the announcement of the date of the local elections, during the beginning of September, a few days before the start of the official period of the election campaign, the idea of postponing the local elections had circulated, mainly as a result of the deteriorating epidemiological situation in that period. Also, on 10 September, after the request for assessment of the situation by the president, the National Institute of Public Health had recommended postponing the local elections until another assessment². This recommendation was followed by holding consultative meetings convened by the President with political entities in order to discuss such a possibility. However, in the absence of consensus - with the ruling party supporting the postponement and opposition parties categorically opposing it³ - The president had not made a decision to postpone or change the election date⁴.

The election campaign, both for the first round and the run-off, was preceded by a pre-campaign, which had started since the announcement of the election date by the President, and was intensified after the certification of the candidates by the CEC. Also, after the conclusion of the first round, the activities of political entities and candidates who were part of the runoff race immediately began. The official five-day campaign for the second round of elections, determined by the CEC, in fact

had served only as a conclusion of activities by political entities, which had not interrupted the campaign for any moment.

This paper presents a qualitative assessment of the network of local organizations for election observation "Democracy in Action" (DiA), on the election campaign, including the campaign for the second round of mayoral elections. The evaluation was made focusing on five key elements of the election campaign, which include compliance with anti-COVID measures and election rules, campaign format, political offers, candidacies and gender, as well as the expenditures of candidates of political entities.

For this evaluation paper, DiA has applied a mixed methodology, which consists of analyzing the progress and progress of the campaign through desk research of secondary sources, conducting interviews and meetings with election headquarters and representatives of key political entities⁵, as well as interviewing different candidates for mayors of several municipalities. DiA also held a meeting with the Food and Veterinary Agency, an institution responsible for implementing anti-COVID measures, especially during the first round election campaign. During the period of compiling this report, meetings were held with representatives of international election observation missions, including EU-EOM, ENEMO and IESC, representatives of institutions responsible for the organization and administration of elections, and with other local NGOs.

1 For more information, see the announcement:

<https://bit.ly/3GoZHYm>

2 For more information, see: <https://bit.ly/300JM2D>

3 For more information, see: <https://bit.ly/3lvmSli>

4 For more information, see: <https://bit.ly/3EsPSrA>

5 Meetings were held with parliamentary political entities, including the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). Despite the efforts and requests of DiA for holding a meeting with the headquarters and representatives of the Vetëvendosje Movement, such a meeting did not take place.



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Legal framework

In addition to the Constitution, the Law on Local Elections – the provisions of which apply *mutatis mutandis* as defined in the Law on General Elections – provides the legal framework on the basis of which the local electoral system is defined, the manner of organizing and holding elections and regulating election campaigns. Other aspects of the electoral process and the financing of political entities are regulated by the Law on Financing of Political Entities and the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo. Two other important laws related to local elections are the Law on Local Self-Government and the Law on Administrative Boundaries of Municipalities.

Regarding the campaign, the law guarantees all political entities and their candidates the freedom to campaign and conduct election propaganda in the media, organize political events and distribute campaign materials. Campaign activity is defined as any “political rally or speech, meeting, public presentation, or any activity prepared to propagate a political message related to the election”⁶. Although the law defines the election campaign as a 30-day period ending one day before election day, there is a lack of legal regulation for the period outside the official deadline, where in fact a significant part of the activities of political entities take place. The law also provides for equal opportunities to participate in radio and television broadcasts, public funding and other forms of support for political entities and their candidates, and imposes bans on the actions of parties that harm other parties or violate the basic principles of free and fair elections. Regarding the use of public resources, the law prohibits the use of offices, resources or staff of any institution at the central or local level in order to support a political entity in elections, and prohibits political entities from using

civil servants, including the position and resources, for election campaign purposes. The law also addresses the issue of campaign expenditures, namely their limitation, the manner of reporting and auditing them. The manner of functioning and operation of the media in relation to the elections is regulated by law.

Whereas, within the secondary legislation, the election rules, administrative instructions and decisions issued by the Central Election Commission (CEC), regulate specific aspects of the electoral process. There are currently two approved election rules in force governing the election campaign: Election Rules on the Election Campaign and Notification of Political Events⁷ (along with amendment-supplementation⁸), and the Code of Conduct for Political Entities, their Supporters and Candidates⁹.

Since this election process took place during a pandemic, another law that has affected the organization of the election process, and in particular the election campaign, is the Law on Prevention and Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo. This law gives powers and competencies to central institutions, including the Ministry of Health and the Government of Kosovo itself, in coordination with the inspectorates and the Police to oversee the restrictions approved by the Government. The latter, through decisions on general special measures, which among other things limit the number of participants in public and private gatherings – as the main forms of campaigning.

⁷ For more information, see Election Regulation No. 13/2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ovrTSW>

⁸ For more information, see Election Regulation No. 20/2019. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ExFRcN>

⁹ For more information, see Election Regulation No. 11/2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3drv5bU>

⁶ For more information, see the Law on General Elections. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3y2a3Kq>

(Un)limited campaign during the pandemic

Electoral processes are considered as one of the basic pillars of democracy that enable the democratic participation of citizens in decision making. And worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way election campaigns are conducted.

Holding the third consecutive elections in Kosovo in times of pandemics, has guaranteed the exercise of the constitutional right of citizens to elect their representatives in local level institutions – as a fundamental right in a democratic state. The experiences created by both parties in the pre-pandemic elections in Kosovo, have given the necessary comfort and time to political entities to design strategies with innovative and creative ideas on how they can conduct the election campaign, targeting as many people as possible and at the same time trying to maintain public health.

Since a few days before the start of the official campaign period, Kosovo was in a deteriorating epidemiological situation, the leaders of the opposition parties had formally requested the shortening of the election campaign period, at different lengths – 10 days, one week and five days, respectively. It was also requested that social networks and televised debates serve as platforms for political confrontation. Such a request, at least formally, was not supported by the ruling party. On the other hand, knowing that such a cut would be formal, equal, and not left to the discretion of the parties to be respected, legal changes were needed, the demands remained only as an expression of good will. All parties, including those that proposed shortening the campaign but also those that did not issue statements, almost indiscriminately continued to organize numerous rallies throughout the campaign, with minimal respect for the measures in force.

As in other countries where pandemic elections are taking place, the local election campaign in both rounds has been conducted under restrictive government measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first-round election campaign, on 11 September – five days before the official start of the campaign – the Government of Kosovo changed the anti-COVID measures based on the recommendations of the NIPHK and the epidemiological situation in the country. According to the measures approved by the Government, political entities and candidates were allowed to organize election activities indoors with only up to 20 people, with a physical distance of 1.5 meters. While outside, gatherings with up to 50 participants were allowed, respecting the rule of keeping physical distance.¹⁰ Meanwhile, for the election campaign for the second round of elections, the Government on 30 October had somewhat relaxed the measures related to the rallies, increasing the number of persons allowed indoors to thirty (30) persons provided the participants possess the vaccination certificate, the RT-PCR negative test for COVID-19, the evidence that the person has passed COVID-19 or the rapid negative antigen test. In open environments, the number of participants had increased to seventy (70) persons with the same condition for the presentation of the aforementioned evidence.¹¹

¹⁰ Decision of the Government of Kosovo on general and special measures for the control, prevention and combating of the COVID-19 pandemic, dated 11 September 2021. Available at: https://kryem-inistri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Masat-kunder-COVID-19_11092021.pdf

¹¹ For more information, see the announcement of the Ministry of Health for the new measures, dated 23 October 2021. Available at: <https://msh.rks-gov.net/sq/qeveria-miratoi-masat-e-e-reja-anti-covid-19/>



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The level of observance of anti-COVID measures during the election campaign in the first round and in the second round was incomparably different. Although during the first round the number of candidates taking part in the race was many times greater, there was generally increased caution in respecting the measures. Of course, the concentration of campaign activities mainly in digital formats had an impact on such a situation. Whereas, as in the second round the campaign of the candidates of political entities shifted from the digital one to the traditional activities – including rallies with large civic participation or parades in public squares – there was a significant deterioration in the level of respect for the masses.



120 inspectors

Despite the relatively large number of inspectors, with approximately 120 of them engaged, the FVA did not have an **ex-officio** mandate to control the activities of political entities, or impose fines after holding meetings – based on photos posted by political entities themselves where non-compliance with the measures was observed.

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The lack of systematic and routine controls by the Kosovo Police and the FVA, and the insufficient fines by these institutions, or their imposition in mostly minimal values, have made such meetings to take place freely throughout the municipalities, especially during the last days of the campaign, where the number of participants in the activities varied from hundreds to thousands. Even in cases when the CEC itself has reported on the organization of rallies contrary to the measures in force, no relevant legal action has been taken, without ignoring the fact that most of these rallies have been public or the same have been advertised by political entities and their candidates. In this regard, political entities have applied different approaches. Those times they have tried to be careful in the posts they have made on social networks regarding the activities held, which provided a supposed guarantee of guaranteeing the distance between people and respecting the allowed number of people in a certain space, and in other cases – especially during the runoff campaign, they did not hesitate to publish photos from meetings or walks in public spaces with up to thousands of participants.

A large number of activities have taken place in the premises of various schools in the municipalities, and in some cases even inside school buildings, which is a violation of the MEST decision on this issue.

Regarding inspection institutions, the Food and Veterinary Agency (FVA), as one of the supervisory authorities for the implementation of anti-COVID-19 measures, has stated¹² that they have not been able to control the observance of measures in many of the activities of political entities, due to the fact that most of the activities of political entities have taken place in private spaces, in which inspection is allowed only by order of the Prosecution. Despite the relatively large number of inspectors, with approximately 120 of them engaged, the FVA did not have an *ex-officio* mandate to control the activities of political entities, or impose fines after holding meetings – based on photos posted by political entities themselves where non-compliance with the measures was observed. This has made the number of fines imposed by this institution to be extremely low, compared to the number of activities held in violation of applicable measures.

According to the leaders of this institution, from all the inspections made in the activities that they have monitored, during the first round of elections, observance of measures was observed mainly in urban areas, while partial observance was observed in rural areas. However, in the second round, the level of compliance with the measures was almost zero, both as a result of few inspections, but also fines, the amount of which was negligible. According to its representatives, the FVA has also attempted to maintain functional neutrality, as in some cases it has attempted to be portrayed as a party to the election campaign. According to them, one of the biggest problems that the FVA has encountered during this process is the lack of inter-institutional communication between them and the CEC, including the Municipal Election Commissions (MECs). As MECs are responsible for drafting and disseminating the calendar of meetings and election activities, including the time intervals and venues where rallies are held on a daily basis for political entities. In the absence of this communication, according to FVA officials, they had no information on where the election activities are taking place and conducted the inspection on an ad-hoc basis depending on the information they received from the field.

¹² Interview with Flamur Kadriu – Executive Director of the FVA, Ibrahim Tërshnjaku – Chief Sanitary Inspector at the FVA and Lamir Thaçi – Information Officer at the FVA.



Political programs of candidates

Unlike the campaigns of past electoral processes, the disclosure of political programs is being done from the beginning of the campaign and being seen by the candidates as an element that can constitute a competitive advantage in the race. Their debut with clearer program offerings is changing for the better the discussion and the language of the campaign, compared to the previous discussions, whose main components were the accusations and the counter-accusations.

Social networks - especially the Facebook and Instagram platforms - as well as TV debates, are the two most used channels for publishing political platforms. In certain cases, the main points of political programs have also been shared through press conferences. Regarding social networks, there has been considerable progress regarding the publication of full political programs, in written and PDF formats, which have been published on the official websites of the candidates. Moreover, the visualization of many projects, especially infrastructure projects, has had a positive impact on the respective electorate, as voters have had the opportunity to better experience the vision of candidates related to certain projects. Meetings with small groups of citizens in public spaces as well as meetings with interest groups are other forms used by candidates to unveil their political programs.

Political parties have played a role in preparing the programs of their candidates, although a considerable autonomy of the respective candidates and branches has been maintained in this regard, due to the different specifics of the municipalities. Almost all political parties or their candidates have declared to the candidates and branches it is left to almost complete discretion to draft the governing plan, especially in cases where the candidate has previously been chairperson or part of the executive. Parties are involved in certain cases only to review or comment on certain parts, as well as

in cases where unfulfilled promises have been identified. Parties have also provided assistance in cases where or when expertise was needed in elaborating implementation plans. Whereas, in cases when the candidates have not been in the executive before, they have encountered difficulties in drafting election programs, they have been offered assistance by specialized teams from the central level of the parties. All parties have paid additional attention, resources and expertise to the race for the capital city.

The content of the candidates' governing programs or plans has advanced significantly compared to past electoral processes. Capital investments are the main topic of the political programs of the majority of candidates, marking a transition from providing promises that are essentially of a maintenance nature to the current situation, to transformation projects. However, for the latter, in some cases action plans, timelines were missing, and clear information was not provided on the cost of implementation and provision of financial resources for their implementation. This has made them seen as unachievable in the eyes of some citizens. The vast majority of candidates' promises are within the scope and competencies of municipalities. However, the budgetary capacity that municipalities have available to carry out all promised interventions or investments remains highly questionable.

The main points of the candidates' political offers include the improvement of infrastructure, employment, subsidies in agriculture, culture, sports and the like. This highlights their strategies to attract voters from different demographic and professional groups. An added value of the programs of a significant part of the candidates for mayors are also the environmental policies, which have found significantly more space in their programs, but also throughout the campaign in general. It is worth noting that environmental policies



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Even in these elections, there were cases when certain candidates made promises or included in their programs issues that are in the competence of the central level, such as the creation of economic zones, construction of stadiums and others. As usual, these promises were made mainly by certain candidates of the ruling political entity. Candidates from the ruling political entity have tried to turn it to their advantage, counting on the help of the Government for the realization of these projects and promised investments. Whereas, to some extent, the cases have been expressed when the candidates for municipal assemblies have given electoral promises, the implementation of which is almost not in the hands of municipal assemblies.

Among the distinctive features of the campaign, especially the one for the first round of elections, was the strategy of some candidates, to be seen together with the neighbourhood communities during the campaign, intervening and fixing basic problems, as a form of attracting civic support, promoting a working spirit in the community and creating an image of practical governance.

During the campaign for the second round, the political programs reflected minimal changes. The programs as such were largely the same as those presented to voters in the first round of elections, although in certain cases, be it as a result of sensitivity to problems raised by citizens or coalitions with other entities, candidates

have updated their programs. Even during the second round, the trend of making government curricula public was continued, both in the form of brochures - which were distributed in public spaces or in certain neighbourhoods - as well as in electronic formats. However, although the programs have been made public, it has not been made known who will be responsible for implementing the program in certain sectors. In this regard, none of the candidates for mayor, neither during the first round nor during the runoff, has made public the eventual composition of local government cabinets.

During the second round, the phenomenon of coalitions between political entities or their candidates in different municipalities has been quite pronounced, although in some cases they have not been formalized. However, in some municipalities, political entities and candidates have stated that they will not form coalitions with other entities. And in cases when there were coalitions, unfortunately not even in this election process, the agreements for coalitions have not been made public. Thus, the citizens have remained uninformed about the agreed program points or the division of governmental responsibilities, which represents a lack of transparency in relation to the citizens. Some of these coalitions have been formalized after election day, especially among the winning candidates. However, the vast majority of these agreements have not been made public.



Between the traditional and the digital campaign

Even before the official start of the campaign for the first round of elections, political entities had stated that their campaign would be more oriented to social networks and other forms, due to the implications that the “field campaign” could have on the deterioration of the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions imposed by anti-COVID measures on the organization of rallies have prevented all citizens from participating equally in the physical electoral activities of political parties.

In addition to the impact of the pandemic, technological developments, but also the potential of social networks, have pushed political entities and their candidates to make a significant leap from the traditional way of campaigning, to the mostly digital campaign. This, at least during the first round of elections, during which the candidates of political entities in this campaign have oriented their capacities more towards digital and innovative forms, mainly in social networks. Here we are talking about posts, video messages, live discussion sessions with citizens - but not to mention targeted meetings with small groups of participants, TV debates and more.

Among the advantages of such a campaign transformation are the greater number of citizens that can be achieved through digital communication, the acceptance of citizens' reactions and views regarding candidacies or political programs, and the reduction of the risk of spreading the virus. Another important element of the digital campaign is the positive impact it has on the preservation of the environment, knowing that the distribution of brochures and the placement of posters in public spaces has been reduced to almost zero. It can even be concluded that this is the “cleanest” campaign - in the environmental sense - that has been organized so far. This, taking into account the fact that in previous election processes, the ECAP had imposed hundreds of

thousands of euros in fines on political entities, precisely because of the placement of billboards, posters and other promotional materials in prohibited areas.

Factors that have influenced the change in the way the campaign is conceived are likely to be the changes within the leadership of political parties. Some of them have stated that the new mayors have had a new approach in relation to social networks, unlike previous mayors who have had a more conservative approach that have tried to avoid digital campaigns. Another factor turns out to be the cost of the digital campaign, which is several times less costly than the traditional one.

However, with the conclusion of the first round, political entities and their mayoral candidates who went to the runoff again focused on traditional forms of campaigning, including public gatherings with large numbers of citizens, door-to-door meetings or walking through squares and other public spaces. Traditional campaigns have enabled a more direct and tangible communication between candidates and citizens. The organization of such activities was facilitated by the measures released by the Government in relation to public gatherings where the allowed number of participants was increased.

In addition to the targeted age groups, differences in the implementation of the digital and traditional campaigns have been observed especially from a demographic perspective. In rural areas, there have been many times more traditional campaign form activities, unlike in urban areas - especially in large centres - where the digital campaign has largely eclipsed the traditional campaign, albeit in the second round the traditional format had again occupied a considerable place.

However, for some of the candidates, the ‘online’ campaign has been penalizing because it has prevented the



With the orientation of the campaign towards the traditional format, the phenomenon of abuse of public resources for campaign purposes has been brought to the fore again. This phenomenon was significantly more present in the runoff race, and was manifested through the participation of members of the government cabinet in public rallies or walks in the squares, mainly during working hours.

holding of physical citizen meetings, especially recognizing the importance of meetings with the composition of the electorate that candidates may have. Based on interviews with some of the candidates of subjects of political change, it was said that the majority of their electorate is difficult to target through online platforms. This is especially true for political parties that have older constituencies that are not very familiar with the use of social media. While most candidates acknowledge that the methods used to campaign digitally have their benefits, they say they cannot replace physical meetings - which they say bring them closer to the electorate.

Television debates are seen as an integral element of both types of campaigns. However, TV shows and debates between candidates have been the added value of these elections, unlike past processes where there were only few debates. The format of debates with only two candidates has enabled more in-depth and substantive discussions regarding the program offerings of the candidates, unlike the debates of the first round when this was made impossible by the large number of participating candidates and the narrow time space. Although there has been improvement in this regard, there is still room for further advancement, as for some municipalities only individual shows were held with the respective candidates, even during the second round.

Regarding the language of the candidates in the campaign, unlike the first round of elections where the campaign was generally calm and balanced, the cases of language irritation and intensification of discourse between the candidates have been quite pronounced, especially during televised debates, but not excluding speeches and communications on social networks.

With the orientation of the campaign towards the traditional format, the phenomenon of abuse of public resources for campaign purposes has been brought to the fore again. . This phenomenon was significantly more present in the runoff race, and was manifested through the participation of members of the government cabinet in public rallies or walks in the squares, mainly during working hours. At the same time, the involvement of the central level executive in the local competition by providing support to the candidates of that political entity, linking the implementation of certain projects with the provision of financial assistance by the Government, has influenced the principle of equal electoral competition. Also, MPs from almost all political parties have been actively involved in the campaign activities.



Financial means in the campaign

Given the trends of orienting the activities of political entities towards digital campaigns, it has been expected that a large number of candidates, including candidates for municipal assemblies, will direct a part of their financial means in advertising and sponsorship of articles and their posts on social networks, especially on the platforms “Facebook” and “Instagram”. This is also noticed by the large number of articles or posts which bear the mark of sponsorship on the pages of these candidates. This is confirmed by the fact that according to a survey by KDI, close to 90% of candidates for mayor, have stated that “Facebook” is the official platform for communication between them and citizens during the campaign. Because these platforms do not have access to information related to the amounts spent, target groups and other demographic information, it is technically impossible to project how much money entities are spending on advertising on digital platforms. However, based on standard sponsorship cost rates, a significant portion of the budget is spent in this regard.

From experience to date, the expenditures of political entities and their candidates on social networks or other digital platforms have not been reported and have not been included in the campaign financial reports. This has resulted in uncontrolled expenditures, as well as violated the principle of equal electoral competition, as these expenditures are not included in the ceiling of maximum expenditures allowed for political entities, set by the CEC.

Political entities have stated that their finances have been limited, so the distribution of finances has been done through prioritization¹³, with the exception of LVV,

whose candidates have stated that the allocation of funds is done for municipalities based on the number of voters¹⁴. Whereas, PDK has provided resources through the purchase of television space for candidates, a space which has been divided proportionally according to the number of voters but in some cases also the potential of the political entity to win elections in those municipalities.¹⁵ Moreover, since most of the political entities have stated that they have faced financial problems during the pandemic period, they have tried to have as little expenses as possible on social networks, while replacing large gatherings with meetings with targeted or individual groups - which they have rated as most effective in increasing civic support.¹⁶ The pages on the social networks of LVV candidates are said to be managed and populated with data mainly by activists of the political entity.

Among the forms that political entities have declared as support to the candidates has been the compilation of a general branding through a ‘brandbook’ that has been shared with the candidates, the commitment of certain companies to shoot different spots, as well as the provision of assistance in the preparation of governing program, especially for candidates running for the first time. In certain cases, the branding of candidates in some municipalities has exceeded that of the respective parties. Marketing companies (PR) have been described in many cases as overestimated by political entities, so political entities have not engaged such for the compilation of the campaign plan at the central level. Certain candidates, through their own resources, have engaged local marketing companies, which have

14 Interviews with candidates Armend Agusholli (Peja) and Kadri Rahimaj (Kamenica).

15 Interviews with PDK election headquarters: Betim Gjoshi and Arianit Elshani.

16 Interview with AAK election headquarters: Muharrem Nitaj.

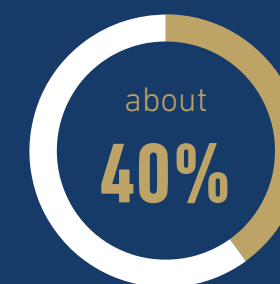
13 Interviews with the LDK election headquarters: Arben Gashi.



of candidates estimate that financial transparency affects accountable governance and that it is important in generating popular support



of candidates stated that own funds are the main source of funding for their campaigns, whether as a sole or partial source of funding.



of candidates stated that their own budget is the only form of financing their election campaign.

dealt with certain aspects of the campaign.

None of the political entities has specifically envisaged gender budgeting as a way to support and encourage women's participation in elections. However, in the case of PDK, it was stated that women candidates were promoted through the increased support provided to them by the party leadership, especially the chairperson and vice-chairperson.

The Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI), as the leader of the coalition of local NGOs for election observation “Democracy in Action” (DiA), has conducted special research regarding the financial transparency of candidates for mayors.¹⁷ This research covered issues related to financial transparency, including those related to social media campaigns, financial planning and how campaigns are funded.

Based on the main findings of this research, it turns out that although over 90% of candidates estimate that financial transparency affects accountable governance and that it is important in generating popular support, not all candidates have been transparent about campaigns. On the other hand, due to the increasing level of use of social networks for campaign purposes, there

has been a decrease in cases when political platforms and programs have not been published on the Internet, with only about 30% of candidates not having their programs accessible on digital platforms. In terms of financial planning, almost a quarter of mayoral candidates (23.5% of them) did not have any calculations or planning on potential campaign expenditures.

Although political entities consistently declare that they equally support their candidates financially, based on this research, it is observed that almost all candidates finance their campaigns with their own funds. Over 92% of candidates stated that own funds are the main source of funding for their campaigns, whether as a sole or partial source of funding. About 40% of candidates stated that their own budget is the only form of financing their election campaign.

While, within the support provided by the political entity, the coverage of transportation costs, provision of human resources, assistance in marketing services, as well as other forms of non-financial support, which include volunteers, free advertising space, and free performances. In the context of the findings of this research, although the legislation does not provide for individual financial reporting of candidates, it is noted that 98% of candidates for mayor have stated that they are ‘pro’ that candidates are legally obliged to declare their campaign finances.

17 Full KDI report on financial transparency of mayoral candidates in the 2021 local elections, available at: <https://kdi-kosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/59-Raporti-per-financat-e-kandidat-eve-per-kryetare-03.pdf>



Nominations and campaign language

Over 5,200 candidates for municipal assemblies, and about 166 candidates for mayors, ran in the local elections. Within the candidacies for mayors, more than half of the candidates (about 55%) were candidates who had not run before, an indicator of the ongoing efforts of the parties to produce new staff and personalities. This was especially pronounced in the capital, where six of the seven candidates competed for the first time. Whereas, the parties which in certain municipalities have won the elections with the same candidate more than once, have stated that after the elections work will begin on the preparation of new candidacies for the next electoral process after four years.¹⁸

Also, characteristic of the candidacies was the running of candidates for mayors, at the same time as holders of lists for municipal assemblies. Approximately one third of the candidates for mayors, respectively 50 of them, are also holders of lists for municipal assemblies. This has prevented local level candidates from having a better chance of being elected. Whereas, as holders of lists for municipal assemblies we have five deputies of the Assembly, three of whom are also candidates for mayor.

Almost all entities through their statutory norms provide different procedures for the selection of candidates for mayors, but also those for municipal assemblies. Despite the high level of decision-making autonomy assigned to local party units (branches, sub-branches, centres or points), based on interviews conducted with relevant political actors, there is an involvement of the central level of the party in determining candidates in specific municipalities, although even in those cases formal approval procedures are followed. Some of the

parties have emphasized the cases when the candidate for mayor is not at the same time the chairman of the branch in question, situations which have produced various problems in the local functioning of the parties.

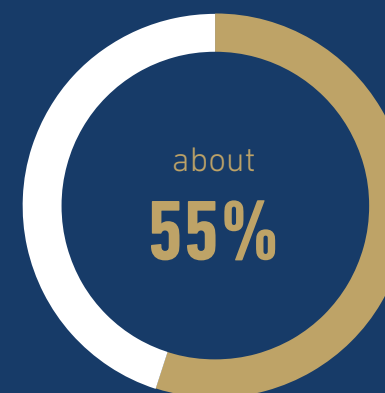
During the campaign for the first round there was a significantly greater concentration of campaign activities in promoting candidates for mayors, overshadowing candidates for municipal assemblies. This is not something new for election campaigns in Kosovo, as traditionally political entities have almost completely focused on mayoral candidates. On the other hand, candidates for municipal assemblies are seen more as a "decoration" during the activities or meetings of political entities. While, progress has been made in terms of media space provided to candidates for municipal assemblies, for which some televised debates have been organized.

Regarding the language used by the candidates, although on a general level it was balanced, the situation was "two-faced", with substantial differences between the two rounds of elections. While the first round was characterized by a relaxed language of the candidates and without any case of using hate speech against the candidates, during the second round, the cases of language irritation and aggravation of discourse between the candidates were quite pronounced, especially during televised debates, but without excluding speeches or communications on social networks. The only atypical case related to language and political correctness was the organization of a kind of protest by the supporters of one political entity (LVV), against the candidate from the ranks of another entity (PDK), before the first round. This form of 'negative campaign', which aims to attack opponents mainly in the personal dimension, focusing on their previous attitudes or actions - in order to create a more negative perception of them, is not even expressed in other municipalities.

¹⁸ Interview with AAK election headquarters: Muharrem Nitaj.

Over
5,200 candidates for
municipal assemblies

and about
166 candidates for mayors
ran in the local elections.

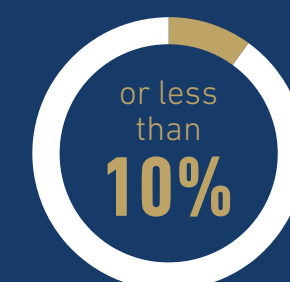


Within the candidacies for mayors, more than half of the candidates were candidates who had not run before.



Out of
166 candidates
13 of them

who were part of the
race for mayor, only

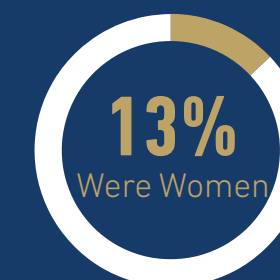


Are Women

In close to
75%
of Kosovo municipalities,
there was no woman who
ran for mayor.

Regarding the list
holders, out of a
total of
270 of them
at the national level

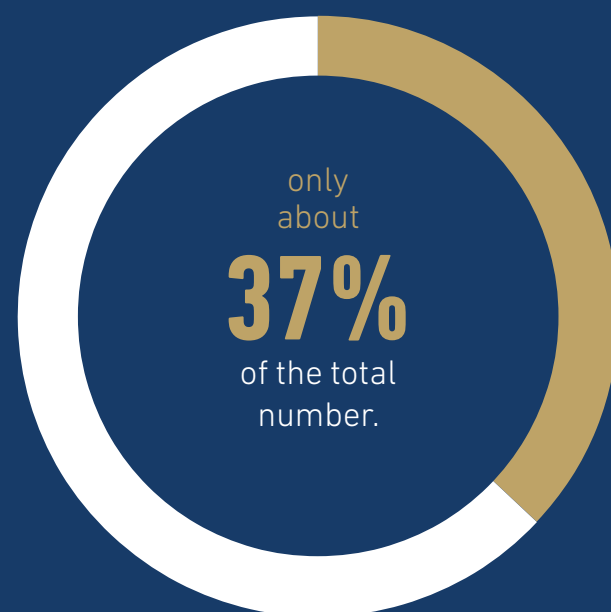
34 of them





Whereas, out of about
5,300
certified candidates for
municipal assemblies,

only
1,943 of them are
women,



First, at the beginning of the campaign, the former MP from the Democratic Party of Kosovo, Uran Ismaili, who was running for mayor of Pristina, had resigned, while now the former Minister of Health from the Vetëvendosje Movement, Arben Vitia, had resigned in the middle of the campaign.



Another important element that testifies to the maturity of political entities and candidates in the race, is the immediate acceptance of the election result. In all municipalities, all elected mayors have accepted their mandate without any problems, while in cases where there has been a change of power, the transition has been smooth and has shown political correctness among the candidates.

However, before the start of the official 30-day campaign period, such isolated cases were identified.

The candidacy in the local elections of officials who have already been elected or appointed to another high public position, has also been a phenomenon expressed in these elections. Among them, we have at least 12 deputies and a minister who have entered the race for mayor. While, there are also such deputies, who have competed only for the municipal assembly, although it was almost certain that none of them would hold the mandate won in the municipal assemblies before the mandate in the Assembly of Kosovo. This phenomenon has had a negative impact on the work and performance of these individuals in relevant institutions, but also the institutions themselves as such. Given the great commitment required in both the exercise of public office and the electoral race, running in the latter had to be followed by resignation from public office, although this is not a legal obligation. However, during this campaign only two cases of such a resignation action were recorded. First, at the beginning of the campaign, the former MP from the

Democratic Party of Kosovo, Uran Ismaili, who was running for mayor of Pristina, had resigned, while now the former Minister of Health from the Vetëvendosje Movement, Arben Vitia, had resigned in the middle of the campaign.

Another important element that testifies to the maturity of political entities and candidates in the race, is the immediate acceptance of the election result. In all municipalities, all elected mayors have accepted their mandate without any problems, while in cases where there has been a change of power, the transition has been smooth and has shown political correctness among the candidates. In this regard, Kosovo has already established a standard of high political maturity, turning the acceptance of the result and the eventual transition of power into a completely common norm.

Despite constant calls for more women to be included in the electoral lists, political entities have generally continued to comply with the minimum legal criterion of 30%, and only within the lists for municipal assemblies. While as candidates for mayors and holders of electoral lists, the inclusion of women was even more marginal. Out of 166 candidates who were part of the race for mayor, only 13 of them - or less than 10%, are women. In close to 75% of Kosovo municipalities, there was no woman who ran for mayor. Regarding the list holders, out of a total of 270 of them at the national level, only 34 of them, or about 13% of them, were women. Whereas, out of about 5,300 certified candidates for municipal assemblies, only 1,943 of them are women, or only about 37% of the total number.

As part of the race for mayor, out of 38 municipalities, only two of them - inhabited by the Serb community - will be led by women, respectively the Municipality of Gracanica and the Municipality of Ranilug. In both of these municipalities, women candidates were elected in the first round. Whereas, only one-woman candidate

managed to go to the runoff, namely Mimoza Kusari-Lila (LVV) in the Municipality of Gjakova.

On the other hand, out of 1,002 candidates who managed to win seats in all municipal assemblies nationwide, only 364 of them were women. This number of women is approximately within the space provided to them within the voter lists.



Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper and the monitoring of the electoral process as a whole, Democracy in Action (DiA) provides the following recommendations for improving and advancing the election campaign:

- 1** The conduct of electoral activities by political entities before the official start of the campaign, should be regulated by law, so that all relevant obligations, restrictions and provisions apply to activities outside the official campaign deadline;
- 2** Funding of political entities and their candidates, especially during the campaign period, should be advanced:
 - a.** Political entities must open special bank accounts for their financing and expenditures during the campaign, which must be transparent and accessible to the public, on the CEC website, any other portal, or on the websites of the political entity or candidates themselves;
 - b.** Political entities and their candidates must strictly adhere to CEC restrictions on campaign spending. Expenditures made by political entities and their candidates outside the official campaign period should be an integral part of the expenditure limit, which is set by the CEC;
 - c.** The issue of financial declaration for candidates of political entities, including personal income and expenses for the period during the campaign, must be included in the framework of electoral reform or when amending the Law on Financing of Political Entities;
 - d.** Political entities should make transparent the manner in which their funds are distributed to women candidates, in order to have equal support for all candidates;
 - e.** The audit of the finances and campaign expenditures of political entities must be completed within the legal deadlines. Whereas, the reform should also foresee the change of the current model for auditing, returning this competence from the Assembly to IPRO - whose mandate should be significantly strengthened;
- 3** The ruling political entities must adhere to the legal provisions regarding the use of public resources in the campaign, actions which are strictly prohibited. Also, the legal framework related to the campaign should be reviewed and clarified, in order to prevent the use of public resources;
- 4** Candidates of political entities should refrain from offering promises that are not within the competence of local level institutions. Whereas, the Government should not be involved in campaign promises, at least to the extent that it violates the principle of equal competition between candidates;
- 5** Coalitions between political entities and/or certain candidates must be transparent to citizens. Coalition agreements should be made public as soon as they are reached;
- 6** In order to promote transparent and accountable governance, candidates running for mayor must make known the names of potential members of their governing cabinets at the local level. In this way, the citizens would be informed about the holders of the implementation of certain program points - an element that can be decisive in their will;
- 7** Political entities should offer women much more space in the election campaign. Political entities must, in compliance with the Law on

Gender Equality, provide equal space, according to the 'zebra' model in the lists for municipal assemblies. Larger numbers of women should be included as candidates for mayor. Also, women should be offered more space to run as list holders for municipal assemblies;

- 8** During the election race, political entities but also the media, should provide more space for candidates for municipal assemblies, who play an important role in local government;
- 9** Political entities and their candidates should refrain from using any kind of hate speech, incitement or other actions that may have an impact on irritating public discourse between them or their supporters;
- 10** Political entities and candidates should continue to develop and advance strategies for orienting campaign activities towards digital forms, which in addition to lower costs, also have an advantage in the number of audiences achieved and in promoting an environmentally friendly campaign;
- 11** Political entities and their candidates should establish the practice of confrontation in televised debates, both in the first and second rounds of elections (if applicable), so that citizens have the opportunity to see the program differences or the way of implementation of certain projects by the candidates;
- 12** Political platforms of candidates of political entities should give priority to green policies, knowing their multidimensional impact on the lives of citizens;
- 13** If Kosovo is to re-organize the election process in pandemic conditions, a special normative act must be issued that strictly regulates the conduct of the campaign in those conditions. In this regard, there is a need for communication and institutional interaction between state bodies that are involved in monitoring the implementation of anti-COVID measures.

Given that Kosovo has successfully completed two electoral processes this year, including parliamentary and local elections, Democracy in Action reiterates that it's the right political momentum to initiate the electoral reform process.

This missing process is of special importance for the advancement of the electoral process as well as addressing the shortcomings identified so far in the election cycles, since the legal framework of the elections has not changed for more than a decade, respectively from 2010 and 2008 with its segments that do not correspond to the current context of political developments.

Electoral reform should include the revision of a number of laws, including the Law on General Elections, the Law on Local Elections, the Law on the Financing of Political Entities, and possibly other laws affected by changes in electoral legislation. In addition to the technical aspects, electoral reform should also include some of the political issues and key elements of the electoral system itself.

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