Reading the results of Kosovo's snap elections

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On 10 July the Central Election Commission informed the President of Kosovo that it had certified the election results of the 11 June parliamentary election. According to the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of Kosovo, the Assembly's inaugural session will now be convened by the President within thirty (30) days of the official announcement of election results. The certification has set in motion the process of establishing a new coalition government. This report looks at the results, possible scenarios and upcoming challenges for the parties in the aftermath of one of the most inconclusive election results in Kosovo's recent democratic history.

Free and Fair

The snap election was held on 11 June in a mostly quiet and orderly manner. Observers generally agree that this was one of the best elections that Kosovo has organized since its declaration of independence in 2008. There were no major complaints by any of the competing parties. An exception to this can be found in the Serb community, where we saw a rather tense situation. However, it is important to note that the intimidation and threats reported by Serb voters came from within the Serb community itself, rather than as a result of inter-ethnic tension. According to other Serb parties competing, the Belgrade-backed Srpska Lista used pressure and intimidation to ensure the votes of the Serb community.

In its preliminary statement, the European Union Election Observation Mission stated, "The 11 June 2017 early elections were genuinely competitive and peaceful in most parts of Kosovo, and voters were generally offered pluralistic information on the political forces in competition." Similarly, the OSCE has described the elections as having been held in an organized manner "without major irregularities or incidents".[1]

However, the election process was negatively impacted by long-standing issues. These included inaccurate voter lists that are vulnerable to fraud, an electoral system open to abuse, and a largely flawed system for out-of-Kosovo voting. The reforms necessary to combat these issues will require considerable political will and commitment.[2]

Winners and winners

2014's Constitutional Court decision gave the entity with the most votes in an election considerable say in the formation of a government. The biggest party or coalition, by default, holds the position of Speaker and is given the opportunity to establish a governing coalition. The now famous decision leaves

[1] http://tiranatoday.com/zgjedhjet-ne-kosove-osbe-u-mbajten-ne-menyre-te-organizuar/

[2] https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_eom_kosovo_2017_ps_en.pdf

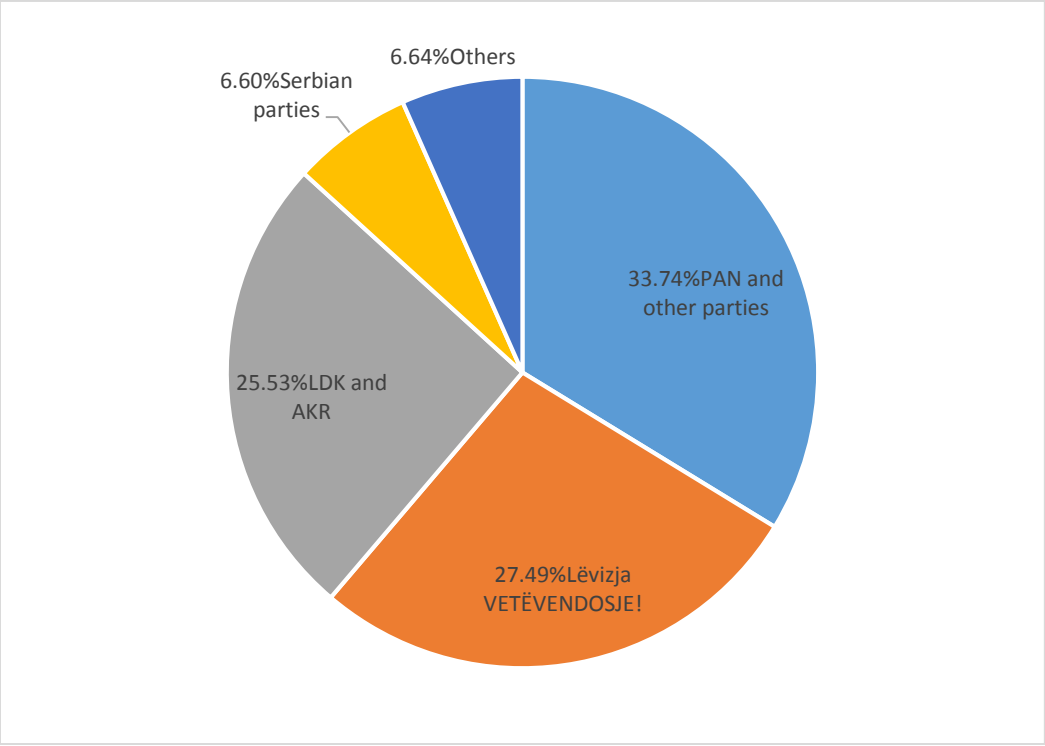
it to the President's discretion what to do if the entity with the most votes fails to establish a governing coalition: he can either give an opportunity to the entity that came second or he can call new elections.

This is why most of the parties entered pre-election coalitions, so that they can come out of elections as the biggest entity and therefore have the position of Assembly Speaker and have the first (or some say only) shot at forming a government.

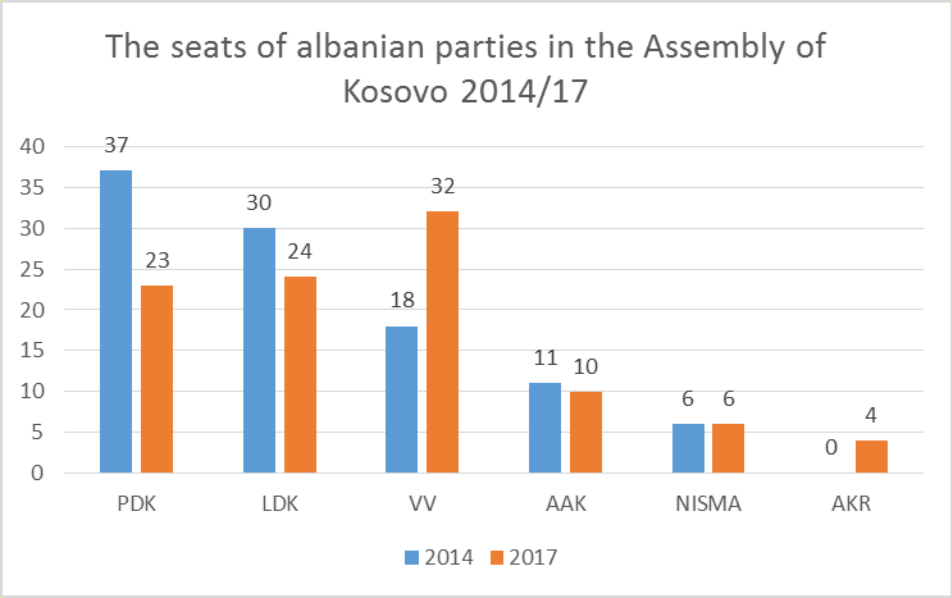
These considerations resulted in the big PAN coalition which brought together parties that altogether received over 45% of the vote in the 2014 elections. Similarly, the LDK brought together a coalition that included AKR and the newly formed Alternativa. It should be noted that these coalitions were mainly based on political considerations, rather than any kind of alignment of policies.

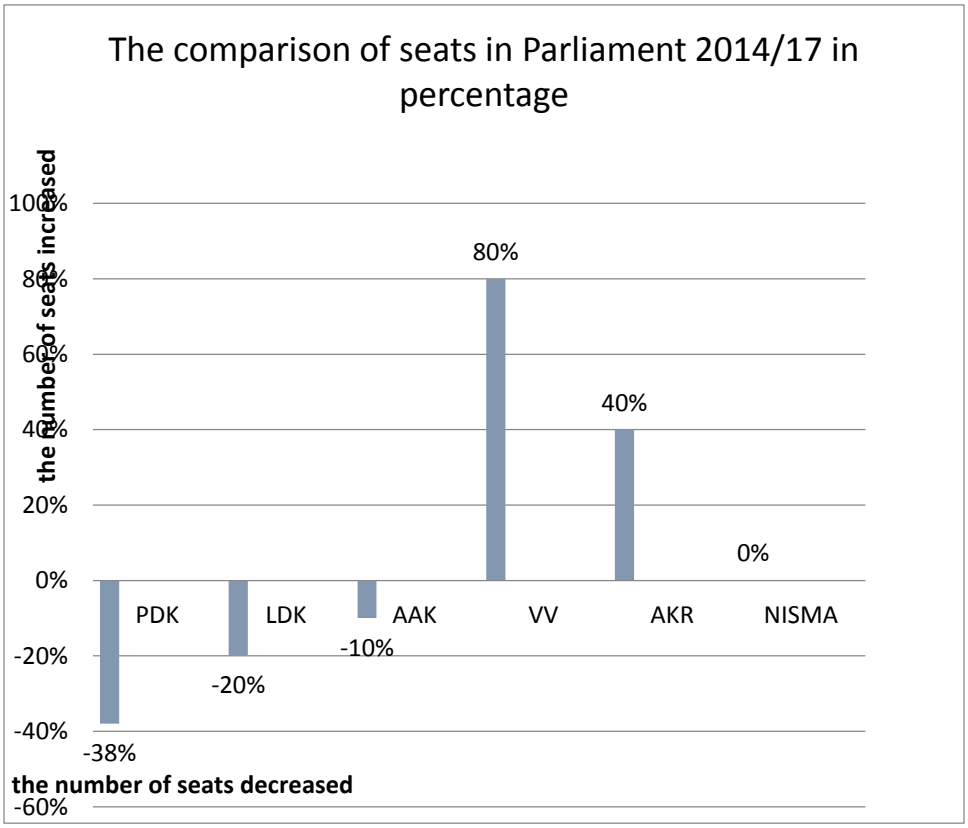
The parties that formed pre-electoral coalitions did not get the results they has hoped for. Although PAN got fewer votes than they were expecting, they nevertheless come out as the biggest entity and are therefore entitled to the position of Speaker and to make the first attempt to form a governing coalition.

The results certified by the Central Election Commission:



It is difficult to ascertain the vote share of individual parties that joined pre-electoral coalitions and so it is not easy to identify outright winners and losers. This ambiguity is epitomized by the fact that, on election night, after the announcement of preliminary results, both Vetëvendosje and PAN held celebrations. Meanwhile, LDK insist that they have maintained a similar vote share to the previous elections. A clearer picture can be obtained by looking at the number of MPs each party got within their respective coalitions. The two charts below illustrate this.





The biggest loss seems to have been suffered by PDK, who got approximately 38% fewer seats than they did in 2014. In contrast, Vetëvendosje now have 80% more seats than before. Despite running in a bigger coalition, LDK could not increase their votes and now hold 20% fewer seats than beforehand.

Hurdles to forming a governing coalition

In a situation like this, it is very difficult to see how the government will be formed. Many red lines were drawn out before the election. At the center of these red lines is PDK, which has been in power since 2007, and whom both Vetëvendosje and LDK accuse of corruption and misgovernment.

A PAN-led governing coalition:

As noted, PDK, AAK and NISMA came together under the PAN coalition. Although they came out as the biggest entity in the election, their task of establishing a government is still not easy. This is mainly because almost all other parties are refusing to cooperate with the PDK, PAN's biggest party. The usual partner would have been LDK, but there is a severe dispute between PDK and LDK. PDK pulled out of the governing coalition they had formed with LDK in 2014, resulting in the recent snap elections. LDK feel they have been betrayed by PDK for a second time (a similar snap election was triggered by the PDK in 2010) and have vowed that they will not go into coalition together again. So far, senior LDK members and important LDK municipal mayors have stuck to this position. With local elections scheduled for November this year, none of the LDK mayors would dare to depart from this position, as they fear that they might be swept away by the rise of Vetëvendosje, which is riding on a wave of anti-government, anti-establishment sentiment among the electorate.

Vetëvendosje has long ruled out any possibility of governing with PDK, whom they blame for all of Kosovo's misfortune over the past years, especially for corruption and unfavorable agreements with Serbia. In fact, this principled position is the biggest drive of their success.

In this situation, the PAN coalition can only hope to win support from the four deputies of Behgjet Pacolli's party, AKR. However, they too have ruled out any possibility of joining a coalition alongside PDK.

According to Kosovo's constitution, all 20 assembly members representing minority communities must be part of any governing coalition. The minority communities are represented in various governmental positions, including the deputy PM, ministers and deputy ministers. Traditionally, these MPs align themselves with whomever forms a governing coalition. This means that, if AKR backs them, the PAN coalition should be able to gain support from 63 MPs in total, thereby reaching the minimum threshold to form a government, with 39 seats from PAN itself, 4 from AKR and 20 from the minorities.

While it is still unclear what decision Behgjet Pacolli will make, or indeed if he can even convince all of his party to align themselves with the PAN coalition, the biggest problem in this calculation are the 9 MPs from Srspak Lista. Many fear that the Srpska Lista MPs would be under direct control of Belgrade and it would be very risky for any government to be dependent on their votes. In previous years the relationship between Srpsak Lista MPs and ministers and their Albanian counterparts has been rocky, to say the least.[3] For the most part, Srpska Lista had its participation in the work of the government frozen.

A Vetëvendosje-led governing coalition:

If PAN fails to establish a governing coalition and President Thaçi decides to allow the second party to form a government, then the ball would be passed to Vetëvendosje. In anticipation of such an eventuality, Vetëvendosje has already publicly stated that it would seek a coalition with LAA (the

[3] For more please read numerous reports that ECMI Kosovo produced on these issues.

coalition that includes LDK). Vetëvendosje and LAA have 32 and 29 seats respectively, i.e. 61 seats altogether. If they received an additional 20 seats from the minority parties, they would have a total of 81 seats in the Assembly. Such a coalition would have to function with an Assembly speaker from PAN, possibly PDK. While there are democracies where the Speaker can come from an opposition party, such a scenario is yet to have been tested in Kosovo

However, LDK has not been very enthusiastic about governing together with Vetëvendosje, as they perceive Vetëvendosje to be encroaching on their electoral territory. They would also be wary of governing with a partner that has no previous experience in central government.

It is interesting to note that the red lines have only ruled out coalitions with PDK, but not with the other two PAN members, AAK and NISMA. In theory, both Vetëvendosje and LDK could be open to including AAK and NISMA in a governing coalition. However, there is a big caveat to this: AAK will only agree to a coalition if they are offered the position of PM. Furthermore, both AAK and NISMA are likely to be hesitant to "betray" their agreement with PDK.

Vetëvendosje will only be able to form a government if President Thaçi, who was previously leader of PDK, opts to give them a chance to do so, rather than calling new elections, which could be held in November, along with the scheduled local elections. However, it is currently being disputed whether the President really has such discretionary power. Vetëvendosje and LDK both claim that if PAN fails to form a government, Thaçi is obliged to allow Vetëvendosje the chance to do so.

The results from the Serb community

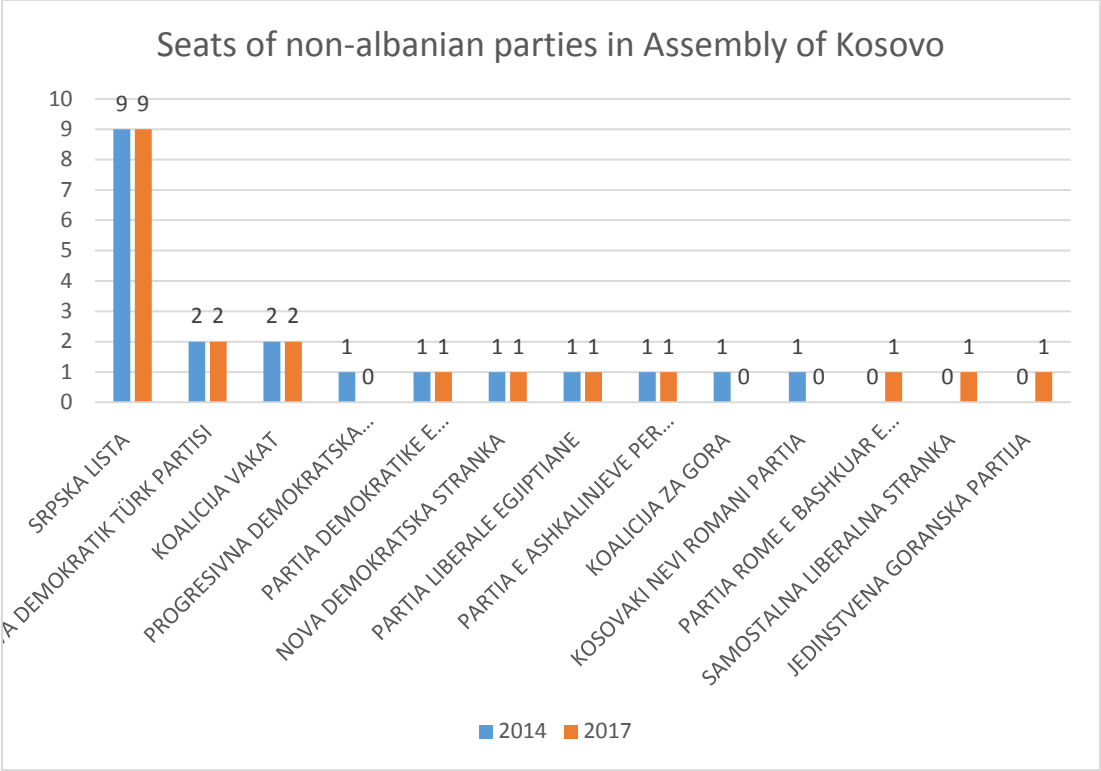
Srpska Lista, the favorite to win the highest number of votes from the Serb community, lived up to expectations, according to the final results announced by the Central Election Commission. They came in fourth place overall, with 44,578 votes or 6.12% of the total. As a result, they gained nine of the ten seats reserved for the Serb community.

taking into account the institutional support Srpska Lista received from the Serbian government, including from the Office for Kosovo and Metohija and from media controlled by Serbia's ruling party, it was no surprise that Srpska got the highest number of votes within the Serb community. Employees of parallel Serbian state institutions in Kosovo (education, health, etc.) were put under great pressure to ensure that they and their families voted for Srpska Lista. Several Embassies issued a joint statement that they had received worrying reports about such activities and condemning them.[4]

It is interesting to note that in the recent Serbian presidential elections, the candidate of Serbia's ruling coalition, Aleksandar Vučić, won 32,495 votes from Serbian citizens in Kosovo (80.04% of the total votes from Kosovo), which is 12,000 votes fewer than Srpska Lista received in Kosovo's parliamentary election.

The other Serb party that got representation in the Assembly was Samostalna Liberalna Stranka, which won one seat for its leader, Slobodan Petrović, who received 2,560 votes. In light of the circumstances that prevailed before and during the elections, this should be seen as a considerable success on his part.

[4] https://xk.usembassy.gov/statement-embassies-france-germany-italy-united-kingdom-united-states-3/



The results from the Bosniak and Gorani communities

Representation of the Bosniak and Gorani communities is guaranteed with three (3) reserved seats for Bosniaks and one (1) reserved seat for Gorani. In the latest elections, there were three political entities representing the Bosniak community: the Vakat coalition, Nova Demokratska Stranka (NDS) and the SDA-BSDAK coalition. The Gorani also had three political entities: Jedinstvena Goranska Partija (JGP), Gradjanska Inicijativa Gore (GIG) and Pokret za Gora.

With 56 candidates and 6,012 votes, the Vakat coalition has managed to gain the majority of Bosniak votes and ensure seats for two of its members in the Assembly. The coalition was formed in 2004 and includes several small parties from Prizren, Pejë/Peć, Dragaš/Dragash, Istog/Istok and Mitrovica. Considering that Demiri and Balje also won seats in the 2014 elections, their success this year comes as no great surprise. Demiri was a Minister without Portfolio in the previous government, dealing with issues related to non-Serb communities in Kosovo. As Demiri had to give up his Assembly seat to become a minister, his seat was taken by fellow Vakat member Ćerim Bajrami, as he was the candidate with the next highest number of votes.

Although NDS actually ran more candidates than the Vakat coalition (58), it won a total of just 3,424 votes.

With 1,384 votes, JGP leader Adem Hodža was re-elected to the seat reserved for the Gorani community. Considering on the close relations that the JGP has with Srpska Lista and the support it received from Belgrade, this result was unsurprising.

The results from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

The previous Roma MP, Kujtin Paçaku of KNRP, has been replaced by Albert Kinolli of PREBK. The Egyptian and Ashkali MPs are the same as beforehand: Veton Berisha of PLE from the Egyptian community and Danush Ademi of PDKA and Etem Arifi of PAI from the Ashkali community.

The results from the Turkish community

From the Turkish community, Fikrim Damka and Mufera Srbica-Şinik of KDTP were both re-elected.

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