



On Electoral Processes in the Western Balkan Countries

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Received: 6 October 2022 / Accepted: 12 November 2022 / Published: 18 November 2022
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Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv9n409

Abstract

This paper presents the results of the comparative analysis on the level of meeting the standards in the electoral processes held in the countries of the Western Balkans. The analysis is based on the evaluations published for the Election Integrity Perception Index, for elections held in the period 2011-2021. Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo are classified in countries that belong to the "Moderate" category in holding elections according to the requirements of democratic standards. BiH, North Macedonia are classified at the level "Very low" and "Low", respectively. The election campaign and its financing is the main challenge faced by all the countries of the Western Balkans. Except for Albania, which is classified in the group of countries with a "moderate" level, the perception of the role of the media in the election campaign in other countries of the Western Balkans is negative, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia "Very low", BiH and Montenegro "Low". All the countries of this region, in particular BiH, North Macedonia and Serbia, should be committed to improve the electoral legislation and the list of voters. Among the countries of this region, there are significant differences in relation to the quality of administration of electoral processes by electoral authorities.

Keywords: Elections, index, integrity, Western Balkan countries

1. Introduction

Electoral processes are among the most important processes for the development of a democratic society. Through them, citizens exercise the universal political right to elect and be elected, as one of the most important human rights on which representative democracy is built and operates. In every society that has created its government system based on democratic principles, in every country that is governed by the rule of law, where the free initiative, movement of people and of goods, free market etc., is guaranteed, the development of elections according to and in accordance with the universally accepted democratic standards, the principles of the European electoral heritage and the commitments of the OSCE, are permanent objectives. The measure of their fulfillment, starting from the way these demands are reflected in the national legislation and up to the implementation of this legislation during the development of the electoral process, are among the important indicators that serve to evaluate the level of democratic development of a country.

The development of democratic elections is conditioned by the complex action of factors of different political, social, economic, cultural, traditional natures, etc. It is conditioned by the behavior of the various actors who participate in it, political parties, candidates, electoral administration, central and local public institutions, voters, civil society. This makes difficult and complex the task of evaluating the level of fulfillment of the standards that must be achieved in

democratic electoral processes.

For the evaluation of the election processes, the OSCE/ODIHR member countries have agreed to refer to the results published in the observation reports of the international observer missions. Meanwhile, the academic community has once again been engaged in the design of methodologies for the evaluation of electoral processes. The most valued results achieved by this community is considered the Methodology for the evaluation of Perceptions of Electoral Index Integrity (PEI) Pippa, N. et al. (2014). According to this Methodology, the PEI is a quantitative Index that is used to evaluate, based on perceptions, the level of meeting the standards at each stage of an election process. By referring to the values of this index and its component indicators, it is possible to judge the quality of the electoral process and make comparative analyzes for different electoral processes that take place at different times or in different places.

The PEI analyzes, the study and evaluation of the dynamics of its changes in different periods of time, the identification and evaluation of the differences between these evaluations in countries that are in similar processes in their democratic development, are opportunities and effective ways that can be used by the respective societies to better orient themselves in their efforts for the development of democratic elections. Such are the countries of the Western Balkan, which during the second half of the 20th century were governed under the conditions of the communist regime and, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, entered the process of the development of liberal democracy.

The object of this paper is the study of the electoral processes in the countries of the Western Balkans region, relying on the evaluations for the PEI for the electoral processes developed in these countries during the period 2011-2021.

2. Study Methodology

2.1 Objective

To identify the differences in the level of meeting the standards in the elections, in the countries of the Balkan region and the challenges these countries face in their efforts to develop democratic electoral processes.

2.2 Data

The data published in the <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PDYRWL>, Harvard Dataverse PEI -Albanian Parliamentary Election, April, 25, 2021. www.insiz.org, "Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, (PEI-7.0)" Norris, P., Grömping, M., 2019, were used for the purpose of this study.

3. Analysis Methods

In order to evaluate the PEI that reflects the level of integrity of the elections for the countries of the Western Balkan region, the overall average of each one of the 11 PEI indicators were calculated. For this purpose, the data of the PEI and the values of the relevant indicators, published for the elections held in these countries during the period 2011-2021 and the final reports of the international observer missions of the OSCE/ODIHR that have observed these elections, were used.

4. Results

4.1 Analyze of PEI

The average values of PEI and for its 11 component indicators, for Western Balkan countries are given in Figure 1. Referring to the value of the PEI index, it can be affirmed that in the countries of the Western Balkan region, the election held during the period 2011-2021, classify this region, in the group of countries that belong to the "Moderate" category. Referring to PEI's assessments for other Balkan countries such as Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece for the elections that took place in these countries in the period 2012-2018, published by Pippa Norris, Max Grömping "Perceptions of Electoral Integrity , (PEI-7.0), 2019"⁸, the differences between these countries and the countries of the Western Balkans are easily identified. According to the values of this index, the Balkan countries can be grouped into four

⁸<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi%3A10.7910%2FDVN%2FPDYRWL>

groups: BiH, North Macedonia, classified in the groups of countries belonging to the "Low" category, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Bulgaria, classified in the "Moderate" category, Croatia, Romania, are classified in the group of countries belonging to the "High" category and Greece, Slovenia are classified in the "Very high" category. The analysis to identify the reasons and factors that have influenced this classification is an interesting and valuable argument to be elaborated. Such a study can be carried out starting from different working research questions and hypotheses, such as: Is there a connection between the historical developments that belong to the period of the Ottoman Empire and its effects on the formation of the spiritual constitution, social behavior, traditions and culture in the population of the Balkan countries and the approach of these populations to the demands that condition the exercise of representative democracy, in general and electoral processes in particular?

Does the period of communist government and the ways of its exercise in different countries of this region affect the level of social and political capacities necessary for the development of democratic elections?

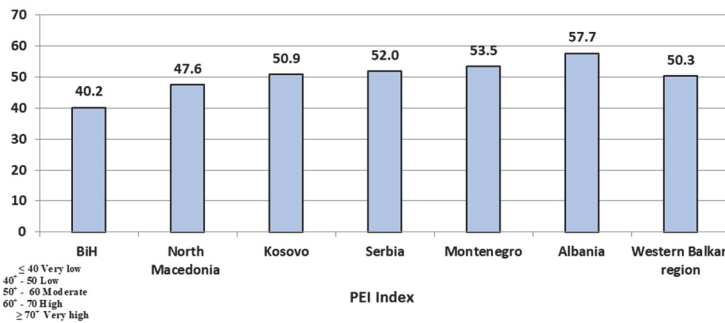


Figure 1: Overall values of PEI index –Western Balkan countries

In the above classification of the Balkan countries, the differences between the countries of the Western Balkan region and the other countries of this region stand out. Meanwhile, these are also the countries where the Ottoman Empire exercised its power for the longest time in the Balkans. These are, at the same time, the countries where the communist system has acted more explicitly. In addition to these factors, it is worth listing the effects that the EU's approach to these countries has produced in the development of democratic processes in the Balkan countries. An approach that has been visibly supportive of Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia, while Greece it is the country that in this region has a history of development after the Second World War, essentially different from other countries.

Referring to the values of the indicators that reflect the various stages and problems of the electoral process, calculated as the average of the values of these indicators for the six countries of the Western Balkans, (Figure no. 2), it can be affirmed that in these countries the strength is Voting process, Vote count, Results, Electoral procedures and Electoral authority while the weaknesses are related to Legislation, List of voters, Media coverage and Campaign finance. This is a situation similar to that of other Western and Eastern European countries (Pippa. N. et al. PEI 7.0 Annual Report, 2019) or even at the global level (Pippa. N. et al. 2014).

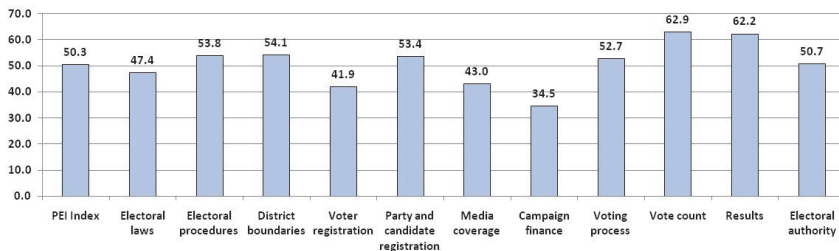


Figure 2: The average values of PEI indicators in the Western Balkans region

Notes: The Perceptions of Electoral Integrity index summary scale and the subcomponent scales range from 0-100. National elections held from 2011-2021

Financing and media coverage of the campaign are among the most problematic phases of the election process. The use of funds whose source is not declared, the marked lack of transparency in the financing of political parties before and during the election campaign is a phenomenon and a concern with which election processes are held, regardless of the level of economic development of the country.

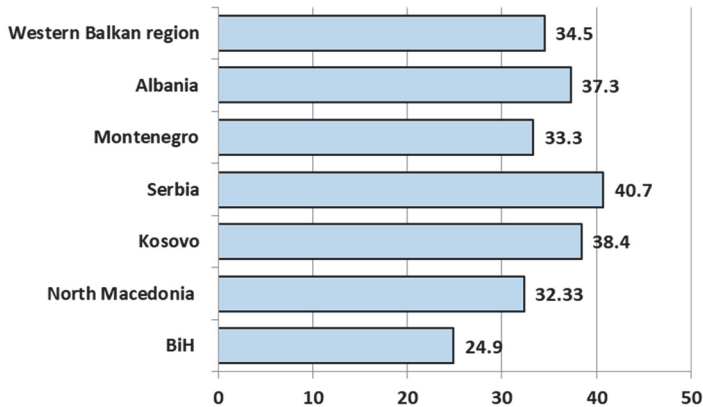


Figure 3: Campaign finance

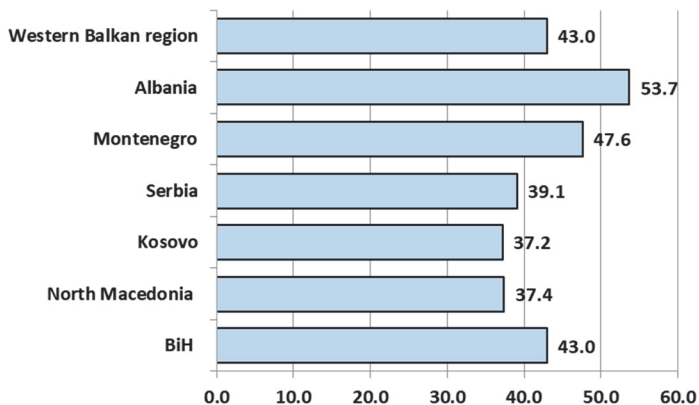


Figure 4: Media coverage

The evaluation of perceptions for the indicator that reflects the financing of the election campaign in different countries of the Balkans (Fig. no. 3) shows that the use of dirty money in the elections, the lack of transparency for the sources of financing, the buying and selling of votes, the abuse of public resources are phenomena that appear in all the countries of this region. The intensity of these phenomena varies from one country to another. Referring to the negative effect that this indicator causes on the integrity of the elections, the countries of the Western Balkan region are ranked BiH, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. Referring to the scores for the Media coverage indicator (Figure no. 4), Albania is classified at the level of "Moderate", Montenegro and BiH at the "Low" level, while Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia are classified in the group of countries that belong to the "Very low" level.

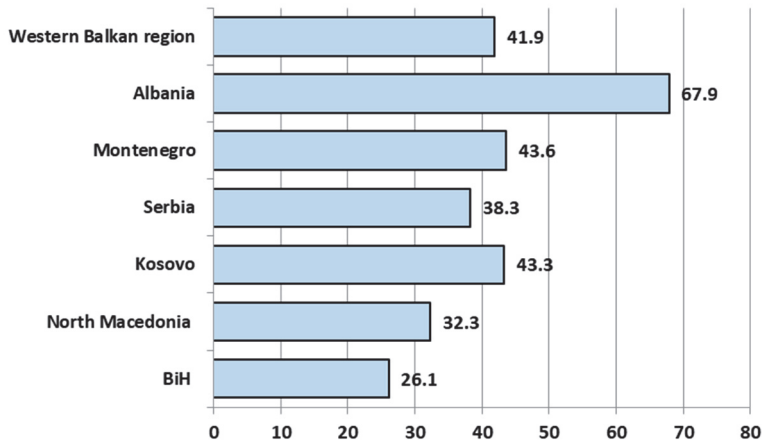


Figure 5: Voter's list

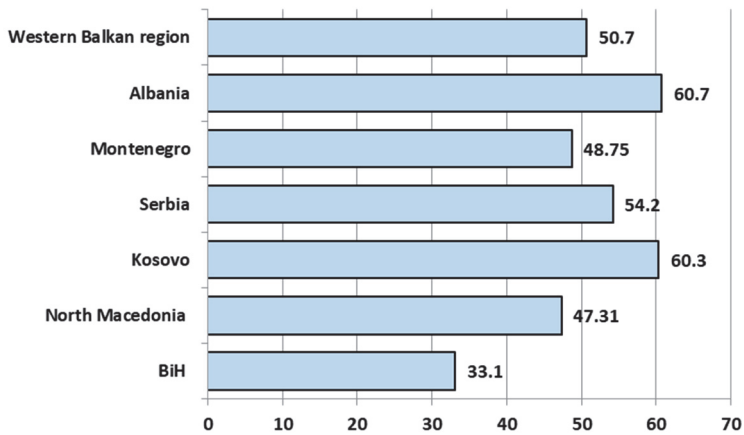


Figure 6: Electoral Management Bodies

Voter's list is one of the challenges faced by all Western Balkan countries, with the exception of Albania. (Figure No. 5). In particular, voter registration is perceived as a very poor quality process in BiH, North Macedonia and Serbia. These countries are classified in the "Very low" category. Kosovo and Montenegro are classified in the "Low" category, while Albania is the only country in the Western Balkans, which for this indicator is classified in the "Moderate" category.

Between the countries of the Western Balkans, there are also differences in relation to the indicator, which for the region is evaluated at the "Moderate" level. BiH is perceived as the country with the lowest level in fulfilling the standards in the election administration processes by the electoral bodies, while in Albania and Kosovo EMBs have created a positive experience in the election administration.

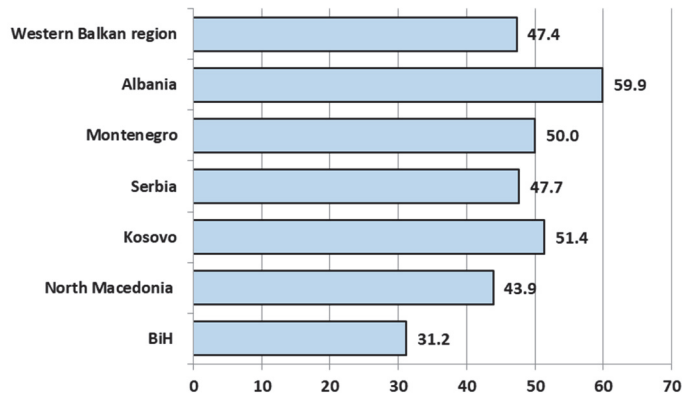


Figure 7: Electoral law

The perceptions of the Electoral laws indicator clearly differentiate the countries of the Western Balkans (Figure no. 7). BiH is the country where positive perceptions of electoral legislation have the lowest value. For this indicator, BiH is classified among countries with the "Very low" level. North Macedonia and Serbia are ranked after this country. Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania are part of the group of countries that belong to the "Moderate" level for the quality of the electoral legislation and the way in which the principles and standards of the European electoral legacy are treated in this legislation, as well as the recommendations given in the Code of Good Practices in Issues Election Commission of Venice.

5. Conclusions

The values of the Election Integrity Index classify the Western Balkan region in the category of regions that belong to the "Moderate" level.

Referring to the PEI value, the classification in ascending order of the countries of the Western Balkans results in BiH, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania.

In the election processes held during the period 2011-2021 in the countries of the Western Balkans, the financing of the election campaign and the role of the media are the indicators that are perceived to have the greatest negative effect on the integrity of the elections.

Improving the voter list, electoral legislation and increasing the professional capacities of the EMB are challenges faced by all the countries of the Western Balkans. Significant progress in dealing with and solving these challenges has occurred in Albania and after that in Kosovo.

In general, in the Balkan countries, the voting process, evaluation and counting of votes, complaints are perceived as processes that are close to the standards.

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