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# **Elections in Croatia**

## *2020 Parliamentary Elections*

### Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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*Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Croatian elections authorities as of July 1, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## When is Election Day?

The Republic of Croatia will hold parliamentary elections on Sunday, July 5, 2020, across the country<sup>1</sup> and on July 4 and July 5, 2020, abroad.<sup>2</sup> Voting will take place from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.<sup>3</sup> in 6,999 polling stations, including 6,558 standard polling stations in Croatia, 109 diplomatic missions and consulate posts in 41 countries and 332 special polling stations.<sup>4</sup> The stations will be staffed by approximately 69,990 poll workers. Voters who are serving in the armed forces, are in social welfare institutions – such as temporary housing, assisted living communities and mental health facilities – or in prison may vote at special polling stations designated based on the law.<sup>5</sup>

## What is at stake in these elections?

The political landscape in Croatia continues to be dominated by two major parties, the ruling, center-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the top opposition, center-left Social Democrats Party (SDP).<sup>6</sup> In the previous parliamentary elections, HDZ was just below an absolute majority, with 61 seats versus SDP's 54.<sup>7</sup> These elections are taking place on the heels of the January 2020 presidential election, in which Prime Minister Zoran Milanović won by a mere 5 percentage points ahead of the incumbent conservative Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović.<sup>8</sup> Current public opinion polls place HDZ ahead of SDP, which is only trailing slightly. Neither party is expected to secure an outright majority, making a coalition government with smaller parties all the more likely. The third largest force is the ultranationalist and euroskeptic Homeland Movement, currently led by Miroslav Skoro, a well-known singer in Croatia.<sup>9</sup>

The elections are further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted President Milanović to shift from the original late autumn date to the midsummer date of July 5. This decision was made in response to fears of a second wave of the virus in the autumn, as well as concerns over an economic crisis due to the pandemic shutdowns. The new ruling government will inherit an economy expected to shrink by up to 9.4 percent, chiefly due to the impact of Croatia's tourism industry, which makes up nearly 20 percent of its economy.<sup>10</sup>

## What is the electoral system?

The Croatian Parliament consists of 151 representatives directly elected for a four-year term. The representatives are chosen from 12 constituencies, 10 of which elect 14 representatives each, while the other two represent Croatian nationals abroad and national minorities, with three and eight

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<sup>1</sup> Article 80, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>2</sup> Mandatory Instructions and Sequence of Election Actions and Duration of Deadlines.

<sup>3</sup> Article 6, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>4</sup> Izbori Za Zastupnike U Hrvatski Sabor 2020, State Electoral Commission.

<sup>5</sup> Elections of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament, State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia.

<sup>6</sup> Republic of Croatia Parliamentary Elections, 8 November 2015, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Assessment Mission Final Report, page 3.

<sup>7</sup> Tena Prelec and Stuart Brown, "Croatian parliamentary elections 2016: voters reject the centre-left's tilt to the right," The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Alastair Jamieson, "Croatian election: Social Democrat Zoran Milanović beats incumbent president in runoff vote," *EuroNews*, January 6, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Igor Ilic, "Croatia president calls parliamentary election for July 5," *Reuters*, May 20, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Ilic, May 20, 2020.

representatives, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Members of Parliament are elected via a proportional representation and preferential voting process, where a voter may only vote for one candidate list – slate – and mark one candidate with precedence over others within the slate.<sup>12</sup> Seats are awarded to the 14 numerically greatest slates, with seats corresponding to the quantity of individual results within them.<sup>13</sup> Slates must meet a minimum 5 percent threshold within their designated constituency.<sup>14</sup>

## **What is the campaign timeline and expenditure limit?**

The campaign for parliamentary elections in Croatia begins upon the publication of the collective slate lists and runs up to 24 hours before Election Day, in this case, July 3, 2020, at 12:00 a.m.<sup>15</sup> or July 2, 2020, for voters abroad.<sup>16</sup> From this time through the closure of polling stations at 7:00 p.m. on Election Day, the silence period prohibits any campaign activity, publication of premature results, any evaluation of the election results and interviews or statements from slate leaders or candidates.<sup>17</sup>

A candidate or slate is prohibited from exceeding a total amount of HRK 1,500,000 (about USD 222,300) in election campaign costs within a single constituency. If any donation to an election campaign exceeds this amount, the candidate or slate is required to return that amount before submission of the election campaign financial statement.<sup>18</sup>

Oversight of the election campaign is exercised by the Ethics Commission, a nonpartisan body that is appointed by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia,<sup>19</sup> while election campaign financing is supervised by the State Electoral Commission.<sup>20</sup>

## **Who is eligible to run as a candidate?**

Any Croatian citizen over the age of 18 may stand for election to the Parliament, regardless of his or her residence. Candidates are chosen by one political party, coalitions, voters or national minority associations and are submitted under slates. These slates must be submitted to the State Electoral Commission within 14 days of when the decision for the call for elections enters into force, in this case on June 16, 2020, until 12:00 a.m.<sup>21</sup> For a slate to be accepted for the elections, it must receive at least 500 voter signatures.<sup>22</sup> National minority slates are required to receive at least 100 signatures.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Article 38, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Article 40, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>14</sup> Article 41, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>15</sup> Article 28, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>16</sup> Mandatory Instructions and Sequence of Election Actions and Duration of Deadlines.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Article 38, Act on the Financing of Political Activities, Election Campaigns and Referendums.

<sup>19</sup> Article 103-104, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>20</sup> Article 56, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>21</sup> Mandatory Instructions and Sequence of Election Actions and Duration of Deadlines.

<sup>22</sup> Article 21, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>23</sup> Article 18, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

Political party slates are determined independently, and their candidates are chosen at the discretion of the nominating entity.<sup>24</sup>

A total of 2,669 candidates are competing for the 151 seats in the Parliament.

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

All Croatian citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to vote in the election.<sup>25</sup> Voters in Croatia will vote at polling stations designated based on their residence, while those serving in the armed forces, living in welfare support institutions or in prisons will vote at special polling stations. Out-of-country voters with residence in Croatia must register as such to be able to vote at diplomatic and consular missions.<sup>26</sup> Further, out-of-country voters with no residence in Croatia are entitled to three representatives in Parliament, who are elected via preferential voting methods.<sup>27</sup>

There are 3,859,481 registered voters for Croatia's 2020 parliamentary elections, including 184,786 out-of-country voters.<sup>28</sup>

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

Each candidate slate is required to have a balanced number of men and women, with a minimum of 40 percent of both genders.<sup>29</sup> If a slate nomination does not meet this criteria, it will be rejected and subject to a fine of HDZ 50,000 (about USD 7,400).<sup>30</sup> Voters with disabilities may designate another person to vote on his or her behalf, and those unable to travel to their polling stations on Election Day due to illness or physical disability may apply for mobile voting until three days before the election.<sup>31</sup>

National minorities in Croatia are entitled to eight representatives in Parliament, who are exempt from preferential voting methods.<sup>32</sup> National minority candidate slates are also only required to receive 100 signatures, rather than the standard 500.<sup>33</sup>

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

The election management body in Croatia is the State Electoral Commission (SEC) and is composed of a president, four vice presidents and four members. The president is also the president of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia, while the Supreme Court elects two vice presidents from its pool of judges following the proposal of the Supreme Court president. The other two vice presidents and

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<sup>24</sup> Article 20, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>25</sup> Article 4, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>26</sup> Article 7, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>27</sup> Article 8, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>28</sup> Decision of the Minister of Administration, Republic of Croatia, June 26, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Article 21a, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>30</sup> Mladen Dragojlovic, Croatia: Electoral procedures officially kick off, *Independent Balkan News Agency*, June 2, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Article 83, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>32</sup> Article 16, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>33</sup> Article 18, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

members of the SEC are elected by Parliament through a majority vote, with one vice president and two members from the ruling party or coalition and the other vice president and two members from opposition political parties or coalitions, in accordance with the distribution of mandates to the Parliament.<sup>34</sup>

According to the Act on the State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia, the SEC:

- Ensures lawful preparation and conduct of the elections;
- Supervises election campaign financing;
- Publishes information on voting results;
- Approves election observation by nongovernmental organizations and foreign observers;
- Trains members of the electoral bodies; and
- Informs citizens of the elections and how to protect electoral rights.<sup>35</sup>

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

Following the announcement of elections, the State Electoral Commission (SEC) began working with the Croatian Institute for Public Health (CIPH) to develop and issue recommendations for election administrators, participants and voters to protect their health throughout the electoral process. The CIPH has thus far issued recommendations for local electoral commissions on [collecting signatures for candidate slates](#), the [work of electoral bodies](#) and [election rallies](#).

The SEC and CIPH have also prepared and issued instructions for Election Day itself, focused on ensuring the safety of voters, election administrators, observers and others present on Election Day, such as media representatives. Instructions and recommendations have been established for [standard polling stations](#) and special polling stations at [social welfare institutions](#).

Some of these instructions include:

- Poll workers and observers must wear face masks while at polling stations, and voters are advised to wear them.
- Gloves are required for poll workers performing voter identification and recommended for all poll workers. Gloves should be disinfected and changed regularly.
- Soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer for hand disinfecting will be provided.
- Polling station windows must be open to provide regular ventilation.
- A distance of 1.5 meters must be maintained between voting screens, poll workers, observers and voters waiting in queues or walking through the polling station.
- VHand sanitizer should be placed at the entrance of rooms, and a designated poll worker must apply it to voters and others entering and exiting the room.

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<sup>34</sup> [Composition, State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia.](#)

<sup>35</sup> Decision Promulgating the Act on the State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia and [Competences of the State Electoral Commission relating to the conduct of elections.](#)

- Commonly trafficked surfaces should be disinfected regularly.
- Poll workers traveling to voters' residence due to illness, disability or self-isolation must wear masks as well as gloves, which must be disinfected before and after each visit and changed after 10 visits.
- During vote counting, observers must maintain a distance of two meters from the vote counting location, and polling station committee members performing this function must be 1.5 meters apart and disinfect their hands at each stage of the process.<sup>36</sup>

The SEC has also allowed voters in self-isolation to request to vote at their residence, much like the process afforded to voters with disabilities. Voters in self-isolation must request this measure from their local election commission by July 2, 2020.<sup>37</sup>

## **What is the election management body doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and counter malign interference?**

The State Electoral Commission maintains active communication with the Information Systems Security Bureau to bolster its protection measures against cyber threats and attacks and to evaluate the vulnerabilities of information technology procedures, especially those in use for the first time.

## **When will official results be announced?**

Individual polling stations count and tabulate voting results and send them to the corresponding constituency electoral commission. These bodies must add up all results received from polling stations within 24 hours from the closing time of the polling station – in this case, July 6, 2020, until 7:00 p.m.<sup>38</sup> These results will be transmitted to the State Electoral Commission (SEC), which determines the final results and immediately publishes them.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, the SEC is permitted to publish preliminary data on voter turnout during voting.<sup>40</sup> It may also publish preliminary and unofficial election results after the end of voting on Election Day. Once all legal actions have been addressed and/or the deadline to submit complaints has passed, the official results may be published.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Technical Instruction of The State Election Commissions Prepared in Cooperation with the Croatian Institute of Public Health: Voting on Election Day and Ensuring Epidemiological Protection of All Participants at Polling Stations, June 29, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Press Release on the Manner of Exercising the Right to Vote in Self-Isolation, June 29, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Article 89, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>39</sup> Article 89 and Article 91, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>40</sup> Article 93, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

<sup>41</sup> Article 94, Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act.

## Resources

- [State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia](#)
- [The Croatian Parliamentary Elections Act](#)
- [Electoral Actions and Deadlines](#)
- [The Act on the Financing of Political Activities, Election Campaigns and Referendums](#)
- [Elections of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament, State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia](#)