

What's at stake after the elections in North Macedonia April 2024

Elections in North Macedonia

- North Macedonia is holding for presidential and parliamentary elections.
- The first round of presidential elections held on 24 April resulted in a landslide win by VMRO-DPMNE candidate with more than 180.000+ votes difference compared to next placed SDSM candidate.
- SDSM, for the first time in history got a score lower than 200.000 votes.
- **The parliamentary elections which will be held on 8 May** will likely reflect the drastic change manifested in the first round of the presidential elections.
- **Potential new coalitions:** VMRO-DPMNE, ZNAM and VLEN or SDSM and DUI

What are the platforms of the different coalitions and parties running for election?

- **The self-declared EU riders:** two coalitions led by the parties in government SDSM and DUI have been running on pro-EU slogans and platforms, **Not Giving Up our Futures** and **The European Front** respectively. Both rely on imaginings of the country's future as "European". Especially in recent times, their electoral words are in stark contrast with lack of respect for European values as rule of law and fight against corruption.
- **The proud nostalgics:** VMRO DPMNE has been running on a platform returning the pride of North Macedonia, internally as well as externally, following the bilateral agreements with the neighbors, especially the demanded change of the constitution due to the Bulgarian veto.
- **The newcomers:** The VLEN coalition made of opposition ethnic Albanian parties including two new parties (LD and VV) seek to challenge the long ruling DUI, and ZNAM, seeking to become the third force in the Macedonian block of political parties, riding the wave of disillusioned social democrats. Against the odds, Levica performed badly.

Why are these elections important?

It is evident that the country's EU path and the concessions it had to make along the way, including changing its name in 2019, and the current dispute with Bulgaria **have tired citizens particularly considering the lack of a clear accession path.**

It is clear that there needs to be a **change in the way of doing politics**, a need which was evident since the SDSM government took over, but has not happened, perhaps in part due to the blockage in the EU path. Depending on who wins the elections, we can see **two potentially distinct futures**, one which remains nominally pro-EU but continues to fail to find a willing partner in the EU and to perform the necessary reforms at home, or one that wants to change the state of play risking to veer away from the path of accession. The likelihood of the latter scenario is close to certain.

Repercussions and challenges

On one hand, the results of the first round of the presidential elections, indicate that the current opposition will have the numbers to form a stable government. DUI's place in it is for the first time challenged. On the other hand, the complexities of the conditioned EU future may well be used to complicate VMRO DPMNE's coalition building. Adding domestic Albanian pressure on the Constitution change to the existing international one would however likely backfire.

Boycott vote is a risk which emanates from the losers of the presidential elections, given the 40% turnout threshold. Some political forces may be tempted to boycott the second round for political gains, risking a deeper political crisis of the nation. Voters of Levica or ethnic Albanian voters may decide to not vote.

