



Snap Municipal Elections in Podgorica

On September 29, 2024, Montenegro will hold snap elections in its capital, Podgorica, which comprises roughly one-third of the country's population. The mayor is elected by the City Assembly members.

The previous elections for the City Assembly of Podgorica were held in October 2022. While some parties attempted to focus on socio-economic and everyday life issues during the campaign, most of the attention was directed toward (ethno)national identity politics, given the high level of (ethno)political polarization in Montenegro. Ultimately, the post-election coalition, led by then extra-parliamentary Europe Now Movement (PES), ousted the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and formed the local government, with its vice-president, Olivera Injac, becoming the first female mayor in the capital's history.

PES gained significant political momentum after the Podgorica elections. Its deputy president Jakov Milatović became the president of Montenegro in April 2023, winning by a substantial margin in the second round. PES emerged as the strongest party in the national elections in June 2023, forming a heterogeneous parliamentary majority, with the party president Miloško Spajić becoming prime minister.

Despite the rise of PES as the dominant political force in the country, personal animosities and political differences between Spajić and Milatović culminated in February 2024, when Milatović left the party. Although Milatović did not have loyalists in the national parliament, the situation was different at the local level. Eventually, the ruling coalition collapsed, as some members of PES – together with coalition partners United Reform Action (URA) and Movement for Changes (PzP), as well as the opposition – voted to cut short the mandate of the city assembly, effectively paving the way for snap elections in Podgorica.

Despite some advances, the new city administration was not very successful or efficient in addressing growing everyday life issues. In light of this, (ethno)national identity politics was pushed to the margins of the campaign, as the opposition used the situation in Podgorica to steer the debate toward “real-life problems” affecting all citizens.

Possible results

This time, 13 electoral lists will compete for 58 seats, with a 3% vote threshold required to win representation. Three major lists – PES, its key national-level coalition partner For the Future of Podgorica (ZBCG), and DPS – are all expected to be in the 20–25% range. On the one hand, several polls suggest that, if they pass the threshold, smaller parties may become kingmakers in the capital. On the other hand, the coalition of URA, PzP, and former PES City Assembly members, led by Milatović, could be a gamechanger, especially if it secures enough seats and gains support from DPS and other opposition parties to elect the mayor.

However, it is important to note that virtually all polls indicate unprecedented voter volatility in Montenegro with, on average, only 50% of voters across lists certain of their choice. This fact, combined with potential voter turnout, makes this election possibly the most unpredictable in the history of Montenegro's capital.

Why are these elections important?

These local elections are perceived by all participants and the general public as “national elections writ small”. If the outcome is unfavorable for the current parliamentary majority, it could create further instability, potentially leading to snap national elections. Whatever happens on September 29, these elections will set new power relations on the political map of Montenegro.