

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WHEN THE POLITICAL ELITE UNDERESTIMATE CITIZENS

Parliamentary elections in Montenegro

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Before the parliamentary elections in Montenegro, the CCE and the FES presented the findings of the public opinion research on numerous social and political issues that shape the attitude towards the election offer.



The research aim was to put into focus citizens and their attitudes that could have been useful to election participants in formulating election campaigns, but which remain instructive in the coming period, as well.



Citizens of Montenegro are tired of the firm leaders. They want democratic, participatory leadership that will look for responses to the challenges through dialogue and compromise within strong institutions. This is almost a revolutionary change and a message political elites in Montenegro must understand.

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Centar za građansko obrazovanje
Centre for Civic Education

Table of contents

Summary	4
INTRODUCTION	5
WHAT SHAPES MONTENEGRIN POLITICS?	6
Election messages and lessons of the citizens of Montenegro.....	6
Trust as a source of political power	6
Social problems and priorities.....	7
MONTENEGRO'S DEMAND: MORE JUSTICE AND EQUALITY	8
Fatigue from the firm leaders.....	8
No retreat without a fight.....	8
Electoral democracy.....	9
WHO VOTES IN MONTENEGRO?	10
Citizen profiles	10
Positioning on the political spectrum.....	10
What kind of society and country do we want?.....	11
FAITH AS THE BASIS OF CHANGE	13
Citizens as creators of change	13
People and parties.....	13
WHAT DIRECTION DO WE TAKE?	15
TOWARDS A DIFFERENT MONTENEGRO	17

Summary

The recent parliamentary elections in Montenegro are predominantly characterised by (1) high voter turnout and voters' motivation within (2) the created climate of strong political tensions, mistrust and uncertainty and, of course, (3) the election result itself, which, thanks to the synergy created by the unification of the opposition into three electoral columns, led to the narrow victory of the opposition.

The pre-election survey of the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) did not intend to directly address electoral forecasts, actors and their win chances. It had a profound character and it was focused on the citizens of Montenegro - their political attitudes and values, perceptions of reality, degree of (dis) trust in social and political actors and institutions, as well as personal expectations, anxieties, fears and hopes.

Citizens are not the direct creators of change, nor can the composition and the structure of the future government be predicted on the basis of their election decision. However, they are the power which can, at least indirectly, change the scene and the (post-election) course of action and the plots on it.

Therefore, anyone who is a serious political actor, and aspires to be an analyst, must carefully analyse their, most frequently vague, and even contradictory messages.

This particularity pertains to countries like Montenegro, in which political change comes after three decades of uninterrupted rule of one structure and in which the adult generations do not remember the other ruling party, nor the time in which the president of that party and its embodiment, Milo Đukanović, was not a key political figure.

INTRODUCTION

A month and a half before the Parliamentary elections in Montenegro, Centre for Civic Education (CCE) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) presented the findings of the public opinion research on the Montenegrin citizens' attitudes towards a series of socio-political issues that shape their needs and choices, as well as the attitude towards the election offer.

Field research was conducted from 30 June to 5 July 2020, with a three-stage stratified sample, which encompassed 10 municipalities in Montenegro. The total sample consisted of 707 adult respondents, with post-stratification by a number of indicators, including regional aspect, gender, age, education, nationality, etc. Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) with an average length of 30 minutes was applied. Expert support was provided by the *Damar* agency.

The objective of the research was to contribute to the understanding of the Montenegrin social and political scene by focusing on citizens and their attitudes that could be useful to election stakeholders in formulating election campaigns, but which remain equally important and instructive in the coming period.

In order to reach an extensive cross-section of the political-ideological and value orientation of society, more detailed analyses are required. Experiences from the region indicate that post-Yugoslav societies have a conglomeration of norms as a mixture of socialist heritage, decades of state protectionism, transitional and national frustrations, various economic backgrounds, but also a tenacious desire for change and improvement. Compared to the region, Montenegro is specific in its constitutional order, understanding and tradition of international relations but also in its extreme leftist orientation.

2020 Parliamentary elections represent a warning that playing on domesticated identity cards carries great risk and limit in a society that has matured both through turbulent transitional fractures and without much adequate leadership. Findings of the research indicated a significant emancipation of the citizenry that responsible politicians and leaders must keep in mind and think outside the scope of the projected result or narrow party interests.

The results of the last elections in Montenegro are the

consequence of a numerous factors and what the outgoing government has neglected over time, and the future must not ignore, is that there is a set of political-ideological-value norms that must be the basis of any government. Montenegrin society is clearly pro-Western with a strong leftist orientation. There are traditional norms that must always be taken into account, but which can live within a liberal framework. Social lethargy is decreasing, and these elections could strengthen citizens' faith in the power of change, which would be stimulating for the revitalization of the forgotten institute of accountability within the political spectrum.

This is particularly important due to the challenges Montenegro is facing, which can only be adequately addressed by the Government that has the political legitimacy, credibility and professional capacity to cope with these challenges.

WHAT SHAPES MONTENEGRIN POLITICS?

Election messages and lessons of the citizens of Montenegro - social and individual framework

Firstly, we researched 'Vox populi' in the meanings of attitudes about satisfaction with one's own life and the related dissatisfaction with the direction in which, according to the citizens, Montenegro is heading.

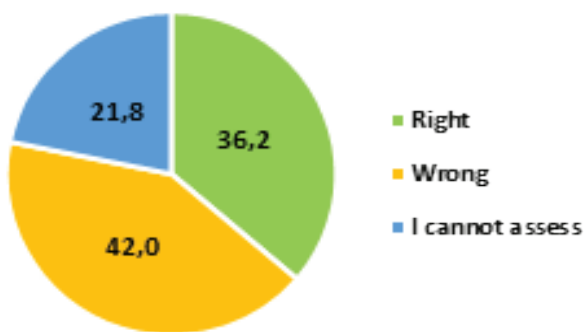


Chart 1: In which direction is Montenegro heading?

Total of 42% of citizens consider that Montenegro is moving in the wrong direction, while slightly more than one-third estimate that the country is going in the right direction. When this is reduced to the personal level, i.e. the degree of life satisfaction, measured on a scale from 1 to 10, the average is 5.66. This leads to the conclusion that citizens are on the verge between satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their life in Montenegro.

State of moderate personal (dis)satisfaction followed by the attitude of a relative majority that the country is going in the wrong direction represents a significant indication of the widespread belief that public policies do not provide guarantees for stable and democratic development. But it does not lead, especially not in a straight line, to a political change. Rather, it ends in the political frustration of the majority and its cynical attitude towards political actors, including those in opposition.

Change happens only when people believe that change is possible, i.e. that this time the opposition is ready and capable to accomplish it, and that, simultaneously, the authorities scored an own goal by conjunctural actions.

Trust as a source of political power

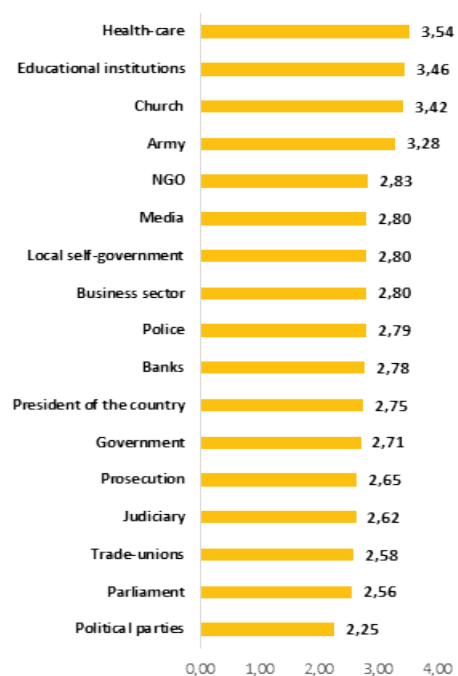


Chart 2: Trust in institutions measured on a 1 to 5 scale

Citizens of Montenegro have the highest level of trust in health and education system, followed by church and military. On the other hand, the least trust is given to political parties, the Parliament and trade-unions. Non-governmental organisations are ranked very high, and they are far above some key institutions. How can the obtained findings be read from post-election perspective?

Distribution of trust is common. For example, trust in collective actors of interest organization, such as parties and even trade-unions, is low as usual, although higher in comparison to the neighboring countries. However, two lines of results are indicative. First, rating of the actors and institutions of the government is below average, i.e. the erosion of trust in them is visible. Furthermore, with the consistent high rating of the church, military, as well as educational and health institutions, a relatively high rating of the NGO sector and the media is specific to Montenegro.

This leads to the conclusion that when political actors of limited rating come into conflict, or at least seriously dispute with social actors and institutions that have trust as a resource, change becomes probable and self-imposed.

Social problems and priorities

Findings unequivocally confirm that the electoral will of the citizens, above all, define issues on standard and quality of life, care for the life perspective, youth, i.e. advocacy for less corruption and more social justice and equality. This, alongside with the high valuation of democracy in this research, is evident both through the identification and condemnation of undemocratic electoral practices,

but it is also in line with the dominant leftism voters. For the citizens of Montenegro, one of the key messages of the participants in this research is that democracy and social justice are almost synonymous, that is, they must go hand in hand. Law on freedom of religion or belief, whose adoption one-fifth of respondents perceived as a key election issue, has the role of an additional mobilizing factor that motivates a significant part of the electorate.

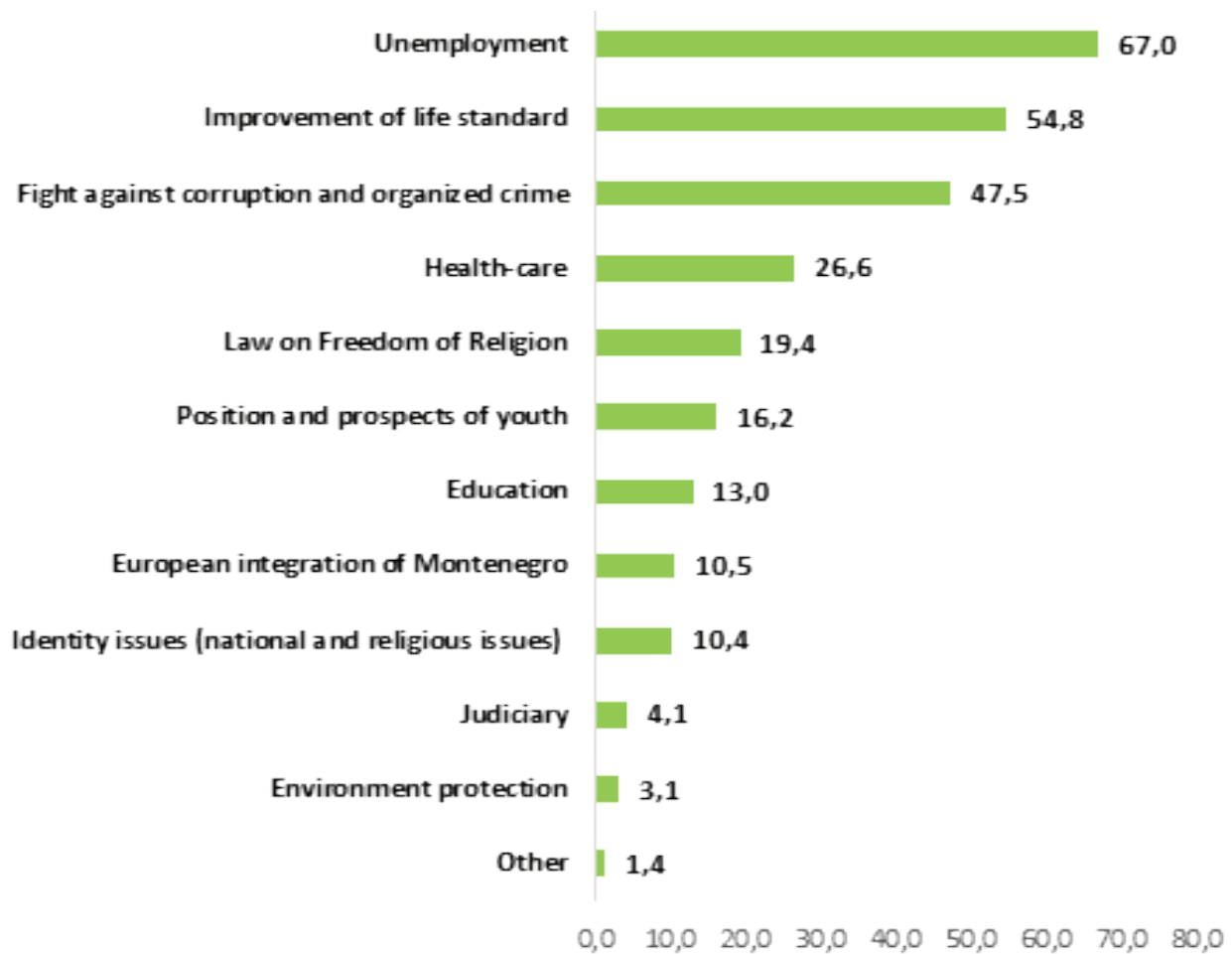


Chart 3: Issues that should be a priority in the campaign for the 2020 Parliamentary elections

MONTENEGRO'S DEMAND: MORE JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Fatigue from the firm leaders

Only one-fifth of voters state that Montenegro is certainly a democratic state and, along with one-third of those who have a completely opposite attitude, there are as many as two-fifths of those who are not, to a greater or lesser extent, satisfied with its quality and achieved effects in Montenegro. Observed from the perspective of election results, this data clearly indicates that the virus of dissatisfaction is not limited to the opposition electorate.

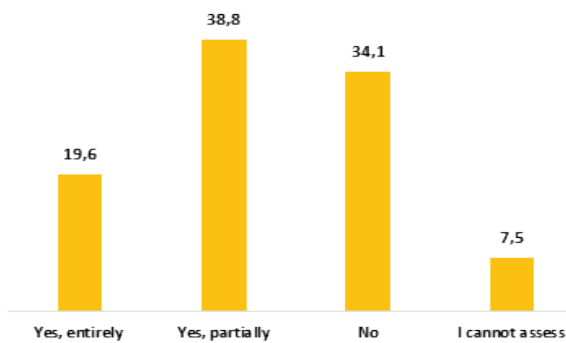


Chart 4: Is Montenegro a democratic state?

Obviously, a significant part of the voters of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the parties that constituted the government until these elections also expected more democracy. Therefore, whoever forms the next government must not turn a deaf ear to the appeal for more democracy and equality, less corruption, clientelism and the rule of tycoons and political oligarchs that go beyond the boundaries of party divisions.

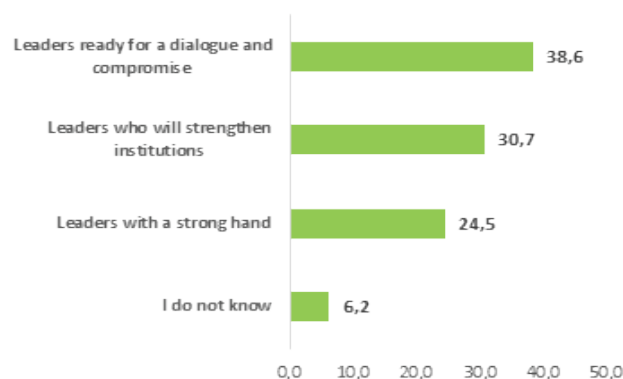


Chart 5: What kind of leaders does Montenegro need?

However, probably the most significant and encouraging finding, which supports the process of democratic maturation of Montenegro, is the identified fatigue of the citizens of Montenegro from firm leaders. It seems that the citizens have announced a call and launched a search for democratic, participatory leadership that will look for answers to challenges through dialogue and compromise within strong institutions. Compared to previous findings on the dominant, traditionally formed authoritarian structure and widespread cult of the leader reflected, for example, through the widespread acceptance of the view that is the most important to find a strong leader whom the people will blindly follow, this represents an almost revolutionary change and a message that members of the political elite in Montenegro must understand. Of course, if they want to remain/become politically influential. Also, it would be good for this 'democratic virus' to be spread throughout the region.

No retreat without a fight

The finding that the electorate does not support boycott of the elections has a similar significance and meaning. Namely, in the first half of 2020, i.e. before the elections, boycotting the elections was also a topic. When asked directly whether they support the boycott of the parliamentary elections, 58% of citizens decisively said that they did not support it, while for about a quarter it was not an idea that was out of the question (24.6%), and less than one-fifth (17.4%) could not declare on this issue. It is good that this message was read timely by its proponents.

Political theory and especially comparative election practice, rightfully, express reservations about election boycott as an effective opposition political strategy. Even in the situation of obvious pre-election irregularities and inequality of electoral participants clear to a significant part of the public. Findings of the research also indicate that the boycott would not be supported by the majority of the opposition-oriented electorate. The narrative of a boycott only makes sense as a mean of exerting additional pressure before calling an election and trying to get more democratic electoral conditions.

Thereafter, far more effective is the strategy of shaping a sufficiently attractive and convincing election offer, followed by an optimal coalition strategy of going to election with a number of programmatic electoral coalitions, i.e. columns that collect votes, while each of them individually oversteps the electoral threshold.

Electoral democracy

When it comes to the assessment of the conditions for democratic organisation of elections and the legitimacy of elections, odds are in favour of those who think that certain conditions exist and that the elections are to some extent fair and just, but a large percentage remains decisive that Montenegro does not have fair and just elections (41.7%).

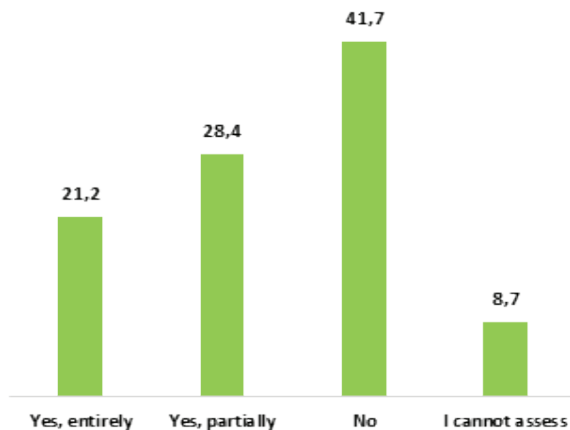


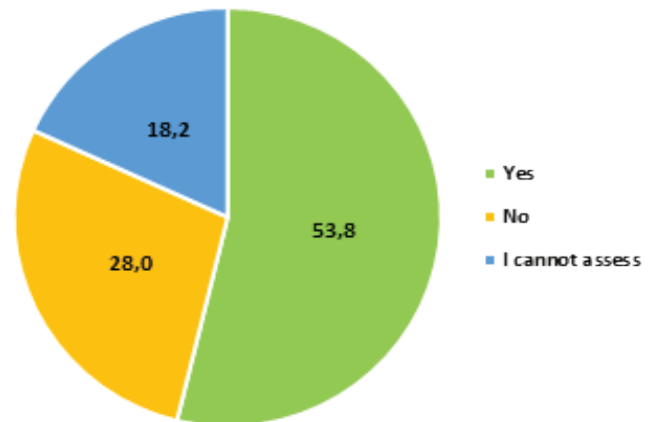
Chart 6: Are the elections fair and just?

Those who think that the elections are not fair and just, state the following main obstacles: abuse of state resources by the authorities, unregulated polling lists, poor election legislation, followed by distrust in key institutions tasked with conduct of elections (State Electoral Commission, Agency for Prevention of Corruption (APC), Prosecution) and inadequate control over political campaigns funding.

From the post-election perspective, it could be concluded that even the establishment of a minimum electoral democracy is not a done deal for at least half of the electorate in Montenegro, i.e. that it is an important premise of trust in institutions and self-engagement.

In this context, misuse of state resources, i.e. widespread suspicion, and the exposed evidence of the vote buying practices lead to a state that a good part of citizens perceive as a disgrace or a drop that spills over the glass. In addition, more than half of the citizens estimate that voting in the elections in Montenegro is secret. The opposite view has 28%, while almost every fifth respondent cannot assess this.

Also, there is a large number (62.8%) of those who believe that votes are to some extent being bought at the elections. They perceive all actors of the election process (political parties, institutions and citizens themselves) as the most responsible for this phenomenon, and in the individual assessment they see as responsible political parties and those ready to sell their vote.



Grafik 7: Da li je glasanje na izborima u Crnoj Gori tajno?

A democratic shift and, at least potentially, the presumption of democratic, responsible electoral practice represent a particularly encouraging, or at least sobering finding that in the circle of culprits for the corrupt practice of vote buying, citizens include not only parties that do so and the 'silent' institutions, but also those among them who (un)willingly participate in it.

WHO VOTES IN MONTENEGRO?

Citizen profiles

The political and ideological beliefs of Montenegrin citizens are traditionally overshadowed by proclaimed national preferences, which have, to a large extent, shaped every election in Montenegro since the establishment of the multi-party system in 1991. This certainly does not exclude the voters' determination in elections according to the ideological determinants of civil/national, west/east, centralization/ decentralization, etc. However, all issues pertaining to the classic left/right, liberal/conservative political spectrum in contemporary Montenegrin multipartyism, although nominally present, remain below identity identification or marginalised, i.e. within smaller political parties.

Therefore, part of the conducted research focused on the attempt to discover more about the personal, ideological and political beliefs of Montenegrin citizens. More precisely, the aim was to determine what kind of political-ideological society and state they aspire to. The data indicated the political evolution of society, but also certain variations related to demography, education and age.

Accumulated socio-economic dissatisfaction was crucial to the outcome, accompanied by underlined poor management of the pandemic, corruption scandals and the alienation of the ruling structure. However, ideological and political beliefs should not be ignored and it seems that the new ruling majority have recognized that as well. As part of the first actions, it first came out with four principles, and later with a seven-point agreement committing itself to the Montenegrin electorate, but also to the interested international public, that there will be no deviations from the dominant directions of Europeanization of Montenegrin society and which have broad support.

Positioning on the political spectrum

The expression and development of parties towards the political spectrum in Montenegro was suspended before it had a chance to profile itself - first by the royal dictatorship, and then by the one-party system of the communist system. Furthermore, despite declarative programme determinations, any profound party and society stratification since the establishment of multipartyism in 1991 has been limited by identity issues and a burdensome transition. Still, the opinion that Montenegrin society tends more to leftist ideals has taken root. The reasons for that were taken from

the centuries-old existence of the autonomous communal organization of the society before the Petrovic dynasty, positive attitude towards the communist period due to industrial development and anti-fascist heritage, as well as the specifics of multi-confessional tolerance.

The research indicated that citizens predominantly consider themselves leftists, that is, nearly half of them positioned themselves as leftist, while every fourth positioned their political orientation at the centre. A quarter could not determine themselves concerning this issue, and only 6.6% of citizens opted for the right.

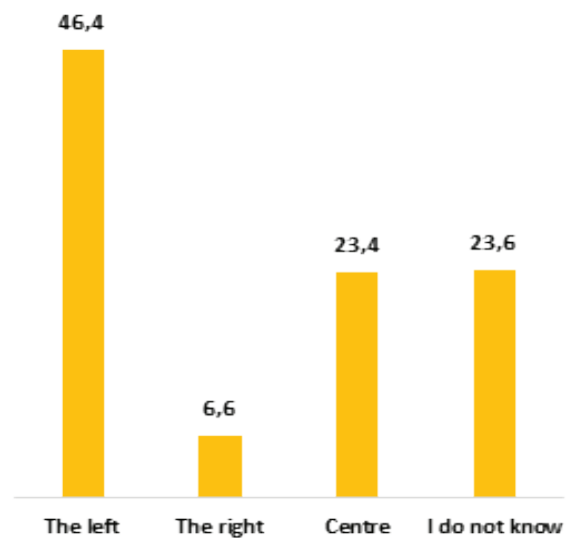


Chart 8: Do the citizens of Montenegro consider themselves as leftists or rightists?

When asking this question, a framework is given, which means that the left implies a set of values and attitudes that include freedom, equality, social justice, progress, reform and internationalism, while the right lists authority, hierarchy, profit, free market, tradition and nationalism, and citizens have positioned themselves on the given scale.

The data indicate that in comparison to the region this represents the highest percentage of those who identify themselves with the perceptions and ideals of the left. More detailed research on the impact of such a high degree of citizens' commitment to one political spectrum is needed, but after all the examples of unequal treatment in society, especially concerning officials of the recent ruling structure, it

would be reasonable to assume that such ideological-political profiling had its reflection through the election results as well.

Furthermore, considering that parties on the Montenegrin political scene often have political and ideological determinants in their name, but also in the programme, the research analysed whether citizens perceive them as such, with a note that this part did not include minority parties. Thus, the Democratic Front (DF) is most frequently named as a party / coalition of the right (37%, while 16.7% place them in the centre). It is interesting that, according to the perception of citizens, they are followed by DPS as right-wing party (30.3%, as opposed to 22.7% of those who see them on the left), Social Democrats (SD) (30.4% as opposed to 17.7% of those who place them on the left) and Socialist Peoples Party (25.8% see them as right and 17.5% as left), whereby these parties contain the leftist determinant of socialism in their name. This identifies the national and religious issue and distancing from social issues as an important indicator of positioning, which led the respondents to classify some declaratively socialist-oriented parties on the right.

Civic Movement United Reform Action – URA (28.5% see them in the left and 17.9% in the centre), Democratic Montenegro (24.9% position them in the centre, 23.5% in the left and 19.1% in the right) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) (22.9% position them in the left, and 22.4% in the centre) are recognised as the most dominant political subjects of the left political spectrum (more precisely central / left), and these parties, apart from SDP, made progress as a strong opposition to the DPS, while the SDP began to lose support during the campaign upon the announcement of support for the DPS. This also indicates that the elections were determined more by the attitude towards the DPS, until recently the ruling party, than by the declarative or practically recognized ideological frameworks.

It is clear that some of these perceptions do not correspond to what these parties publicly advocate, so it is up to the parties to assess what they are doing to make citizens see them differently than they present themselves and how to correct it in the coming period. This applies in particular to the further political future of DPS, which, apparently, must conduct a thorough reform accompanied by ‘ventilation’ of personnel at all levels if it wants to remain a serious player on the political scene in Montenegro, but also all other parties that belong to or aspire to membership in international organizations of a certain ideological profile.

What kind of society and country do we want?

Within Yugoslav framework, Montenegrin society was defined as traditionalist, with certain clearly represented conservative norms. Even after three decades of democratic development, perception of the family role, the position of men and women in society, attitudes towards authority, etc. seemed firm and unchanging. Social migration during communist

industrialization only partially managed to jeopardise these norms, and even the prolonged transition and economic crisis with the strong presence of identity issues and the growing influence of religious organizations could not have an adequate positive impact on this spectrum. This might demonstrate part of the results of the great efforts made by the civil sector in Montenegro in building a democratic political culture.

Hence, findings of research which indicate that the current values of Montenegrin society are shaped by liberal-leftist principles, such as individual freedom, equal conditions for social action and support to civil society accompanied by certain conservative elements, such as respect for authority and traditionalism, are not entirely surprising. Some discriminatory conservative perceptions of the LGBT population and women are ranked low, but still present.

Nothing is more important than freedom of an individual.	4,53
Society should provide equal conditions (schooling system, healthcare) for development of capabilities of an each individual.	4,51
Respect of the authority in the family, school, country, is necessary for achievement of social progress.	4,14
Each closing up into one's nation is pointless at the beginning of the 21st century.	3,93
We should return to tradition and autochthonous values of one's people.	3,7
We should strive for as lesser as possible participation of religious organisations in the functioning of the country.	3,59
Non-governmental organisations are useful for our society.	3,49
Homosexuals should not have equal rights as other citizens.	3,09
The state should intervene less in the economy.	2,76
Some people should be prohibited from voting in the elections.	2,63
Abortion should not be allowed.	2,62
Inequality in richness and social position among people is a natural thing.	2,49
It would be better if only one political party existed.	2,34
A woman's place, first and foremost, is in the house, where she should be taking care of the household and upbringing of children.	2,03

 Liberal claims

 Conservative claims

Chart 9: Average values for statements referring to liberalism / conservatism

Findings of the research indicate changes within Montenegrin society towards strengthening of values that are essential for fundamental democratization. Certain traditional norms are expectedly present, but to a lesser extent in comparison to previous research and closer to other European societies, which may indicate the effects of the process of Europeanization.

This is followed by attitudes towards the constitutional order of Montenegro as a civic state, the greatest civilizational heritage of Montenegrin society and the consequences of a multicultural and multiconfessional structure which, despite everything, was preserved during the 90s. It is based on the development of tolerance from Kingdom of Montenegro era and anti-fascist values from the period that followed. This framework has, to a significant extent, preserved a civic oasis amongst the predominantly nationally determined states of the Western Balkans. Even 14 years upon the restoration of independence, that concept remains alive with the majority support, which was underestimated by the previous ruling structure.

This is indicated by the data that the majority of citizens (68.7%) want to live in a society where respect for the law is an expression of patriotism, not emphasizing political and national symbols, while the opposite position has slightly more than a one-tenth of citizens (11.9%), and close a fifth does not yet have a differentiated position (19.8%).

Although the civic concept is rooted in Montenegrin society, the new Montenegrin authorities still need to work on strengthening it, given that 45.5% of respondents believe that the authorities provided a multiethnic and multi-religious society. Under the circumstances, it is especially encouraging that half of the respondents consider that for the sake of the state interest, national and religious affiliation should be put in the back burner (50.7%), and that only a quarter (25.2%) oppose it, with a quarter of those who could not declare (24.1 %). This also indicates that the electorate did not change its attitude towards Montenegrin statehood, but that it punished the DPS in the elections for extensive manipulating this issue. Of course, we need to work on these issues and reassure the citizens that Montenegro is a state of all instead of only those who belong to a certain political structure.

The curves of all indicators point to the support and identification of the importance of the civic concept of Montenegrin society. The need for a greater degree of respect for the law and engagement in ensuring the constitutional order of the state are an expression of dissatisfaction with the work of the previous government on these issues, on which it indicatively and largely based her authority, but did not realise that playing on that card is over.

FAITH AS THE BASIS OF CHANGE

Citizens as creators of change

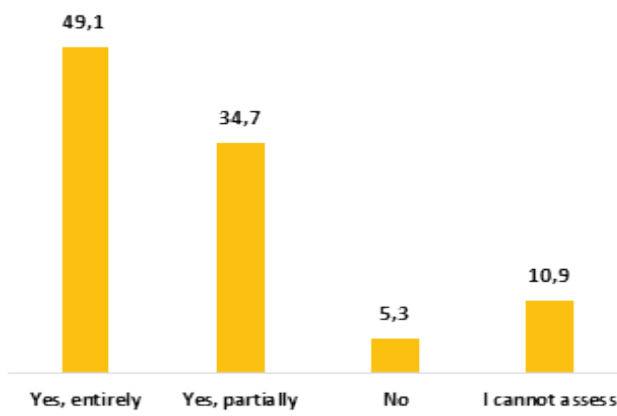


Chart 10: Do you believe that citizens can have an impact on change in a society?

It is indisputably refreshing that the vast majority of citizens (83.8%) believe that they can be the bearers of change, whether it is a direct (49.1%) or partial (34.7%) impact, while slightly more than one-sixth of them do not that believe or cannot assess this.

This is still not clearly reflected in their social and political activism, as both are below the average values ranging from 1 to 10, with notice that they are more willing to express their activism outside political parties (social activism is at average value of 4.11, and political at 3.13).

This disbalance can be partially explained by the fact that until the 2020 Parliamentary elections there was no change of government at the national level, and there were sporadic examples at the local level. Also, the attitude of the authorities towards dissidents was not in favor of activism, especially the one that is critically oriented.

However, certain shifts that have begun in recent years, especially in engagement of citizens around issues that directly affect them, such as environmental, communal issues, etc. were noticeable and indicated a growing trend of local initiatives. Thus, more developed civic consciousness that takes action instead of waiting for political parties, institutions, or someone else on their behalf to do so has been increasingly demonstrated. The success of some of these actions undoubtedly had a positive effect and strengthened faith in the possibility of change.

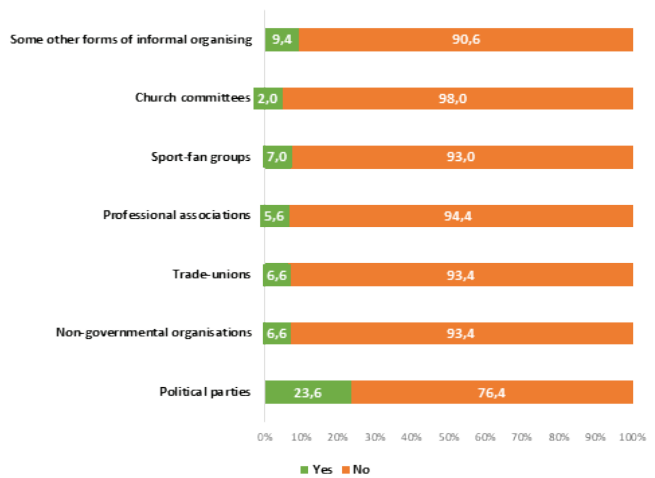


Chart 11: Are you a member of a political party, NGO or informal group?

The research also indicated that almost one in four respondents stated that s/he was a member of a political party, and more than one-third (37.2%) said that they were members of an NGO or informal group.

People and parties

Two-thirds of the citizens stated that they were partially informed about the work of political parties, while one-fifth assessed that they were fully informed. In that area, the media have a significant role, especially television and the portal, as the most frequently used sources of information.

Every tenth citizen fully trusts political parties, while about 40% partially trust them, or do not trust them at all.

The level of keeping promises by political parties, measured on a 1 to 5 scale, is 2.99. This means that the political parties, according to the respondents who voted for them, only partially fulfilled their pre-election promises. This is a warning fact for political parties in Montenegro and their legitimacy.

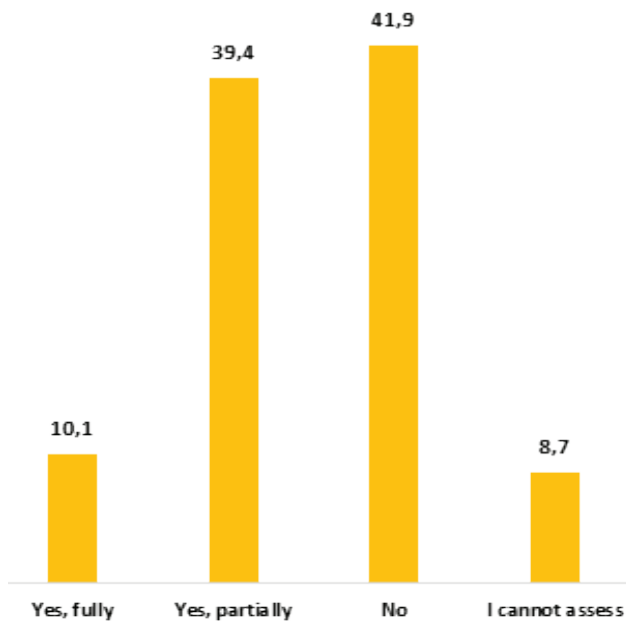
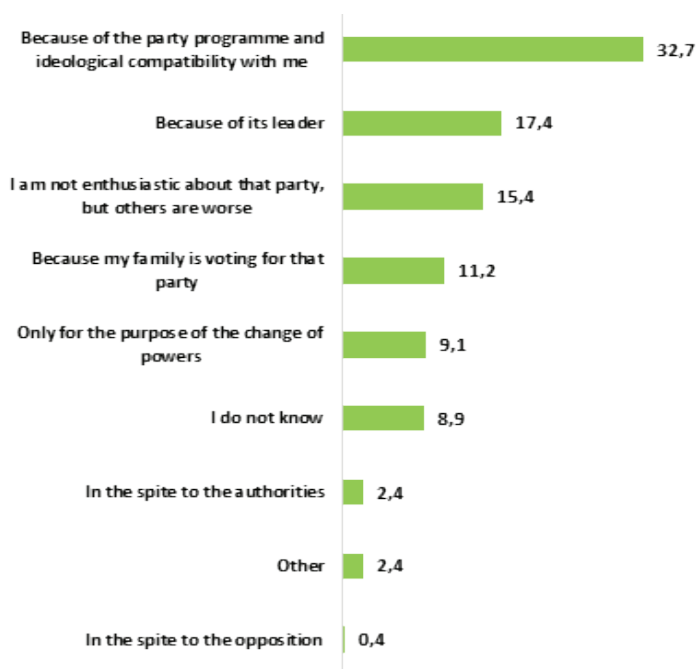


Chart 12: Do citizens believe in the promises of political parties?

This does not always and inevitably change their attitudes about these parties as significant number of them stated that they would vote for the same party again. Things become much clearer when one looks at the determining reasons for voting for a party.

Namely, in addition to the expected one-third of those who vote because of the programme and ideological matching, there is not a small number of those who are determined by the party leader and the lack of a better alternative.



Grafik 13: Zbog čega biste glasali određenu političku partiju?

However, given the trend of political maturation of citizens, in some of the upcoming elections, this may return very negatively to political parties that do not fulfill their promises, and there will be particularly high expectations from the new majority consisting of three, until recently opposition, coalitions.

WHAT DIRECTION DO WE TAKE?

The results of this research on ideological and political orientation and value tendencies speak of the aspiration of Montenegrin society towards certain ideals, which are currently rather unrealistic. But these are tendencies that no serious government should ignore, and which will be expressed for the new ruling majority through great and difficult to achieve expectations.

A clear orientation towards the values of Western societies, social justice and respect for local specific traditional values is indisputable. The last item is often bypassed, with quick assessment that it is in collision with the development of a modern democratic society. Nevertheless, recent political history has demonstrated that such societies can successfully integrate cultural-traditionalist values as long as they do not jeopardise the liberal view of the rights and roles of all its stakeholders.

Part of the research also referred to foreign policy. In that area, one-third of the citizens believe that Montenegro's membership in NATO has not brought benefits to the country. More than two-thirds support the EU membership, which indicates that the competent institutions have not adequately presented the benefits of NATO membership. This can be partly explained by the insistence of the outgoing government that this is the exclusive merit of the so far ruling coalition and not of the various structures that contributed to the membership from their positions.

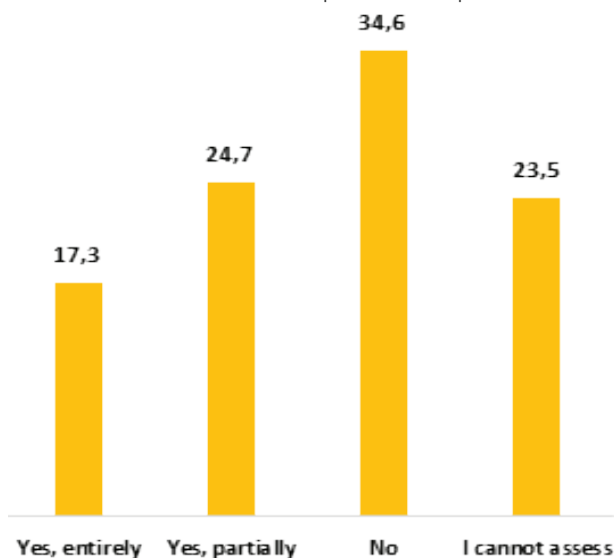


Chart 14: Do you think that Montenegro's membership in NATO brought benefits to the state?

On the other hand, increased EU activity was reflected in greater support. However, it should be noted that the EU has always had a broader social consensus because, inter alia, accession negotiations are also perceived as a framework for the democratization of the entire society.

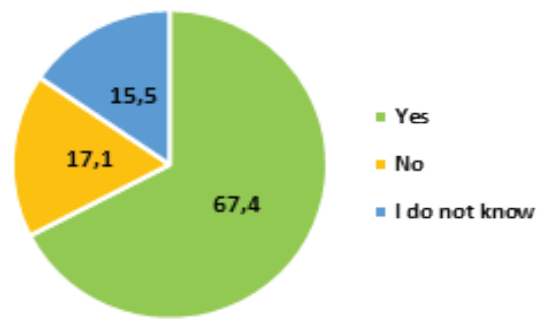


Chart 15: Do you support Montenegro's membership in the EU?

This support to the EU is also related to the overall pro-European orientation, therefore, it is no coincidence that the DPS is knocked from power after three decades, because, amongst other things, it lost that image and began to lead the state and society into stagnation, even in certain segments into regression, when it comes to European integration, to which direct warnings were received from the EU through their reports.

The EU is perceived as Montenegro's most important foreign policy partner, followed by Russia and the USA. Positioning of the USA behind Russia is obviously a consequence of the lower level of US engagement in Montenegro since Montenegro became a member of NATO alliance.

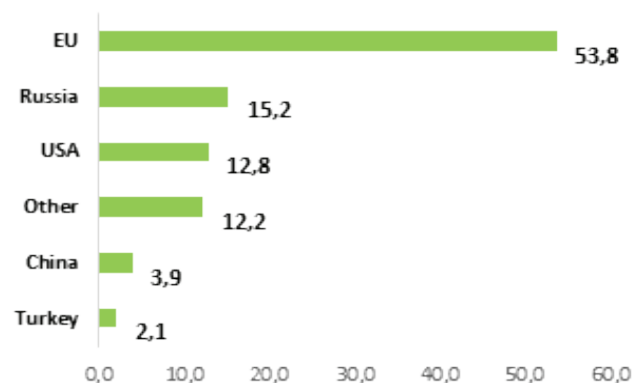


Chart 16: Who is the most important foreign policy partner of Montenegro?

The findings of the research indicated that the citizens of Montenegro consider (in more than 50%) that Montenegro's relations with all its neighbors, except Serbia, are very good and good, and relations with Serbia is an expected consequence of recent tense political events.

The research also included citizens' attitude towards their future in Montenegro and indicated that one-fifth of the respondents want, but also plan, to leave Montenegro, and amongst them young and educated people are in the lead. The main reason for leaving Montenegro is the improvement of living conditions. The most desirable country for resettlement is Germany, followed by the USA, other EU member states, the Nordic countries, etc. Unfortunately, this problem is still insufficiently discussed in Montenegro, and there are no systematic efforts of institutions to address it, which can have additional negative effects for a country with limited human resources.

TOWARDS A DIFFERENT MONTENEGRO

The narrow electoral defeat of the DPS in the parliamentary elections marks the beginning of the end of a three-decade rule of DPS personified by Milo Djukanovic, who was also the focus of the opposition's election campaign as a key political opponent.

Reactions from the neighboring Serbia, which was often mentioned as an important actor in these elections, were interesting. One part welcomed it with frenetic enthusiasm because they saw Djukanovic as an enemy of the Serbian people, while other depressedly perceived the results as the return of Montenegro to some myth about Serbian countries and political space, far from reality and undertaken international commitments. Hence, Montenegro has become a connecting line between the so-called 'first' and 'second' of Serbia, and regardless of all their differences, both demonstrated that the elections and decisions of the citizens of Montenegro are good only when they please them. In Serbia there were few who saw a hint of democratic evolution in Montenegro in this peaceful and democratic change of the government. At the same time, none of the stakeholders in Montenegro questioned the legality and legitimacy of the election results

In its decadent phase, the DPS government relied on magnifying the danger of renewing the 'Greater Serbia' project, which would make Montenegro disappear as a sovereign state, that is, reduce it to a vassal status. The conflict with the Serbian Orthodox Church and the idea of constituting a national Orthodox church as the final completion of the state project and separation from the Serbian cultural circle and tradition, as well as creating animosity towards what comes from Serbia was not crucial for electoral change, but it did contribute to the electoral defeat of the DPS, as well as to the creation of an atmosphere of political tension felt by the vast majority of citizens in the pre-election period (78.9%) and the electoral defeat of the DPS.

The post-election story about indifference of the democratic international community aims to reconstruct the support of the West by fueling the fear, above all, of the spread of Russia's influence in the region and Serbia's assistance in that work. The part of this is an attempt to present the new government as 'three-part and unreliable' in relation to the DPS and Djukanovic, who, although significantly delegitimised, should represent a 'reliable and usable' partner.

Nevertheless, prompt and clear agreement within the election winners on fundamental common principles and steps makes the strategy of a quick DPS return to power less convincing. Of course, the persuasiveness and success of the former opposition in building bridges of trust and creating a sustainable governance strategy is crucial. This implies a combination of a discontinuance and democratic deflection from the clientelistic and partocratic practice of the previous government with calming social and political tensions, which citizens note in this research, by renouncing any revanchism and undertaking existing international commitments. The obligation of the new government to be unequivocally pro-Western, civic-oriented, inclusive and consistent in respecting the proclaimed principles in practice remains, if it wants to use its term of office. The first major exam will be the personnel plan, which must satisfy the principles of competence and political responsibility, but also commitment to strengthening the state of Montenegro. The capacity and duration of new authorities will largely depend on the ability to recognise what is possible and effective. In this, of course, it is not enough to count on a majority of one MP, which underline the necessity to engage national minority parties and to expand support for unblocking the judiciary as well.

In the general context, there is no democratic consolidation of Montenegro without the democratic evolution of the parties from both the current and the former government.

Why citizens should never be underestimated?

The support of the citizens is crucial. They believed in the possibility of change and the power of their votes. Now, they have high expectations and they will not, when the change is 'within their grasp', easily come to terms with an outcome that could be summed up by the motto: awakened hope - betrayed expectations.

The citizens of Montenegro do not deserve that. According to comparative research insights, they are more politically and ideologically identified than others, especially when it comes to identification with the left, and highly, at least formally, politically and civically engaged. At the same time, globally widespread distrust in collective civic and political bearers of changes is less intense than in other countries, both in the regional and in the wider European framework.

Finally, there are no democratic changes also without elites who are accountable to politically aware and adult citizens united in their autonomous interest and professional organizations. These civic organizations are strong in Montenegro and have the capacity to follow these changes and possible deviations from the path of Europeanization of Montenegrin society. They remain one of the important government control mechanisms, in addition to a strong and motivated opposition, the media, the interested international community, but also the three coalitions of the new ruling majority, which will have reason to closely monitor each other.

In this context, the results of the Montenegrin elections should be considered as the beginning of the process of establishing political accountability that citizens require and which can act as an incentive for the dynamization of internal reform interventions, with full awareness that there are no perfect government but also that no government in Montenegro will carry the aureole of irremovability.

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WHEN THE POLITICAL ELITE UNDERESTIMATE CITIZENS

Parliamentary elections in Montenegro



Half of the citizens consider that for the sake of the state interest, national and religious affiliation should be put in the the back burner. This also indicates that the electorate did not change its attitude towards Montenegrin statehood, but that it punished the DPS in the elections for extensive manipulation of this issue.



It is encouraging that vast majority of citizens (83.8%) believe that they can be the bearers of change, whether it is a direct (49.1%) or partial (34.7%) impact.



Persuasiveness and success of the former opposition in building bridges of trust and creating a sustainable governance strategy is crucial. This implies a combination of a strict discontinuance and democratic deflection from the clientelistic and partocratic practice of the previous government with calming social and political tensions by renouncing any revanchism and taking on existing international commitments.

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