

The Democratic Union (HDZ) comes out ahead in the Croatian general elections... but without an absolute majority

The coalition led by the Democratic Union (HDZ), led by outgoing Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, came out ahead in the Croatian general elections on 17 April. It won 34.32% of the vote and 61 of the 150 seats in the Hrvatski Sabor, the single chamber of parliament (down 5 on the previous general election of 5 July 2020). It beat the Rivers of Justice (Rijeke Pravde) coalition, led by Pedja Grbin's Social Democratic Party (SDP), which won 25.41% of the vote and 42 MPs (+1).

The coalition of the outgoing Prime Minister includes the Social Liberal Party (HSLs), the Christian Democratic Party, the Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja, the People's Party-Reformists (NS-R), the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Croatia, the Roma Alliance of the Republic of Croatia, the Union of Albanians and the Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU). The opposition includes the Democratic Party of Istria (IDS), the Alliance of Primorje-Gorski (PGS), the Reformists, the Centre Party (Centar), the Workers' Front (DO i SIP), the Civic-Liberal Alliance (GLAS) and the Peasant Party (HSS).

The Democratic Union won in 8 constituencies, as well as the constituency for voters living outside Croatia (the 11th) and the Social Democratic Party in 2.

The Patriotic Movement (Domovinski Pokret, DP), a right-wing populist party founded by Miroslav Skoro and led by Ivan Penava (which ran in coalition with Agrameri, Law and Justice, the Peasant Democratic Party, the Green List and the Bloc for Croatia), came third with 9.56% of the vote and 14 seats (-2). The party obtained high results in Slavonia, a region in the east of the country. It was followed by The Bridge (Most), a liberal party led by Bozo Petrov, which won 8.02% of the vote and 11 MPs (+3), and We Can! (Mozemo!), a left-wing ecologist party, which won 9.10% of the vote and 10 seats.

Turnout was particularly high, the highest for 20 years. It stood at 62.30%, an increase of 15.86 points compared with the previous general elections held on 5 July 2020. The fact that the elections were held on a weekday undoubtedly explains this increase in part.

General elections in Croatia

17th April 2024

02

Results of the general elections of 17 April 2024 in Croatia

Turnout: 62.30%

Political Parties	% of votes cast	Seats
Coalition led by the Democratic Union (HDZ)	34.32	61
Rivers of Justice Coalition led by the Social Democratic Party (SDP)	25.41	42
Miroslav Skoro's Patriotic Movement (Domovinski Pokret, DPMS)-Coalition of Sovereignists	9.56	14
Most-Nezavisnih Lista	8.02	11
(Bridge-Independent Lists)	9.10	10
Mozemo (We Can)	2.18	4
Democratic Party of Istria (IDS)	1.22	1
Independent Northern Platform (NPS)	2.25	0
Fokus (F)	7.94	0
Others		8

Source : https://www.izbori.hr/site/UserDocsImages/2024/Izbori_za_zastupnike_u_Hrvatski_sabor/Rjesenje19042024.pdf

"The Democratic Union has won the general elections for the third time in a row," said outgoing Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic when the results were announced, adding. "A lot has been achieved in recent years, but there are always new duties, new challenges and new problems (...) In a geopolitical context that has changed significantly, and in the face of security threats, it is important that Croatia is run seriously, responsibly and reliably, and that all our citizens are safe. Croatia needs serious and responsible people to protect it from all possible crises".

Andrej Plenkovic highlights Croatia's stability and its results as head of government: economic growth, entry into the euro area and the Schengen area (in January 2023). "A vote in favour of the Democratic Union is a vote in favour of stability, security and development", he repeated during the election campaign.

To obtain a majority, the Democratic Union could form an alliance with the Patriotic Movement. However, if it makes this choice, the Prime Minister will have to forgo the support of the Serbian Independent Democratic Party (SDSS), led by Milorad Pupovac, with which the Patriotic Movement refuses to cooperate. It will also have to do without the support of its coalition partner, Darinko Kosor's Social Liberal Party (HSL), which

opposes any alliance with the right-wing populist party. "It is clear that we are the 3rd largest political force in Croatia and we will talk to anyone who calls on us," declared the leader of the Patriotic Movement, Ivan Penava.

"These are not the results we were hoping for," said Social Democratic leader Pedja Grbin, adding: "However, we have days, weeks, perhaps months of negotiations ahead of us. Negotiations that will bring about the change that will make Croatia a country free of corruption, and that starts tomorrow, with all those who said they would not work with the Democratic Union. It's time to see if they really want change" Mozemo! called on the political parties "on the left and the right, who have sworn over the last 4 years that their main objective was to destroy the corrupt overlords, to be consistent, to respect their voters and to say no to the Democratic Union".

The Social Democrats could consider working with Mozemo! but also with the Democratic Party of Istria and the Reformists. But only if the President of the Republic renounces his ambition to become Prime Minister. In mid-March, the Head of State announced his candidacy for the general elections, but on 18

March the Constitutional Court declared that this was absolutely impossible. This event transformed "an election with relatively predictable results into an uncertain battle", according to Tihomir Cipek, professor of political science at the University of Zagreb.

"Zoran Milanovic is trying to ride the wave of anger among a large section of the middle class. This is a calculated marketing strategy, a carefully conceived performance", said Jurica Pavicic, writer and journalist. The President of the Republic accused the Democratic Union of being riddled with corruption and his Prime Minister of being "a godfather of crime". "When you have to deal with thieves and savages who take advantage of their power, you have to react like that,

you have to show your muscles", he stressed to explain his decision to succeed Andrej Plenkovic. Plenkovic accused the President of being "the hidden leader of the opposition, in charge of a mini coup d'état".

"As a result, neither side has won a sufficient number of seats in parliament to form a governing majority, including with its own partners. Things could come down to one seat. The negotiation process will be very long, and it will be very difficult to find a common language" said Tihomir Cipek. The likelihood of new elections has already been envisaged. And this at a time when the 3.7 million Croatians will be going to the polls on 9 June for the European elections and at the end of the year for the presidential elections.

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