



# Weekly Briefing

**Slovenia Political briefing:  
Upcoming local elections  
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## **Upcoming local elections**

### ***Summary***

*2018 is a double-election year in Slovenia, with parliamentary elections which took place in June and the local elections due November 18. The political situation has largely changed since the previous 2014 elections, however, some long term trends in local politics still seem to hold strong. With the election campaign in full swing, several irregularities and scandals have also happened, while the effect of those will most probably remain limited.*

### **Background: voting system and previous 2014 elections**

Local elections which take place every four years are actually an amalgam of two election processes – elections of the mayors of the municipalities and elections of municipal council members. Mayors are elected directly, following the principle »one candidate-one vote«. On the other hand, municipal council members are selected with a mixed majority-proportional system through candidate lists. Costs of the elections are covered by the municipalities themselves.

The candidate for the position of a mayor has to be over 18 years old, and have permanent residence in Slovenia. The candidate is also required to have permanent residence status in the municipality of his candidacy. This last criterion is often debated and seen as a potential disqualification element with the candidates who change their residence in order to be able to submit their candidature. For the mayor candidature to be submitted, the potential candidate can be either promoted by a political party or needs the support (expressed by signatures) of at least 2 % of the number of voters in the respective municipality, that voted in the first round of the previous mayor elections, number being limited not less than 15 and not more than 2500. Same system is in place for

candidatures of the municipal council members' lists, with the signatures numbers being smaller, amounting to 1 % of the number of voters in the respective municipality, who voted on the municipal council elections, the number being limited to minimum 15 signatures for both majority and proportional system and maximum 1000 signatures for proportional system. Gender quotas are also in place, requiring that any candidate list needs to include at least 40 % of men or women and on the first half of the list different gender candidates have to be listed alternately.

Voting is direct in the mayor elections, where all candidates compete in the first round and if one of them gets over 50 %, he/she wins in the first round. Whether none of them gets 50 % support, the best two compete again in the second round, which is scheduled to take place on December 2. The system of the municipal council elections depends on the size of the municipal council, and this in turn depends on the size of the municipality. The number of municipal council members vary from 7-11 for the smallest municipalities (with less than 3000 people) up to 36-45 members for the largest municipalities. The capital, Ljubljana, has 45 seats in the municipal council. In the ethnically mixed municipalities, the national minorities have a tenth of the number of the council members, or at least one. In municipalities with less than 12 council members, the voting system follows the majority system, where individual candidates are voted for. In municipalities where municipal council consists of more members, proportional system is applied, where candidate lists are voted for and the council members are then selected according in relation to the order of the names on the list.

### **Trends in local elections until 2014 and current predictions**

From the 61, 1 % on the first local elections the turnout was consistently lower each time, except for the 2002 local elections which coincided with presidential elections and thus got a high 72, 2 % turnout. In 2014 the percentage dropped to 43, 6 % and the trend might continue this year as well.

The last elections also showed a growing affinity of the voters towards the candidates which claimed not to be affiliated with any political party, although this was not entirely true in several cases. Out of 212 municipalities, 115 of them elected mayors who were independent candidates. Of the other 97 that were politically affiliated, the most successful political party was Slovenian People's Party with 31 elected mayors. This result showed a deep contrast between the politics on local and national level, since the same year this party suffered a significant downfall on parliamentary elections and with only 3, 95 % failed to enter the parliament. Along the same paradigm, the winning parliamentary party Miro Cerar Party (now: Modern Centre Party), which got 36 out of 90 seats in the parliament, failed to have even one single mayor elected on the local elections. Another 20 mayors belonged to left-wing Social Democrats, 19 to the right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party, 7 to the Christian right wing New Slovenia. Slovenian Democratic Party got the most of the municipal council members nationwide.

In 2005, following the example of the 2004 European elections, the law was changed to introduce gender quotas. Although the 40 % participation of both genders was prescribed, the introduction of this rule was only gradual, starting with 20 % in 2006, 30 % in 2010 and then reaching the European elections standard of 40 % in 2014. The proportion of women in municipal councils was 31, 5 %. In mayor elections, where quotas of course can not apply, the proportions are considerably lower. The highest number of women mayors in the history of local elections in Slovenia was 16 in 2014 elections, when a total of 108 women mayor candidates competed. In proportions, this meant 13, 3 % representation in candidatures, but only 7, 6 % representation in election results. This year the percentage of women candidates is only slightly higher at 14, 5 %.

Another trend became very obvious in 2014: several of the »old« mayors were elected again with high votes. Among them, most obvious examples are the mayor of Ljubljana who has been on the position since 2006 (with few

months break in 2011/12), the mayor of Celje Bojan Šrot, who has been a mayor since 1998, and the mayor of Koper, Boris Popovič, who has been a mayor since 2002. All of them compete again this year. Even more, mayors of eleven municipalities have been on their positions since the reform of the local governance system in 1994, for 24 years. Compared to the parliamentary elections, where, almost as a rule, last three elections have been won by newly established political parties, local elections display an opposite trend. In 2014 elections, 85 of the elected mayors were »old« mayors, continuing their mandate.

### **Irregularities and scandals related to the campaign**

The election campaign officially started on October 19. Although the media coverage of the election campaign is still not very extensive, several irregularities were already discovered along with a few scandals related to the campaign. Apart from the fact that some candidatures were rejected due to the procedural errors, more serious irregularities were also discovered. The Green Party of Andrej Čuš did a promotion for their candidature by offering free seedlings in different locations in Central Sava Valley. The recipients of the free seedlings were asked to sign a form that was presented as a sign of support for their party, but was in fact a confirmation of their candidature. This made the recipients of the seedlings unknowingly the candidates on the list of the Green Party, an action which is irretrievable when the campaign has officially started. Another campaign scandal occurred in Koper, where Boris Popovič, the mayor of the last sixteen years is challenged by his former associate Gašpar Gašpar Mišič. The posters of the latter were removed, allegedly due to some risk related to a storm, by the public utility company, owned by the municipality.

Such an act is seen as a symptom of the corruption risks which are related to the long-term mayor mandates, especially in bigger and wealthier municipalities. A related issue which was brought up in the past week was the extent to which the current mayors abuse their positions and the municipal resources to campaign for their new mandate. The example which got most

media attention, were several local newspapers, published by different municipalities, which dedicated special issues to the merits and achievements of the current municipal governments and the mayors.

### **Conclusion**

Local elections tend to be more conservative in the choice of mayors and city council parties compared to the parliamentary elections. Despite the fact that the new Prime Minister himself comes from a background in local politics, most probably the election results on the local level will not reflect the results of the parliamentary elections in June 2018. The biggest issue will most probably be the relation between »old« and »new« mayors, a competition which will be most intense in city municipalities. The evident tolerance of the voters on local level to corruption scandals related to the local politicians also make any further big pre-election scandals quite unlikely.