



A Survey of Public Opinion in Bosnia & Herzegovina: *Details of the Long Road Ahead*

This report is based upon surveys conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina during mid-late June, 1998. In total, 3002 interviews were conducted: 1000 in the Republika Srpska by the firm Medium Index, Ltd of Belgrade; and 2002 in the Federation by Puls Public Opinion Research of Split. These contractors used a stratified probability sample design in which interviews were apportioned by region in proportion to population, while the specific location of interviewing, the household, and the respondent within the household were selected randomly. In the Republika Srpska, interviews were conducted in all regions of the entity, including 19 of 47 principal municipalities. In the Federation, interviews were conducted in 8 of 10 cantons (excluded were the detached Posavina, and remote Gorazde), and 41 of 79 principal municipalities. Interviews were conducted in three languages: Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian.

In the absence of reliable census data, the most recently available voter registration data from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were used to weight the survey data, so that the geographic distribution of interviews represented the actual distribution of the adult population of Bosnia & Herzegovina as closely as possible. Based on this registration data, 39 percent of the national population is found in the Republika Srpska, 61 percent in the Federation. The obtained survey data were weighted to conform to these targets, and to match the population distribution within each entity according to region — by canton in the Federation and by four unofficial regions in the RS. The theoretical margin sampling error for the entire sample is $\pm 1.8\%$; for the RS survey it is $\pm 3.1\%$; for the Federation sample it is $\pm 2.2\%$.

This report was prepared by Steven Wagner, President of QEV Analytics in Washington, DC. QEV Analytics served as the technical consultant to the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) for the purposes of this survey project. This project was commissioned by the National Democratic Institute funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Political Leaders & Parties in Bosnia & Herzegovina

When asked to identify the three most politically important persons in the BiH in an open-ended format (response options were not provided), responses were quite diverse. Only seven persons were named by 10% or more. Typically, political figures were cited by respondents in only one entity. Two figures enjoy significant identification in both the RS and Federation: Alija Izetbegovic (cited by 41% nationally; 56% in the Federation, and 18% in the RS); and Milorad Dodik (26% nationally; 16% in the Federation; 42% in the RS). Izetbegovic is far and away the most widely recognized individual we tested.

SUMMARY

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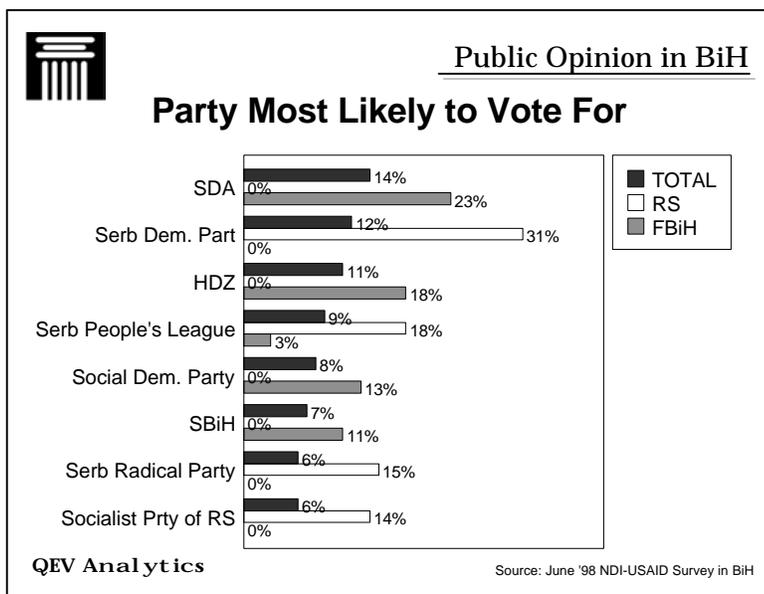
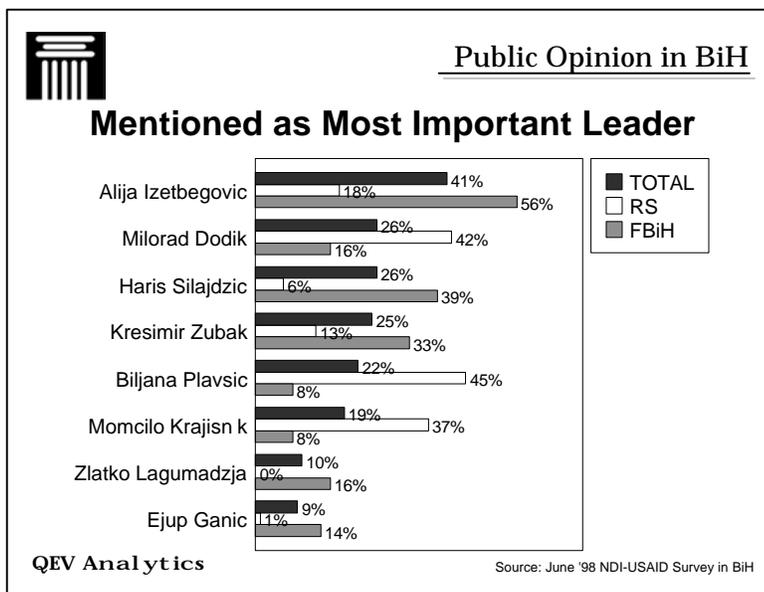
But familiarity does not translate into admiration. Izetbegovic has a nationwide image which is 39% favorable, 57% unfavorable — with a huge 95% unfavorable in the RS. Dodik receives a 43% favorable, 47% unfavorable rating (57% unfavorable in the Federation); Silajdzic’s rating is 43% favorable, 51% unfavorable (90% unfavorable in the RS); Zubak’s rating is 27% favorable, 66% unfavorable (87% unfavorable in the RS).

This pattern was consistent for all of the 26 public figures we tested by name: few had a net positive image because popularity in one entity was typically outweighed by unpopularity in the other. The exceptions to this pattern arose for individuals who were virtually unknown outside their home entity.

Asked whom they would most like to see elected President, “if there were an election tomorrow” — an election which will yield three Presidents — respondents in the RS named Biljana Plavsic, Momcilo Krajsnik, and Nikola Poplasen in a statistical tie (18%, 16%, and 15% respectively). Zivko Radisic lags at 11 percent.

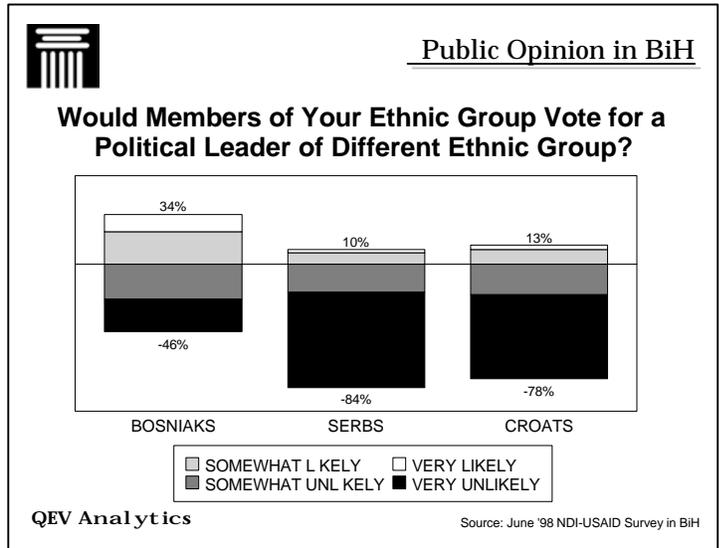
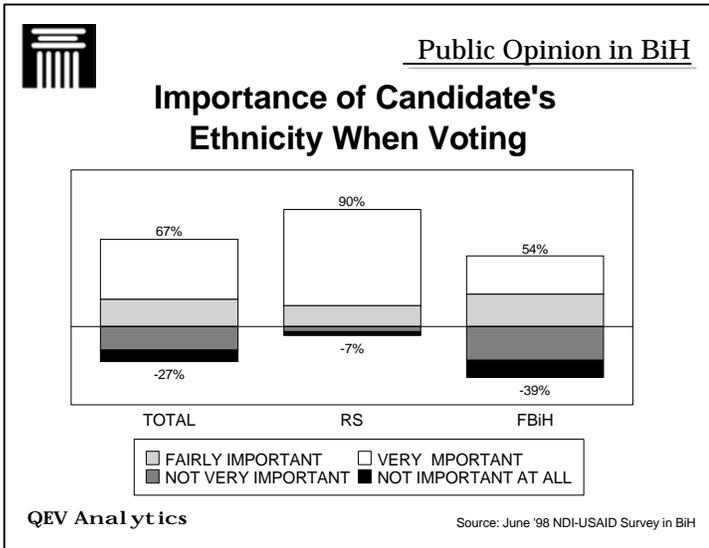
Among Bosniaks in the FBiH, Alija Izetbegovic has a slight advantage over Haris Silajdzic (32% versus 26%). Zlatko Lagumdzija is in third place with 16%. Among Federation Croats, Kresimir Zubak is currently the only contender with 32%. Ante Jelavic is named by 8 percent of Federation Croats.

Just as the survey was unable to detect an individual with a clear potential to appeal across entity borders, the appeal of political parties is even more starkly confined to entity borders. Of the twenty-two political parties we tested, only eight have any significant degree of popular following, and none has support in both entities. The parties selected as being “most representative of the interests of the people like [the respondent]” are, in the RS, the Serb Democratic Party (selected by 30%) , the Serb People’s League (18%), the Serb Radical Party (16%), and the





Socialist Party of RS (15%). In the Federation, the leading parties are: the SDA (29%, a party appealing to Bosniak's), the HDZ (20%, dominant among Croats), the Social Democratic Party (15%), and the SBiH (11%). Not only is there not yet in Bosnia and Herzegovina a political party with popular support in both entities which might serve as a

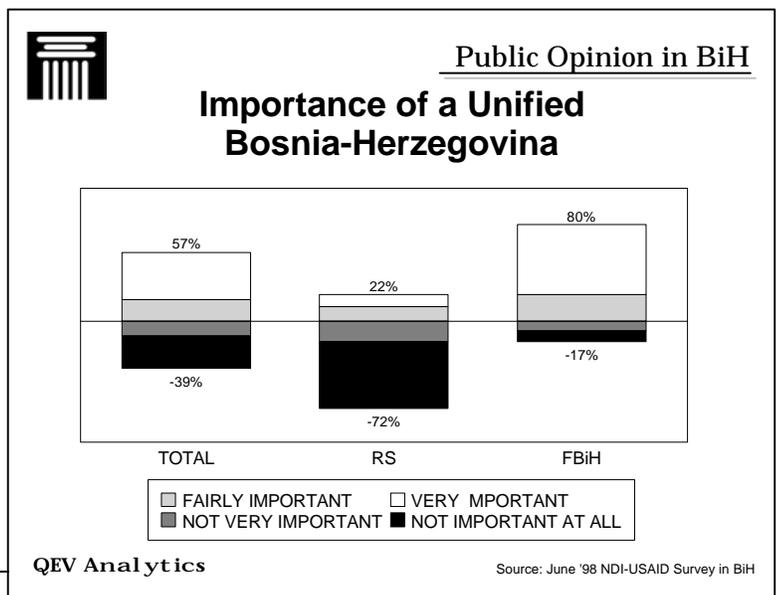


vehicle for inter-ethnic cooperation, there is no party in the Federation with significant support among both Bosniaks and Croats.

Looking forward to the elections, the same picture emerges from our question on which party respondents are likely to vote for: the leading parties attract significant following in one entity or the other, but not both.

The unmistakable circumstance that no person or party has transcendent appeal across ethnic lines is consistent with the public's relative disinterest in ethnic reconciliation — or, to be more precise, the distinct lack of priority attached to ethnic reconciliation among certain ethnic groups. This is the attitudinal impediment to reconciliation: there are no multi-ethnic political vehicles, ultimately, because the public is not demanding them.

How important is the achievement of a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina? A majority in the FBiH say it is very important (58%), while in the RS, a majority say it is "not important at all" (55%). Support for unification among respondents in the FBiH is actually limited to the Bosniaks, of whom 75% consider unification to be "very important." But Croats are divided on this question, with 39 percent saying unification is important and 54% saying it is not important.





These attitudes on reconciliation are apparent in the several other questions on this subject. In selecting a candidate for whom to vote, the candidate's ethnicity is said to be a "very important" consideration by 74 percent in the RS, and by 58 percent of Croats in the Federation, but a more modest 48 percent of Bosniaks in the Federation say this is an important consideration (the sum of those who said it is "very important" and "fairly important").

When respondents were asked to assess the likelihood of members of their own ethnic group supporting a candidate from a different ethnic group, even a plurality of Bosniaks (46%) say Bosniaks are unlikely to support a candidate of another ethnic group. Among Serbs and Croats, huge majorities say persons of their ethnicity are unlikely to support a candidate from a different ethnic group.

Very similar responses were obtained when respondents were asked whether they personally would support a candidate from an ethnic group different from their own. Roughly a third of Bosniaks say they are likely to vote for a candidate of a different ethnicity, while huge majorities of Serbs and Croats report this to be unlikely.

In other questions concerning ethnic harmony, 61% in the RS oppose the return of refugees to the respondent's town, while 76% of Croats in the Federation and 96% of Bosniaks favor resettlement. Serbs are also skeptical of the possibility of achieving harmony with a multi-ethnic town. A large majority (72%) in the RS say that it is necessary for a town to consist of one ethnic group in order to maintain harmony. Half (54%) of Federation Croats agree. But a majority (82%) of Federation Bosniaks say harmony can prevail in a town consisting of more than one ethnic group.

Perhaps most significant from a political point of view is how few voters report that a party's program of ethnic relations will influence their vote. A plurality (38%) say they are most likely to be influenced in their vote by a party's economic platform. This is followed by concern for a party's "commitment to your national interests." Ethnic issues ranked as low priorities — meaning that parties which make ethnic relations a major part of their political program run the risk of being dismissed as irrelevant by large portions of the electorate.

One factor which may account for some of the attitudinal differences on questions concerning ethnic relations between members of the various ethnic groups is that only 58 percent in the RS lived in 1991 where they live now. But the Federation population is apparently much more stable, with 89 percent living now where they lived in 1991. It should be noted that voters who live outside of Bosnia were not included in the interviews.

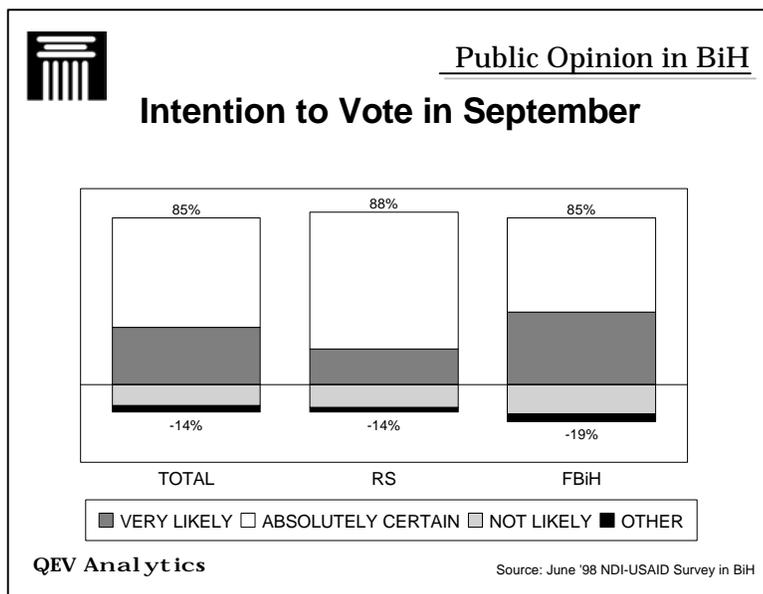
Consistent with other indicators of optimism about the future (see below) is that — even though 67 percent in the RS and 54 percent in the Federation describe ethnic relations as currently "bad" — a plurality in the RS (41%) and a majority in the Federation (66%) expect ethnic relations to improve.



Encouraging Opinions Expressed on Politics

Large majorities in both entities and among all three ethnic groups report they are “certain” or “very likely” to vote in the September elections.

While majorities in both the RS and the Federation report they discuss politics “often” or “occasionally,” the self-described level of interest in politics is noticeably lower in the Federation, where a minority of 35 percent say they have a “great deal” or “fair amount” of interest in politics. But in the RS, a majority (58%) have this level of interest in politics.

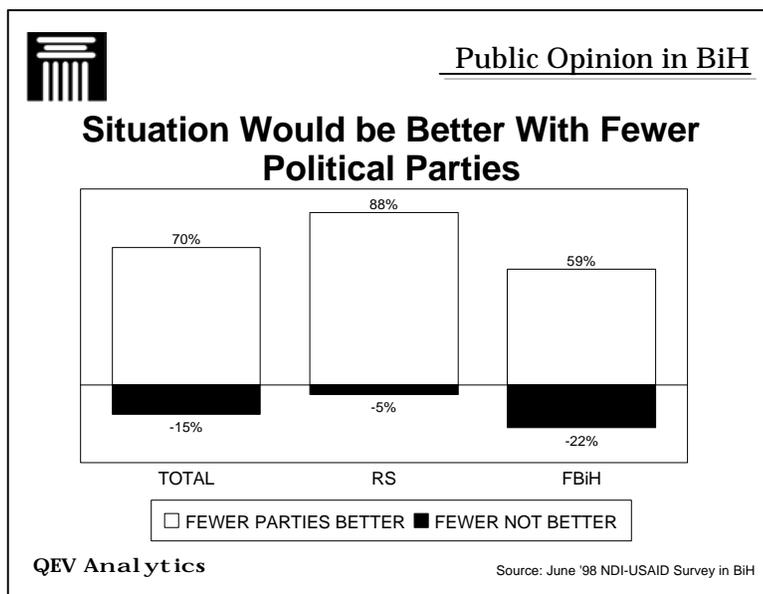


Respondents Offer Important Advice to Political Parties

Several key findings in this survey have important implications for the success of the political parties in appealing to the voters — in addition to the priority assigned to economic issues, discussed above. First, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina tell us they choose which party to support on the basis of policies, rather than because of the party leader, or because of animus toward other parties.

Currently, a majority (69% nationally) report they think the political parties have clear policy identities, which is important, but doubtless an overstatement, since only minorities say they know a “great deal” or “fair amount” about the various parties, and so few of the parties have any significant degree of public following.

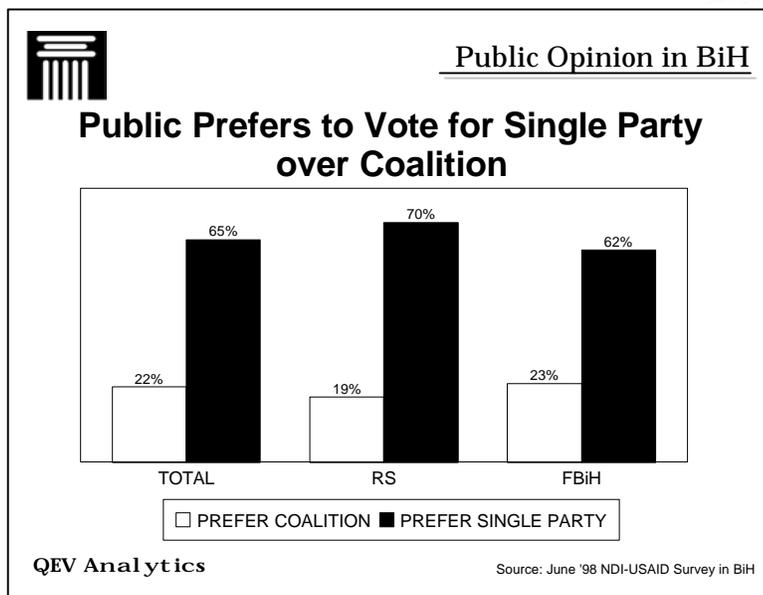
Given the plethora of parties available to the voters in both entities — most of which have scant public support — it is not surprising that the voters think the country would be better off with fewer political parties. This is the opinion of a majorities in both entities. Also, respondents report they prefer to vote for a single party rather than for a coalition. It should be noted the survey was conducted before parties had the





option of forming alliances, where they will appear on the ballot alone, but cooperate with other parties.

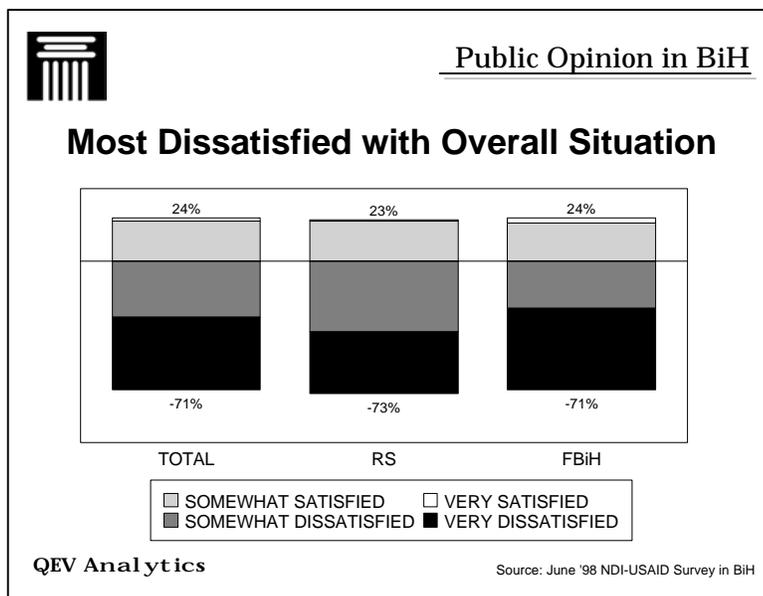
Taken together, the message of these results is that citizens want to be able to make a rational choice concerning which party they will support. This desire requires, in turn, that the parties have clear public identities as to how they would address the nation’s problems. The parties would be well advised to pursue the crafting of their national images so as to provide such clarity on the issues and to establish contrast with competing parties — remembering that achieving economic growth is the public’s number one priority.



Views of the Overall Situation in the BiH Negative — But Optimism Prevails

A large majority report they are dissatisfied with the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both the economic situation and the political situation are described by majorities as “bad,” but the economic situation is perceived to be bad by larger majorities.

However there prevails a considerable degree of optimism about the future of BiH in both the political and economic arenas. Roughly half (49%) think the economic situation will improve in the next 12 months, while just 5% think it will deteriorate further. And about the same is said of the political situation over the next 12 months. This is a very significant political fact; since public patience with a process of evolution and change is dependent upon the perception that things are or will be getting better. When hope is lost, people tend to look for alternatives outside the prevailing political structure.



As if to emphasize this point, a solid majority (58%) consider the current pace of change in the BiH to be “too slow.” This opinion is particularly acute in the Federation. In the RS, while a plurality agrees that change is proceeding too slowly, a significant minority (31%) say that



things are changing too fast. So, political advocates would do well — especially in the Federation — to call for an acceleration in the pace of reform.

