

## Women's Political Participation and Representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina: General Elections 2014 and 2018

### Bosna Hersek'te Kadınların Siyasal Hayata Katılımı ve Temsil Edilmesi: 2014 ve 2018 Genel Seçimleri

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#### Abstract

This paper aims to introduce readers to the changes and transformations of gender political equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their impact on the legal and institutional framework. A brief survey of major changes and transformation will demonstrate to what extent the position of women's political participation and representation has improved in the past two decades? That is why the goal of this paper is to examine and analyze the participation and election of women to the executive and legislative bodies at the state, entity and cantonal level in the last two parliamentary and presidential elections held in 2014 and 2018 respectively. Then, the comparative analysis of the elections will clearly show statistical gaps between male and female electoral lists nominees and obtained mandates among male and female nominees and mandates across parliamentary, state and entities levels. Thus, the research will analyze gender quotas based on electoral law and obtained mandates among female candidates. Such analysis will demonstrate to what extent female candidates have moved from mere participation in the elections to the level of political representation by obtaining mandates across different governance levels. For testing the main research objectives on the degree of women's political participation and representation, the researchers used the data from the *Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina* ([www.izbori.ba](http://www.izbori.ba)). Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to present the data regarding women's political participation and representation in General Elections 2014 and 2018.

**Keywords:** Political Participation; Political Representation; Electoral Law; General Elections.

#### Öz

Bu makale, okuyucularına; Bosna Hersek'te toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin değişim ve dönüşüm süreçleri ile beraber bu süreçlerin yasal ve kurumsal çerçeve üzerindeki etkilerini tanıtmayı amaçlamaktadır. Büyük değişiklik ve dönüşümlere bağlı olarak yapılan bu araştırma, kadınların siyasi katılımının ve temsil edilmesinin son yirmi yıllık süreçte ne şekilde geliştiğini örneklerle kanıtlamaya çalışacaktır. Çalışma, ilk olarak 2014 ve 2018 yıllarında yapılan son iki parlamento ve cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinde kadınların devlet, tüzel kişilik ve kanton düzeyinde ki yürütme ve yasama organlarına katılımını ve seçimlerini inceleyecektir. Daha sonra ise istatistiksel verilerdeki farklılıkları, seçimlerin karşılaştırmalı

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analizini yaparak ve seçim listelerindeki erkek ve kadın adaylar ile bu adaylar tarafından, parlamento, eyalet ve tüzel seviyeler düzeyinde elde edilen görevleri karşılaştırılarak gösterecektir. Buna bağlı olarak, araştırma federal seçim yasası temelinde cinsiyet kotalarını ve kadınlara verilen mazbataları inceleyerek, kadın adayların mazbatadan ziyade ne ölçüde siyasi temsil seviyesine geçtiğini de analiz edecektir. Bu bağlamda, araştırmada kadınların siyasi katılım ve temsil derecelerini test etmek adına Bosna Hersek Merkez Seçim Komisyonu'ndan ([www.izbori.ba](http://www.izbori.ba)) elde edilen verileri kullanılmıştır. 2014 ve 2018 Genel Seçimlerinde kadınların siyasi katılımı ve temsiline ilişkin verileri sunmak için hem nitel hem de nicel yöntemler kullanılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyasal Katılma, Siyasi Temsil, Seçim Yasası, Genel Seçimler

## 1. Introduction

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, early beginnings of women's activism were aimed at the humanitarian work, peacebuilding and reconciliation process (Mulalić, 2011, p. 44). However, after the war, women's participation began to be much more visible, whereby women activists resisted marginalization in political and public life. This was the consequent result of the signing the *Dayton Peace Agreement* (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3de495c34.html>) and adoption of the *Beijing Declaration* (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3dde04324.html>). This period was very important because of setting up cultural awareness against women's discrimination and the creation of the legal and institutional framework against women's discrimination. That is why this paper shall clearly analyze the development of legal framework and the adoption of the principal documents that ensured gender equality and gender political participation. The phase of women's political activism could be traced back to the adoption of *Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina* ([https://arsbih.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GEL\\_32\\_10\\_E.pdf](https://arsbih.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GEL_32_10_E.pdf)) and establishment of agencies of gender equality at the entity and state levels. However, since 2010 women's political and public life moved beyond legal and institutional settings to the level of strategic implementation of adopted national gender action plans.

A large number of factors have determined the political participation and representation of women. Some of these factors include the educational, professional and social status of women, the democratic state-institutional framework, public support for women's political participation and women's organizations support for female candidates during the elections. Since the 1990s, women's political participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has partially improved. Thus, the feminist groups, international organizations, and intellectuals began to question why women were not equally represented in the elections, political parties, state institutions and the government. A patriarchal society, socio-economic situation, education and prejudice against women greatly determined the place and role of women in one society and in this regard, Bosnia-Herzegovina is not an exception (Miftari, 2015, pp. 16-17). These determinants do not only affect mere placing of women's names on the electoral lists but women's active socio-economic participation in the family, society, local community, village, municipality, school and at the workplace. Therefore, women's active social participation is interrelated and interconnected with women's political participation in the elections, political parties, state institutions and the government (Berry, 2018, pp.171-6; Manjima, et. al., 2013, pp. 277-293).

Some political analysts even question women's active political participation, who under strong male party influence does not voice women's concerns. On the contrary, they often represent narrow party interests and male-dominated political agenda (Osmanović, 2015, pp.25-6; Aladžuz, 2015, pp. 3-5). There are instances when women who belong to different political parties are bitter opponents, which inhibit wider women's cooperation and fostering greater women's rights by using a common political platform. Although the educational, professional and social status of women affects women's active political participation, the democratic system of governance and the support for women during the election campaign are also of crucial significance in countering traditional and conservative understanding of women in the politics. Therefore, the political parties could play a role to increase women's political publicity, the appearance of the electoral lists as candidates and assigning of key positions in different branches of government, assemblies, and parliaments (Mirović, et. al., 2015, pp.16-20; Veličković, 2014, p. 13).

Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina are subject to political manipulation, which inhibit the proper promotion of positive and successful examples of women's socio-economic and political dynamism. There are rare examples when positive and successful examples of women's success have been properly articulated and promoted. However, even the media portrays the marginalized place of women in politics. The media often presents women actively involved in politics through traditional and stereotyped roles. There are prevailing discussions in the media, whereby women are presented as mothers and less as scientists, experts, and professionals. In this regard, women's social role is articulated and not a proactive and contributive socio-political and economic role in society. On the contrary, the media as a shaper of the public sphere should portray women's active share and role in politics, by articulating her leadership qualities. In particular, the media demonstrates the lack of interest to promote female candidates during the political campaigns, giving very poor information about female candidates and their political programs in comparison to a man (Simić, 2015, pp. 87-107; Bečić & Aladžuz, 2014; Miftari, 2014, p. 22). In this regard, *Gender Action Plan of B&H* in particular addressed the role of the media in fostering gender equality. The *Gender Action Plan of B&H* stated

“Stereotypes and prejudices are the basic cause of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination; all activities should be aimed at changing the awareness of gender equality in the wider and professional public. Since media has a great influence on social change, the media's promotion of gender equality as a human rights principle may speed up the structural changes towards gender equality.”

Women's political participation in decision-making processes is mostly subject to so-called male political power. Prevailing traditional and conservative views in society foster an idea that politics is a “male job” and that leadership requires power, which has been traditionally aligned to man. According to Berry's (2018) work *War, Women, and Power*

“Ordinary Bosnians perceived formal politics during and after the war as chauvinist, corrupt, nationalistic, and – perhaps most critically – male. “Politics is a whore” (politika je kurva) became a widespread refrain. Politics also often “happened” over rakija at bars, an exclusively male space (p.152).”

In most of the cases, decisions are made outside of the democratic institutional setting and women’s hands are only used for mere endorsement of already made decisions within smaller male party-political circles. Their active roles and outspoken voice are simply stereotyped and discredited as a form of feminism, which is unfortunately presented as something negative. Therefore, politically active, highly educated and competent women in political parties do not properly foster women’s political agenda. In fact, the few women who managed to position themselves within the political party do not get proper support from the public, media and wider society. That is why women who play active political roles should work hand-in-hand in fostering women’s political agenda regardless of their party identification. This approach could foster effective lobbying for the creation of public policies that are in favor of women. Their political activism, political initiatives, and political participation are overshadowed by their traditional family roles, physical appearance and subordinate role to dominant male political leaders in the party. Thus, women’s family background, ethnicity, religiosity and dress code are more articulated than their political activism and achieved results in predominantly male-dominated society. In interviews and broadcasted debates, female political activists are asked questions like “how do you align your professional and political obligations with family?” “Are you married?” Similar questions are rarely addressed to male political activists, which placed women already in a disadvantaged position in comparison to a man. Thus, this and similar social norms and widespread stereotypes hamper the equal participation of women in public and political life.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there has been declarative advocacy for gender equality. For instance, according to the *Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina* Article 20 Paragraph (1)

“State bodies at all levels of organizations of authorities, and local self – government bodies, including legislative, executive and judicial authorities, political parties, legal persons with public authorities, legal persons that are in the state’s property or under the state’s control, entities, cantons, cities or municipalities whose work is under control of a public body, shall ensure and promote equal gender representation in process of managing, decision making and representation. This obligation shall exist for all authorized proponents during elections of representatives and delegations to international organisations and bodies. (2) Equal representation of women and men shall exist in the case when one of the sexes is represented with at least 40% in bodies from paragraph 1 of this Article...”

However, mere adoption of various declarations, resolutions, codes of law and electoral laws could not bring about greater women’s political participation and representation. Mere advocacy could not change the representation of women in the executive branches of the government.

Women are not equally represented in the public and private sectors. The political participation of women limited to voting rights only is a serious liberal and democratic shortcoming in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then, in theory, the political parties meet the legal frameworks on the candidate lists, but not in practice concerning female assigned mandates. This trend has been in practice of every local and general election in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Therefore, legal obligations that at least 40 percent of women must participate in political life do not guarantee equal political representation in terms of the post-election selection of the candidates for certain governmental positions. Thus, the mere existence of a legal framework and institutionalized mechanisms do not ensure the progress in gender equality. For more effective fostering of the legal framework of gender equality, the political will and socio-cultural context must change respectively. Consequently, adopted legislature and gender national action plans shall bring about greater women political participation.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout history, various stereotypes against women inhibit her proactive political participation. The lack of political participation significantly affected women's employability, socio-economic position, violence against women and increased discrimination in the public sphere. In order to change negative perceptions of women's position in the society, women who already hold positions in the state-institution, political parties and corporate sector should become proactive in promoting and highlighting that women are educated, able, communicative, skillful, competitive, determined and decisive. In particular, it is important to promote women's emotional and social intelligence and overall greater sensibility towards public action.

## 2. A Survey of General Elections 2006-2010

The constitution stresses that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a democratic state, which operates under the rule of law and with free and democratic elections. Since the end of the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, a total of eight parliamentary and seven presidential elections were held. In 1996, in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina, the first parliamentary election was organized under the United Nations and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) supervision and monitoring. The election campaigns were predominantly focusing on the nationalist topics, security, humanitarian and existential problems, whereby there was no space for gender-related issues in the election and post-election campaigns.

**Table. 1** Women's Political Representation (General Elections 1996-2010)

	1996 Post-War Election	1998 General Election	2000 General Election	2002 General Election	2006 General Election	2010 General Election
House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly B&H	2.38%	26%	4.76%	14.3%	11.9%	21.4%

<b>National Assembly of Entity RS</b>	1.89%	22.8%	14.86%	16.9%	23%	21.68%
<b>House of Representative of the Parliament Entity FB&amp;H</b>	5%	15%	17.4%	21.4%	25.5%	17.35%

**Source:** Author's compilation based on the data from the *Central Election Commission of B&H*

According to Table 1 after the 1996 post-war elections, women remained powerless and under-represented. Concerning the 42-seat House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly B&H, only 2.38 percent of women candidates were elected, whereby only one woman was elected. Then, in the House of Representatives of the Parliament FB&H only 5 percent of women were elected, whereby out of 140 allocated seats only seven women were elected. The situation was even worse in the National Assembly of RS where only 2.38 percent of women candidates were elected, whereby out of 106 allocated seats only two women were elected (Miftari, 2014, pp. 17-18; Osmanović, 2015, p. 22).

In 1998, as Table 1 clearly demonstrated, there was a partial improvement of women's representation. These improvements were due to the involvement of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and changes in the *Electoral Law* that required at least 30 percent of women on the electoral lists as potential candidates for the governmental positions. In addition, due to these changes and legal amendments the closed electoral system was introduced. Thus, due to coordinated efforts of women's activists and international organizations

“...in 1998 the Provisional Election Commission adopted Article 7.50, the gender rule instituting a 30 percent quota of women on every party list. This meant that, for the first time, there had to be three women among the first ten candidates on any electoral list submitted by political parties to contest the election. This represented a turning point for Bosnian women in politics. The quota system, combined with closed electoral lists, also employed in the 1998 general election, dramatically increased women's representation at all legislative levels” (Borić, 2005, p. 3).

For example, in 1998 General Elections an introduction of the closed-list proportional representation electoral system contributed to the highest number of women elected in the legislative branches of government. However, in 2000 General Elections that was conducted entirely under the domestic jurisdiction, the open-list proportional representation electoral system was again introduced and it significantly affected a decrease in the number of elected women in the House of Representatives BiH, the National Assembly of RS and the House of Representatives FBiH (Miftari, 2014, p. 18). There are prevailing views that the open-list proportional representation electoral system is “disadvantageous to women in that voters may be able to ‘demote’ the women on the party lists if they so choose. Open lists also work to the advantage of more popular and well-known candidates, who are usually men” (Borić, 2005, p. 3).

Consequent changes and amendments of the *Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina* in 2013, political parties in the General Elections in 2014 were obliged to include at least 40 percent of women on electoral lists. By the introduction of so-called quotas gender proportional share was made mandatory, which increased the percentage of women on electoral lists. According to Ismeta Dervoz, former Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Gender Equality,

“the changes to the Electoral Law and its harmonization with the Gender Equality Law were adopted. A policy I cared deeply about on the issue of gender-sensitive language was also adopted and it is finally now being used in the PSBiH after all these years. The Istanbul Convention, for which I lobbied, and which I promoted regionally was ratified, and we were one of the first countries to do that” (Aganović, et. al., 2015, p. 64).

As a result, in 2014 General Elections 98 political parties included 7,748 candidates out of which 3,276 were women or 42 percent of the total number, which was significant increment because in previous elections 36,82 percent of women were placed on the electoral lists. According to the data, women representation is higher in the legislative branches of the government than in the executive branches of government (*Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014-2017*, pp. 15-21). Thus, participation in political life has been granted according to the adopted legal framework and changes in the electoral law. However, mere enlisting of the female candidates on the electoral lists did not secure female mandates after the elections. For the sake of illustration, in 2014 General Elections more than 300 female candidates were on the list for the House of Representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H, while only 10 obtained the mandates at the end (Miftari, 2014, pp. 47-55). Therefore, the changes of the *Electoral Law* have only provided the legal framework for gender participation in the elections, but these changes couldn't ensure gender higher representation in the legislative and executive branches of government.

### **3. Legal and Institutional Framework for Women's Political Participation**

Since in the number of countries, the electoral system couldn't ensure greater participation and representation of women so-called affirmative quotas were introduced. These quotas determined the minimum number of women in political electoral participation (Burnet, 2012, pp. 190-207). The gender electoral quota system has been implemented in 81 countries, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women's electoral quotas were first introduced in 1997 due to the intervention of OSCE, which required each political party to put at least three women among ten candidates on their electoral lists. It is important to mention that OSCE was in charge of organizing and monitoring the elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina until 2002. This initiative was partially motivated by the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* that set new objectives to achieve at least 30 percent of women in power. This intervention, as in the Table 1, significantly increased women's participation and representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The existing legal provisions and the *Electoral Law* set gender quota of the 40 percent on the electoral lists (Veličković, 2014, p. 3). Then, the Bosnian *Electoral Law* applies the model of plurality majority for the election of the three-member Presidency and the president and vice-presidents of the entity RS. On the other hand, the proportional representation election system with the preferential vote model is used for the election of legislative members at all governance levels. This implies that the number of seats allocated to the list (political party or coalition of political parties) is proportional to the number of votes that list obtained in the elections. According to the Bosnian *Electoral Law*, mandates won by a list are distributed first among candidates on the list who individually received at least twenty percent of the total number of valid votes. These mandates are awarded in the order of the highest number of votes to the lowest number of votes. If there are still mandates to be distributed to a list and the candidates remaining are those who received less than twenty percent of the total valid votes received by that list, then the distribution of the mandates among the remaining candidates from the list is done according to their order on the list. It is very important to mention that this threshold of twenty percent has been used for the first time in the General Elections 2018 (*Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, “Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” No. 23/1, Article 9.8 (2) and “Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” No. 31/16, Article 29). Although the threshold for the candidates on the list is five percent, the allocation of mandates after the elections has been extremely subjective towards women because lower number of women enlisted on the electoral lists gets a mandate after the elections

In the past two decades, significant steps were made to foster gender equality. Bosnia and Herzegovina have ratified a number of international documents related to gender equality and the strengthening of the position of women. Some of them include *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (CCPR), *Beijing Declaration with the Platform for Action* and *UNSCR Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security* (Mulalić, 2011, p. 45). The Resolution 1325 is very important for Bosnia and Herzegovina because it

requires an increase in the number of women in decision-making processes, conflict-prevention and post-conflict processes, peace negotiations, and peace operations. It recognizes the specific needs of girls and women in conflict situations and demands the punishment of sexual and other kinds of violence against women... (Aganović, et. al., 2015: 61)

Then, the most important legal sources that ensure compliance with the *European Convention on Human Rights* include *Law of Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, passed in 2003, and *Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination of Women in BiH*. These laws regulate, promote and protect gender equality in the public and private sectors of life. These laws are obligatory at all levels of the system of governance including legislative, executive and judicial power, political parties, entities, cantons and municipalities. They must ensure equal gender representation



in governance and decision-making process, with at least 40% in all bodies. These laws also regulate employment, work and access to all forms of resources. Then, in the period from 2006 to 2018 the number of action plans has been adopted for the implementation of the *UNSCR 1325* (Irvine, 2013: 20-38). These action plans include *Gender Action Plan for BiH* (2006-2011), *the First National Action Plan* (2010-2013), *Gender Action Plan* (2013-2017), *the Second National Action Plan* (2014-2017), and *Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018-2022*.

Gradual establishment of institutional mechanisms at different levels also significantly contributed to gender political participation. *The Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina* was established in 2004. This agency functions under the direct authority of the *Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees BiH*. Then, *The Gender Centre of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, established in 2000, and *The Gender Centre of the Republika Srpska*, established in 2001, ensures application of gender institutional mechanisms in at entity levels regarding gender equality and gender action plans (Mulalić, 2011: 45-46). In addition, women's NGOs have been involved in shaping legal, economic and socio-political aspects of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women's NGOs have contributed towards the adoption of laws and establishment of ministries and institutions that furthermore contributed to women's political participation and representation. These developments were harmonized with different reforms and Bosnian accession process to the EU.

#### 4. General Elections 2014 and 2018: A Comparative Analysis

The seventh parliamentary and sixth presidential elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014. The total of 98 political subjects was registered for the three-member Presidency at the state level, the President and Vice Presidents of the entity Republika Srpska (RS) and the legislative authorities at the state, entity and cantonal levels: 50 political parties, 24 coalitions and 24 independent candidates. The number of political subjects increased in the elections held in 2018. Thus, the 128 political subjects were registered for the eighth parliamentary and seventh presidential elections: 58 political parties, 36 coalitions, and 34 independent candidates. Therefore, for the sake of comparison 7.730 and 7.497 candidates were registered in the elections held in 2014 and 2018 respectively.

According to the *Electoral Law* of Bosnia and Herzegovina, direct presidential elections are held at the level of two entities. For the elections in 2014, 17 candidates contested the position of the Presidency with only one female candidate, Željka Cvijanović from the entity Republic of Srpska. She was nominated by the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), the strongest political party in the entity Republic of Srpska and was the only woman who received a substantial number of votes. However, she lost the election to Mladen Ivanic, a candidate of the opposition coalition party Party of Democratic Progress (PDP). Nineteen candidates contested the position of the President and two Vice Presidents of the entity Republic of Srpska with only

two female candidates who scored very poorly in the elections. Therefore, no female candidate was elected to either of these positions.

The General Elections 2018 brought somehow different results compared to the General Elections 2014. Namely, fifteen candidates contested the election for the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with one Croat woman from the entity Federation of B&H (FBiH) and one Serb woman from the entity Republic of Srpska being candidates to the state highest executive institution. Neither of them scored the results that would secure them the place in the Presidency. Croat female candidate obtained 25.890 or 6.04 percent of the valid votes from the entity Federation of B&H while the Serb female candidate secured only 12.731 or 1.86 percent of the valid votes in the entity Republic of Srpska. Thirty-seven candidates took part in the election for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the entity Republic of Srpska in General Elections 2018. Željka Cvijanović from the SNSD won the election and became only the second woman who holds this position since the end of the war. Prior to this, she was the Prime Minister of the entity Republic of Srpska for the period between 2014 and 2018.

In the General Elections 2014, 7.694 candidates participated to the legislative bodies at the state, entity and cantonal levels, 4.428 or 57.6 percent were male candidates while the remaining 3.266 or 42.4 percent were female candidates. According to the official data of the *Electoral Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, there was a slight decrease in the total number of registered candidates for the General Elections in 2018 and the number of women contesting the elections. Namely, 7.443 candidates were registered for the General Elections in 2018; 4.344 or 58.4 percent candidates were men and 3.099 or 41.6 percent were women. In both elections, the number of registered women was in the line with the *Electoral Law* of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which requires a minimum 40 percent gender quota on the list of each political party that contest legislative elections in B&H at the state, entity or cantonal levels. Analysis has shown that almost all political parties with the exception of a few and minor political parties complied with this legal requirement.

Having in mind preferential type of voting, these candidates received 7.070.677 votes in total. Female candidates received 2.212.992 or 31 percent of the total votes while on the other hand, male candidates who participated in the 2014 legislative elections obtained 4.857.685 or 69 percent of all votes. This is the first indicator that there is a significant difference between the male and female candidates popular support in the elections. The number of votes obtained by the male candidates overwhelmingly exceeds the number of votes obtained by the female candidates in both elections. The difference between the male and female candidates on the electoral lists was slightly more than 15 percent however, that difference reached almost 38 percent in favor of male candidates in terms of votes obtained in the elections. During the 2018 legislative elections, all candidates obtained 7.914.451 valid preferential votes. Male candidates garnered 5.525.212 or 70% of votes and female candidates received 2.389.239 or 30 percent of votes. Election results for 2018 show a further increase of votes for male candidates by 1 percent.

**Table 2.** Man and women preferential votes (General Elections 2014-18)

Election Year	Total votes	Male	Female
2014	7.070.677	4.857.685 (69%)	2.212.992 (31%)
2018	7.914.451	5.525.212 (70%)	2.389.239 (30%)

Source: Author's compilation based on the data from the *Central Election Commission of B&H*

According to the official results, 512 candidates were directly elected to the various state, entity and cantonal legislature in both elections. 42 representatives to the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 98 representatives to the House of Representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 83 representatives to the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska and 289 representatives to the ten cantonal assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results show that 413 or 81 percent of seats were won by male candidates and 99 or 19 percent of seats were secured by the female candidates in the 2014 legislative elections at all levels. In spite of the fact that comparing to the 2104 legislative elections, the female candidates garnered less preferential votes during the 2018 legislative election, however, female candidates achieved much better results by winning 141 or almost 28 percent of all legislative seats available for the elections and male candidates secured the remaining 371 or around 72 percent of seats. This makes an increase of 42 percent for the seats won by the female candidates comparing to the previous elections held four years ago and more than 10 percent decrease for the seats won by the male candidates.

**Table 3.** Seats won by female and male candidates (General Elections 2014-18)

Election year	Total seats	Seats won by male candidates	Seats won by female candidates
2014	512	413 (81%)	99 (19%)
2018	512	371 (72%)	141 (28%)

Source: Author's compilation based on the data from the *Central Election Commission of B&H*

According to the *Electoral Law* of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 512 seats are allocated from 39 electoral districts at various levels. Table 3 clearly demonstrated that in the elections 2014, female candidates garnered the highest number of votes in only three electoral units, one electoral unit at the cantonal level and two electoral units at the state level. These three female candidates came from Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Croat Democratic Party (HDZ) and Serb Democratic Party (SDS). General Elections 2018 did not bring any substantial change to this phenomenon. Again, only three female candidates obtained the highest number of votes in three electoral units, one electoral unit at the cantonal level and two electoral units at the level of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The only difference is that all three female candidates were elected from the Party of Democratic Action (SDA).

At the state level, 42 representatives were elected in each electoral cycle, two-thirds from the entity Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and one-third from the entity Republic of Srpska.

According to the official data, male candidates obtained 68 percent of valid votes in the 2014 elections. With this number of votes, male candidates secured 32 seats or 76 percent of all seats in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, female candidates got 32 percent of the preferential votes which secured only 10 seats or 24 percent of all seats available. Therefore, data indicated that female representation in the state highest legislative body has further deteriorated in the 2018 legislative election. First, the number of preferential votes for female candidates decreased by additional 6 percent, leading to the fact that only seven female candidates, what makes only 17 percent of all available seats in this legislative body, secured the parliamentary seats.

**Table 4.** Preferential votes and seats secured by male and female candidates (General Elections 2014-18)

Election year	Male votes	Female votes	Total	Seats won by male candidates	Seats won by female candidates	Total seats
2014	1.215.452 (68%)	578.085 (32%)	1.793.537	32 (76%)	10 (24%)	42
2018	1.606.522 (74%)	569.123 (26%)	2.175.645	35 (83%)	7 (17%)	42

**Source:** Author's compilation based on the data from the *Central Election Commission of B&H*

This makes the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina the least female represented legislature of all thirteen legislative bodies directly elected by the people in the country. Second, six of seven female representatives have been elected on the basis of compensatory mandates. This shows that when electing the state-level legislators the electorates are very much in favor and prefer male to female candidates.

The National Assembly of entity Republika Srpska consists of two chambers, lower and upper. The lower chamber comprises eighty-three members directly elected for the period of four years. Comparative study of General Elections 2014 and 2018 showed that there has been no significant change in terms of the preferential votes and seats won by the women. Thus, in the 2014 elections women won 14 seats (17 percent of all seats) with 30 percent of preferential votes, six women were directly elected from the constituencies while eight women, or more than half of those elected, got elected on the basis of the compensatory mandates. General Elections 2018 showed that female candidates increased their presence in the National Assembly of entity Republika Srpska by only one seat with an almost identical percentage of preferential votes. Further analysis has shown a similarity between the preferential votes received by male and female candidates among those who secured the seats in the Assembly in the elections in 2014 and 2018 respectively. According to Table 5, female candidates who secured the seats in the Assembly received 12 percent and male candidates garnered 77 percent of preferential votes in 2014 and 2018 elections respectively.

**Table 5.** Preferential votes of all candidates and secured seats in the NARS (General Elections 2014-18)

Election year	Candidate type	Male votes	Female votes	Total	Seats won by male candidates	Seats won by female candidates	Total
2014	All Candidates	855.996 (70%)	360.027 (30%)	1.216.023	69 (83%)	14 (17%)	83
2018	All Candidates	1.066.362 (71%)	431.554 (29%)	1.497.916	68 (82%)	15 (18%)	83
2014	Obtained seats	372.823 (88%)	52.860 (12%)	425.683	69 (83%)	14 (17%)	83
2018	Obtained seats	453.011 (88%)	62.267 (12%)	515.278	68 (82%)	15 (18%)	83

Source: Author's compilation based on the data from the *Central Election Commission of B&H*

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has a bicameral Parliament, whereby the people in the elections directly elect the members of the lower house. An analysis of the legislative elections for the year 2014 has shown that the discrepancy between the preferential votes won by male and female candidates in the election was somehow similar to the state parliament election held in the same year. Male candidates obtained 67 percent of votes and secured 78 percent of seats in the House of Representatives and female candidates garnered 33 percent of votes and secured only 22 percent of the seats in the Parliament. General Elections 2018 revealed promising results regarding the female representativeness in the Federal House of Representatives. Namely, with only 1 percent increase in the preferential votes, female candidates have secured four more seats (26 seats or 27 percent) in the new term-the most women to serve in the Parliament at once since its commencement. According to Table 6, preferential votes obtained by the women who secured the seats in the House of Representatives of the Federation in the 2018 elections increased by 7 percent.

**Table 6.** Preferential votes of all candidates and those who secured seats in the FB&H House of Representatives (General Elections 2014-18)

Election Year	Candidate Type	Male votes	Female votes	Total	Seats won by male	Seats won by female	Total
2014	All Candidates	910.763 (67%)	448.697 (33%)	1.359.460	76 (78%)	22 (22%)	98
2018	All Candidates	984.195 (66%)	505.019 (34%)	1.489.214	72 (73%)	26 (27%)	98
2014	Obtained seats	375.271 (84%)	69.610 (16%)	444.881	76 (78%)	22 (22%)	98
2018	Obtained seats	385.906 (77%)	118.234 (23%)	504.140	72 (73%)	26 (27%)	98

Source: Author's compilation based on the data from the *Central Election Commission of B&H*

Bosnian entity Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) is divided into ten cantons. Each canton has got an assembly whose representatives are directly elected on a four-year term. The size of the assembly depends on the size of the population of a canton. It varies from 21 representatives in Posavina Canton to 35 representatives in Tuzla and Sarajevo Cantons. The analysis of the election results showed a promising trend with regards to the change in the female representation from 2014 to 2018 cantonal legislative elections. Out of 289 representatives elected to all ten cantonal assemblies the number of women elected in 2018, compared to the previous elections, increased by 75 percent, from 53 to 83. In all but two cantons, Posavina Canton and Western-Herzegovina Canton, the number of female representatives has increased and the number of women representatives ranges from 47 percent in Hercegovina-Neretva Canton to 20 percent in Bosnia-Podrinje Canton.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

A thorough analysis of General Elections 2014 and 2018 indicated that the female candidates secured more preferential votes and more seats in the elections held in the 2018 than in the legislative elections held in 2014. However, the number of additional seats secured by women does not match the approximate number of preferential votes obtained by women during the elections in 2018. Thus, how to explain the phenomenon that the number of seats secured by women in 2018 elections almost doubled compared to the previous legislative elections held in 2014. The total number of seats for grab in the state, entity and cantonal legislatures was 512. Detailed analysis showed that in terms of women securing more seats in the legislature, the drastic change has taken place only at the cantonal level while at the state level women won fewer seats in 2018 elections. However, at the entity level, there were no significant changes; namely, women secured one and four extra seats in the National Assembly of the RS and the House of Representatives of the Federations of Bosnia and Herzegovina respectively. On the other hand, out of 289 seats in ten cantonal assemblies, women increased their seats from 53 in 2014 elections to 91 in 2018 elections, i.e. by 71 percent.

After a thorough analysis of the programs and election manifestos of the leading political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it appeared that nothing special was offered during the campaign that might have attracted the public to female candidates. Second, all political parties have fulfilled the legal requirement of the equal representation of the gender, with a minimum of 40% of the total number of candidates on the list. The presence of male and female candidates on the party lists was almost identical comparing to the elections held in 2014 and 2018. Therefore, the presence of gender quota on the lists does not guarantee more representation of women in the country's directly elected legislative bodies. Third, the threshold for the candidates on the list in all parliamentary elections held in the post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina was five percent. Thus, certain legal amendments to this rule were made in 2016 and the threshold has been increased to twenty percent. We have conducted a simulation of the last election results for the cantonal assembly taking into consideration the current threshold of twenty percent for the candidates

on the list and the previous rule of five percent. Results have shown that the current threshold is much more in favor of female candidates. The current composition of all ten cantonal assemblies consists of 196 males and 93 females elected in the last elections. However, if the previous rule of five percent threshold was applied, the number of female elected candidates would be reduced by 35 and quite close to the number of 52 women elected in the 2014 elections. Therefore, it can be stated that the open-list electoral system with the quite high threshold within the list has been in favor of female candidates at the cantonal level in the last elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Fourth, quite strong and diversified party pluralism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the low threshold, which stands at three percent, has enabled many political parties to win the seats in the legislature. Still, the scenario of the significant increase of the women elected to the legislature has not taken place at the entity and state level legislatures. The number of representatives sent to the assembly differs due to the size of the electoral units and varies from three to six representatives at the state level, three to twelve at the entity level and twenty-one to thirty-five at the cantonal level. Therefore, the higher size of the electoral unit leads to the higher possibility for women to win the seats considering the quite high threshold within the party list prescribed by the current election law of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Comparative analysis of the last two elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that although women are becoming more active in Bosnian politics, especially after the 2018 legislative elections, however, men have continued to dominate the local political spectrum. Closer study of the preferential vote difference between the men and women in the elections clearly indicated that the electoral culture of the Bosnian people is still quite patriarchal. In order to have more women in the legislative branches of the government, it is important to increase the threshold in the party list or even introduce the closed lists in the elections. Then, women's representation could be increased by an introduction of parity in the form of quota and using the zipper system whereby men and women are given alternating places through the candidate lists. In addition, it is important to place women on the top of the lists especially in the small electoral units such as the case with the state and entity constituencies and giving more space to the women in the media. All these measures could help in breaking up with the prevailing patriarchal electoral culture and the man-dominated politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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