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Discussion paper:

Is this your first time?

How responsive are political parties to first-time voters?

Sarajevo, 23 September 2010

Introduction

On October 3, 2010 voters[1] in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) will elect their political representatives in a number of electoral contests[2].

Since the passive voters' registration system was introduced in BiH in 2006[3], there are approximately 15% more names on the voters' list[4]. This increase in new voters includes first-time voters that turned 18 years old since the last polls. The High Representative and EU Special Representative, Valentin Inzko, emphasised that "the 80,000 young people who will be eligible to vote for the first time on 3 October can revolutionize the political landscape" in BiH[5].

One of the main functions of political parties is the mobilisation of voter support[6] by "selling" their political platforms and recruiting new supporters. In the context of a change in electoral demographics, do BiH political parties take the opportunity to attract young voters' support when these young voters show interest in their platform? It is particularly interesting to study this topic in the pre-election period, when numerous political leaders have made public statements about the importance of youth-targeted voter mobilisation.

The political landscape in BiH is mainly divided along ethnic lines. Political parties, with a few exceptions, are competing mainly for the vote within their own ethnic communities and even the parties which declare themselves as multiethnic, such as the "Social Democratic Party" (SDP), are not perceived that way[7]. Since the 2006 general elections, several new political parties emerged in BiH. Amongst these are: "Our Party" (NS), established in 2008, which declared itself to be a multi-ethnic political party, and the "Alliance for a Better Future of BiH" (SBB) formed in 2009, which declared itself to be promoting the interests of Bosniaks.

To assess how responsive political parties are to new supporters, we used the profile of a first-time voter – Voter X. Voter X has recently returned to BiH (Municipality Sarajevo Centre) from abroad, and is hesitant about whom to vote for in the October 2010 general elections. Neutral and uninformed, Voter X did not have any specific sources of information except from reading the list of candidates in the newspaper. Voter X has contacted fifteen pre-selected political parties by phone, including ruling political parties as well as opposition parties from both Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of BiH (FBiH). They have been selected because of their importance in the BiH political landscape, either because they are main political forces or because they are newcomers in the political arena.

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[1] As of June 2010, there were 3 128 530 registered voters including regular voters, internally displaced persons and voters abroad. A total of 71 political subjects have been certified to stand for elections, including 47 political parties, 11 coalitions and 13 independent candidates. All data available in the OSCE/ ODIRH NEEDS assessment mission report: <http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2010/07/45519_en.pdf>.

[2] BiH voters will elect the three members of the State Presidency and the members to the State House of Representatives. Voters in Republika Srpska (RS) will elect for the President (and Vice-Presidents) of the entity, as well as the National Assembly of the RS. Finally, voters in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) will elect the House of Representatives of the FBiH, as well as their representatives in the cantonal assemblies.

[3] The March 2006 amendments to the Election Law changed from an active to a passive system of voters' registration. The Central Voters register, from which the voters' lists are compiled, is based on the civil register which is known as "Citizens Identification Protection System" (CIPS). Every citizen over 18 years of age is obliged by law to register with the CIPS and is thereby automatically included in the voters' list.

[4] Central Election Commission of BiH: <http://www.izbori.ba/>.

[5] Office of the High Representative: <http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/pressr/default.asp?content_id=45288>, 9 September 2010.

[68] More to the „Roles and Definition of Political Parties", please refer to the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network: <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/pc/pca/pca01/pca01a>.

[7] Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, „Observation of the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina", published on 22 November 2006: <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc06/EDOC11101.htm>.

The data was collected via a semi-structured telephone questionnaire, using the parties' publicly advertised telephone numbers, on Friday 26 August, Monday 29 August and Tuesday 30 August 2010[8]. The same presentation was given, and the same questions were asked to every person picking up the phone, as well as to those whom Voter X has been forwarded. Using this qualitative approach to collect information, an analysis of the data was carried out in order to evaluate their ability to engage, be informative, invite Voter X to political events and promote their activities, and ultimately, whether they worked hard enough to gain his support.

Each section of the exercise describes one aspect of the Voter X interaction with the representatives of the political parties during the phone calls[9]. We placed the parties within three groups (1-satisfactory, 2-average, 3-nonsatisfactory) which enabled us to identify and rank broad trends. The grading in each section was done for each party individually and the parties where grouped by their grade. The charts in the sections below present an average grade for each group (x-axis) as well as the number of political parties that qualified into a each group. A detailed description of the grading criteria and the structure of the questions can be found on the authors' website[10]. The parties' scores were anonymised to remove any potential of bias in representation of their responsiveness to Voter X's approach.

This exercise and the scores contained herein, neither judges parties on the content of their platforms, nor on the other mediums they use to contact young voters.

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[8] The dates carry a particular importance. The interviews were completed three to five days prior to the start of the official campaign period (September 3rd – October 1st, 2010). It was expected that the parties would have campaign teams ready for the start of the campaign, while the interviews would be completed prior to the official start.
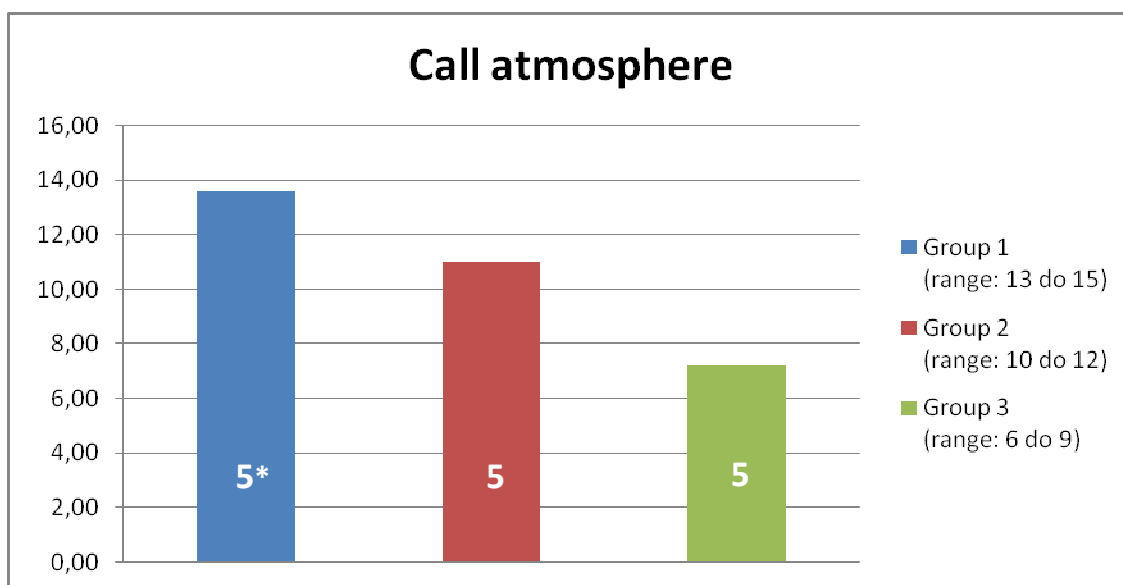
[9] While the duration of the call was not monitored as a valid characteristic for this exercise, the reader should be aware that they lasted from 2 to 10 minutes, with six calls under 3 minutes and five calls above 7 minutes.

[10] www.popoulari.org and www.fortynine.org

Good manners cost nothing

When calling a public information number, you would expect to be answered in a polite and friendly way, even more so when calling a political party in the pre-election period.

The first part of this exercise was aimed at assessing the general atmosphere of the call. It was based on the following categories: greetings, politeness and friendliness, as well as informativeness about their agenda and when a representative would be available to talk to Voter X. Finally, we assessed how much effort was required to reach the political parties on the phone.

The number represents how many parties qualified in each group.

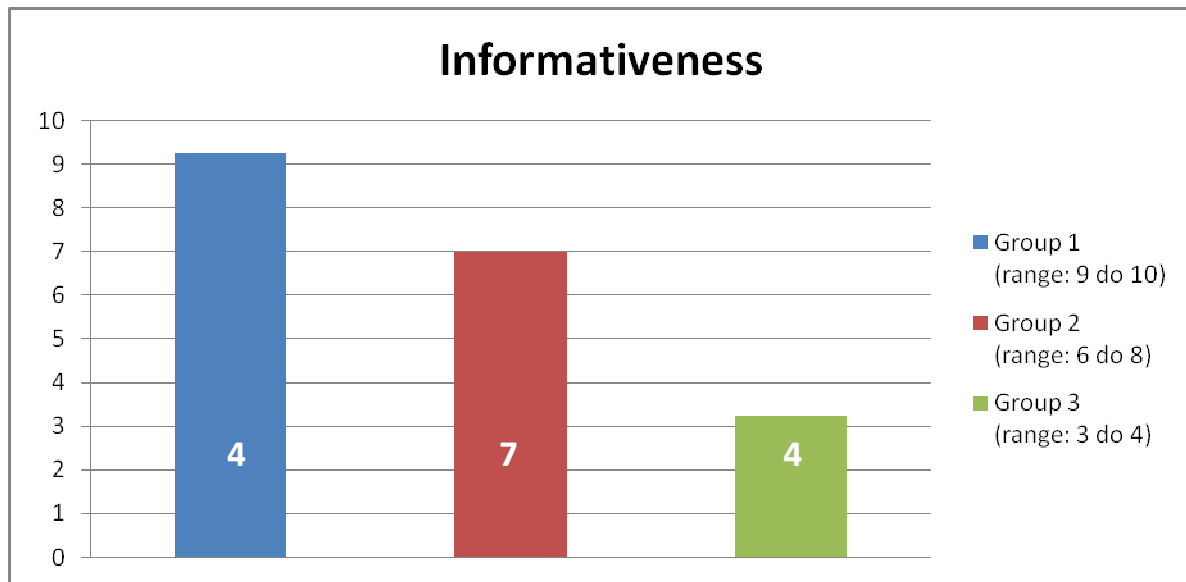| **Group 1** **SBB, PDP, NS, LDS, HDZ 90**	**Group 2** **SDP, BPS, SDS, HDZ, SDA**	**Group 3** **DNZ, NSR-B, SBH, SNSD, SRS**
In general, political parties in this group performed well in this category. Persons picking up the phone presented themselves in a polite and friendly manner, stating their name and job title, also the location of the party premises where they could be visited. They showed genuine interest in attracting Voter X`s attention: *"You are a first-time voter and you would like to know more about our programme? That's fantastic!"* Voter X had the impression he was given consideration and would definitely be comfortable with a longer chat with every person in this group. They were very accessible, and only one or two attempts were needed to reach them.	Compared to group 1, group 2 performed in a less professional manner. The presentation skills of the person picking up the phone were sometimes poor and even unclear. Nevertheless, two respondents in this group presented themselves in a very polite manner. Voter X had to put forth much more effort than with group 1 to get some basic information about their agenda and whom to contact to obtain more information. When forwarded to a more senior member of the party, the respondents were neither willing nor competent to respond as those in the first group. Voter X had difficulty to reach some of the persons in this group.	Political parties in this group have definitely under-performed in this category. It took Voter X several attempts to reach them. Persons picking up the phone were mostly rude and some even refused to speak on the phone under the pretext of lacking time. One of them seemed eager to end the call at the earliest opportunity. In general, they made no effort to try to attract Voter X's to vote for them. In response to the question of why Voter X should vote for the party, one person said: *"The reason why I joined the party is too subjective and wouldn't be of any help. There are actually a million, and I don't have time to list them now on the phone"*.

(Trying to) be an informed voter

Based on the profile of the first-time voter, we have identified the most important issues as being youth unemployment and the educational system, both of which are crucially important to young people. This section studies the capacity of each of the selected political parties to provide Voter X with accurate information in these two areas. It also aimed to assess the responsiveness of each party, whether or not they were able to reply on the spot, or if they needed to re-direct Voter X to someone else or a different party structure.

Informativeness

Group 1 (range: 9 do 10)	**Group 2** (range: 6 do 8)	**Group 3** (range: 3 do 4)

Group 1 = 4, Group 2 = 7, Group 3 = 4

Group 1
SBB, PDP, LDS, HDZ 90

Group 2
NS, SDS, BPS, HDZ, SNSD, SBH, NSR-B
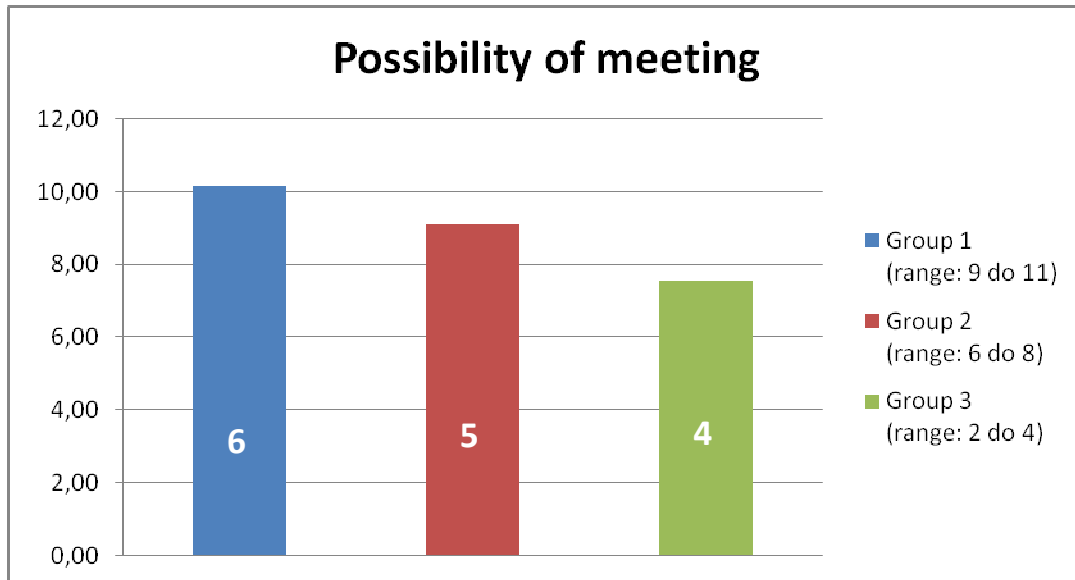
Group 3
SRS, SDA, DNZ, SDP

All political parties in group 1 were able to provide Voter X with the extensive information both on candidates running for the 2010 general elections and the programme of the party. The persons answered the question with valuable examples relevant to Voter X's concerns. For instance, Voter X was able to speak to a high-level party representative who elaborated about what their party is doing in the field of youth policy and economic planning. Most people in this group were able to answer questions on the spot, without consulting another colleague or re-directing to another structure.

In group 2, more effort was needed to collect information either on candidates or on political platforms. Some of the respondents still showed particular dedication to that task like in group 1: *„Shoot [your questions]! I don't have much time right now, but I will try to answer concisely and to the best of my knowledge"*. But the rest of them either gave little or no information on these matters. When they provided Voter X with little information, they seemed to have pre-arranged answers. They would not forward the call unless Voter X insisted. Only one person in this group who promised to call back actually did.

The persons picking up the phone in this group either refused to give information, or admitted their lack of knowledge about the political platform or the candidates. They justified this lack of knowledge upon their title: *„I'm only a Secretary/ technician"* and asked Voter X to call back or to leave his mobile phone number. All the persons in this group promised to call back, but never did. Furthermore, people in this group refused to forward Voter X's call. One person explained that *„the headquarters are completely empty. We are launching our campaign soon, and everybody is out of the office"*.

If it's easy to talk to you, it's easy to meet with you

This part of the exercise was based on several indicators. First of all, whether or not the political party seemed to be available to meet Voter X and whether they showed enthusiasm. Secondly, what was the party representative's, Voter X was supposed to meet, position in the party apparatus. And finally, what was the timeframe they suggested between the phone call and the possible meeting?

Group 1
PDP, NS, LDS, SNSD, SBB, HDZ 90

All political parties in this group suggested impromptu meetings with Voter X. They proposed to meet with a high-level representative of the party, such as a President of a cantonal party board, or even a candidate. When they did not mention the name of a candidate, they suggested visiting the headquarters in order to check the list of candidates and meet whoever would be available. On one occasion, Voter X was invited to meet a representative of a youth organisation (such as a Vice-president). The timeframe to meet was short (the same day or within the next 24 hours), and they tried to adapt to Voter X's agenda by sometimes suggesting alternative dates and time.

Group 2
DNZ, BPS, SDS, SDA, HDZ

As in the previous group, all political parties in group 2 accepted to meet Voter X. However, except for two political parties, they were not very enthusiastic about meeting in person. Voter X had to ask several times in order to arrange a meeting. One interlocutor in this group mentioned the possibility of meeting with a representative of a youth organisation and two with medium-level representatives such as communication or recruitment officers. The timeframe for the possible meeting was mostly short, but some political parties in group 2 suggested meeting "*in two weeks at the earliest, since we are very busy preparing the campaign*".
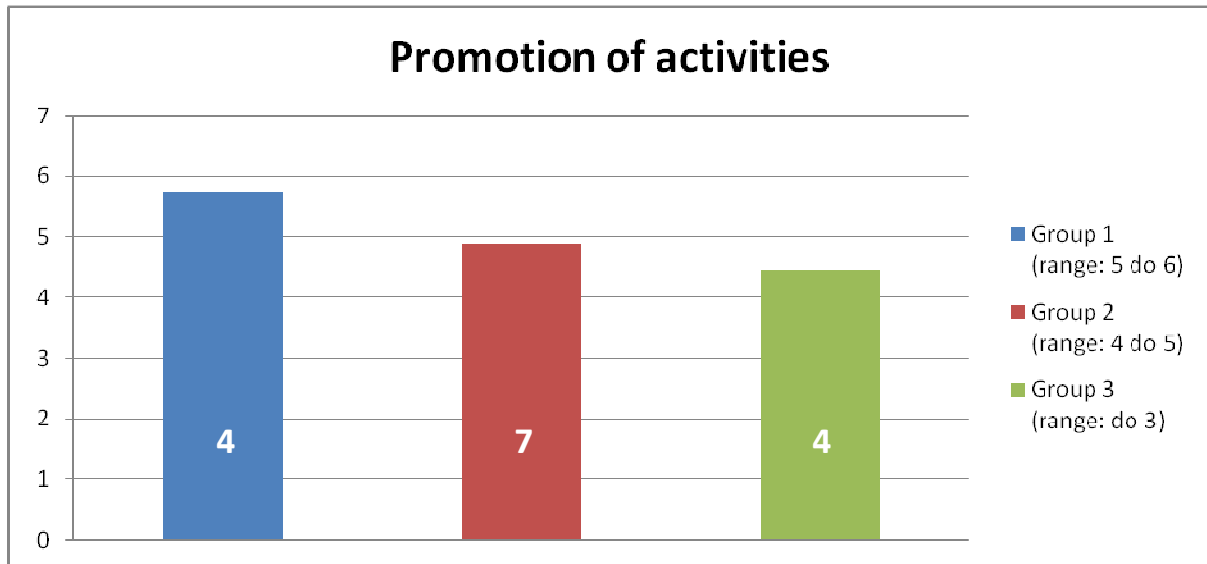
Group 3
SRS, SDP, SBH, NSR-B

Political parties in this group were not keen on meeting, and Voter X was automatically re-directed to the headquarters. No specification was made concerning with whom or when it would be possible to meet a representative of the party. One person said: "*All the necessary information is on the website, we have no protocols in place for a face-to-face meeting*". One respondent in this group mentioned the possibility of meeting, but that it was unlikely to happen. Either because the interlocutor did not specify the name of the person Voter X could meet or they mentioned the name of the person but did not call back as promised to make an appointment.

Political marketing for dummies

Numerous studies underline that political marketing has a positive effect on the voting behaviour of the electorate[11].

This part of the exercise was meant to determine whether political parties spontaneously invited Voter X to a public event such as a political rally. Voter X did not ask any questions about events, how to become a member or how to get promotional material.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
SBB, NS, BPS, SNSD	HDZ, SDA, PDP, LDS, HDZ 90, SDS, SBH	DNZ, SDP, NSR-B, SRS

Political parties in this group could not have done more to attract a first-time voter. Voter X was invited to public events (such as rallies taking place the same day or in less than a week), including twice to youth association meetings. Three offered membership of the party, but reassured Voter X that there was no pressure by using the conditional tense. On the same occasion, Voter X was more than welcome to come to the headquarters and pick up as much material as needed.

None of the political parties in group 2 invited Voter X to a public meeting. Only two proposed that he become a member of the party, but they did not qualify that they was no pressure, and that Voter X could explore this possibility when visiting the headquarters. Nevertheless, they all offered promotional material.

None of the political party in this group tried to promote their activities. They did not invite Voter X to a public event and they did not mention the possibility of becoming a member of the party. Furthermore, they did not offer any kind of promotional material.

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[10] Please refer to articles available online such as International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: < http://www.idea.int/>, National Democratic Institute: <http://www.ndi.org/>, ACE Electoral Knowledge Network: <http://aceproject.org/>.

Conclusion

The goal of this exercise was to understand how responsive political parties are to young voters who approach them. In order to test this, our Voter X, a first time voter, asked the same set of questions to fifteen political parties. The parties' responsiveness was judged on the same sets of criteria.

This exercise did not assess the content of the platforms. It demonstrated the response of political parties in a situation in which a young first-time voter had specifically approached them about information. As such, they had been provided with an opportunity to appeal to a young voter. Despite a lack of political knowledge, Voter X was still very reasonable in what he expected from the fifteen parties contacted. Unfortunately, majority of contacted parties were able to meet these expectations.

Most political parties tried to put Voter X in a "box" by asking about his age, municipality and occupation. This approach proved positive when it was used to re-direct him to the appropriate party member or office. However, some parties gave Voter X the impression that his profile was a deciding factor in whether they sought X's vote. For example, some responses included the following interrogative questions and statements: „*Can you please say your last name again?"; "Where are you calling from?"; "Please don't call us back."; "We will contact you when we have determined the person authorised to talk to you*". This made Voter X feels very uncomfortable, rendering him unlikely to engage with the party in question, or recommend it to others.

It is a political reality that some parties rely on their core vote rather than trying to engage with new supporters. Although the political parties expressed nominal recognition of the importance of first-time voters, this was not practically demonstrated. Perhaps this is because they do not understand their electoral potential. If parties squander the opportunity to engage a voter who took the time to ring them, what hope they have of gaining the support of the thousands who do not. Even the political parties that did succeed in communicating their political platform, and who actively tried to attract this new voter, still did not do enough to engage him fully. And the worst performing political parties that left poor impression and too many unanswered question, there is little chance that Voter X would be considering them on October 3, 2010.

To conclude, the selected political parties were presented with a golden opportunity to recruit a motivated young voter. However, the majority failed to engage him appropriately with some resorting to nationalist rhetoric, whilst others proved barely able to engage him at all. In this exercise, we did not consider the parties overall efforts made by the political parties to appeal to young voters, but focused only on their response to the Voter X phone calls. This, however, speaks volumes for the attitude of political parties to new young voters. Is it realistic to emphasise first time voters' potential to revolutionize the Bosnian political landscape, given that a representative cross-section of Bosnia's political parties responded so poorly during this exercise? Knowing the existing preponderance of generational apathy among youth, there lies a danger in the future - that a whole section of Bosnian society might fall off the electoral radar completely. This should serve as a wakeup call both for Bosnian political parties and new young voters. Think carefully, before ticking off the box as every vote counts.

ANNEX 1 – Scores

Rank	Political party	1. Call atmosphere					2. Informativeness				3. Possibility of meeting				4. Promotion of activities				Total (points)
		Greetings	Politeness	Informativeness	Accessibility	Sub-total	Candidates	Programme	Responsiveness	Sub-total	Seniority	Timeframe	Availability	Sub-total	Public event	Membership	Material	Sub-total	
1	SBB	4	4	3	4	15	3	3	4	10	3	2	4	9	2	2	2	6	74
2	PDP	3	4	4	3	14	2	3	4	9	5	2	4	11	1	1	2	4	72
3	NS	4	3	2	4	13	2	2	4	8	5	2	4	11	2	2	2	6	70
4	LDS	3	4	3	3	13	3	3	3	9	5	2	4	11	1	1	2	4	70
5	HDZ 90	3	3	4	3	13	3	3	3	9	4	2	3	9	1	1	2	4	66
6	BPS	3	3	2	3	11	1	2	4	7	3	1	4	8	2	2	2	6	58
7	SDS	2	2	4	3	11	2	3	3	8	2	2	4	8	1	1	2	4	58
8	HDZ	2	2	3	4	11	1	2	4	7	4	0	2	6	1	2	2	5	53
9	SNSD	1	2	1	2	6	3	2	2	7	5	2	3	10	2	1	2	5	51
10	SDA	4	4	1	1	10	1	1	1	3	2	2	4	8	1	2	2	5	47
11	DNZ	2	2	1	4	9	1	1	1	3	4	2	2	8	1	1	1	3	43
12	SDP	4	4	2	2	12	1	1	1	3	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	3	37
13	SBH	1	1	1	4	7	1	1	4	6	1	0	1	2	1	1	2	4	34
14	NSR-B	2	1	1	4	8	1	1	4	6	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	3	35
15	SRS	1	2	1	2	6	2	1	1	4	2	0	2	4	1	1	1	3	31

ANNEX 2 – Grading system

Indicator	Grading system

Section 1 is aimed at assessing the general atmosphere of the call, whether the interlocutor was polite and informative and how much efforts it required to manage to reach the interlocutor.	
Greetings: Did they tell you their name / title, the name of the political party? **Politeness:** Are they engaging in a respectful / friendly way? **Informativeness:** Do they provide you with satisfactory information about their agenda / when a representative will be available to talk to you?	**1** = Poor **2** = Average **3** = Satisfactory **4** = Excellent
Accessibility: How many attempts did you need to reach the interlocutor? Did they ask you to call back? Did they promise to call you back (after taking your number) and did or did not?	**1** = Three attempts to reach the interlocutor and asked to call back next day **2** = Two attempts to reach and asked to call back the next day **3** = Two attempts to reach and managed the same day **4** = First attempt to reach the interlocutor
Section 2 is aimed at evaluating the capacity of the interlocutor to provide you with accurate information on the candidates and programme, and whether the interlocutor can provide you with such information on the spot and needs to forward you call / postpone the answer.	
Candidates / Programme: Did they inform you about their candidates and political platform, did they stick to their areas of expertise? Did they provide you with valuable examples or are they confused? Do they seem to have pre-arranged answers or to be spontaneous?	**1** = No information **2** = Partial information **3** = All information
Responsiveness: Do they need to look up information or can they reply on the spot? Do they ask other colleagues for information? Do they re-direct you to someone else/ different structure? Who / what?	**1** = The interlocutor promised to call you back but did not **2** = Promised to call you back with more information and did **3** = The interlocutor forwarded your call to talk to someone else **4** = The interlocutor was able to answer your questions on the spot

Indicator	Grading system
Section 3 addresses the possibility of a meeting with a representative of the party, his / her seniority and availability, and whether you can meet in a reasonable timeframe.	
Seniority: What is the position of the person you are able to meet in the party apparatus? Is it a volunteer, a party member, a youth representative, a party staff member, a candidate? Did the person behave differently because of his seniority?	**1** = Interlocutor redirects you to the headquarters **2** = Suggests a meeting with high-level but unlikely to happen **3** = Redirects you to the youth organisation **4** = Redirects you to a medium-level representative **5** = Redirects you to a high-level representative or a candidate
Timeframe: What is the timeframe they suggest between the phone call and the meeting? Do they forward your call to another interlocutor? Do they postpone the answer whether it is possible to meet?	**0** = Not specified **1** = Long timeframe (more than 24 hours) **2** = Short timeframe (less than 24 hours)
Availability: Do they suggest/ agree to a meet you face-to-face? Do they show specific enthusiasm about you meeting their candidates?	**1** = Failed to organise a meeting **2** = Managed but with major efforts **3** = Managed after asking a second time **4** = Could easily organise a meeting
Section 4 is aimed at determining if any political party spontaneously invites you to a public event such as a rally and whether they promote their activities by proposing party membership and / or promotional material.	
Do they invite you to a **public event** such as a rally? Do they proposed you to **become a member** of the party? Do they suggest to offer you **promotional material** upon visiting them?	**1** = No **2** = Yes

ANNEX 3 – List of political parties acronyms (by alphabetical order)

BPS   Bosnian-Herzegovinian Patriotic Party- Sefer Halilović (Bosanskohercegovačka Patriotska Stranka- Sefer Halilović);

DNZ   Democratic People's Community (Demokratska Narodna Zajednica BiH);

HDZ   Croatian Democratic Union of BiH (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH);

HDZ 90   Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica 1990);

LDS   Liberal Democratic Party (Liberalna demokratska stranka);

NS   Our Party (Naša Stranka);

NSR-B   People's Party Work for Betterment (Narodna stranka Radom- Za boljitak);

PDP   Party of Democratic Progress (Partija demokratskog progresa RS);

SBB   Alliance for a Better Future of BiH (Savez za bolju budunost BiH);

SBH   Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stranka za BiH);

SDA   Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije);

SDP   Social Democratic Party of BiH (Socijaldemokratska partija BiH);

SDS   Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska demokratska stranka);

SNSD   Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata);

SRS   Serb Radical Party (Srpska radikalna stranka)