


Local Elections in the North and What Comes Next?

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Institutional and Political Crisis Deepens in Northern Kosovo Ahead of Local Elections

Kosovo is currently grappling with an institutional and political crisis, marked by growing uncertainty and fragility in its northern municipalities. As the region prepares for local elections, the atmosphere remains tense, with reintegration efforts hampered by persistent structural and human resource deficiencies. Legal ambiguity and administrative stagnation continue to characterize governance in the north, where public trust in institutions is steadily declining, fueled by perceptions of selective justice and uneven application of the rule of law.

Amid this fragile landscape, the Serb community in northern Kosovo appears politically exhausted and socially disengaged, widening the already significant gap between communities when it comes to expectations around reintegration. The international community, while crucial to maintaining a degree of stability, has often played an inconsistent role.

Underlying these challenges is a fundamental issue: the absence of a broader political agreement that could offer a roadmap for long-term peace and integration, compounded by a lack of political will, a possible lack of meaningful incentives, and the region's low placement on the list of global priorities. Kosovo's future remains intricately tied to the evolving and often strained relationship between Pristina, Belgrade, and the international actors that continue to shape the contours of governance and legitimacy in the region.

Political Deadlock and Divergent Party Positions Complicate Kosovo's Governance Landscape

On June 9, 2025, a roundtable was held at the Civic Energy Center in North Mitrovica to discuss the state of local governance in northern Kosovo and the broader political context ahead of the upcoming local elections, scheduled for October. The event brought together civil society actors, policy experts, and representatives of the international community. The discussion focused on the institutional and political consequences of the four-year absence of legitimate local leadership in the four Serb-majority municipalities in the north, as well as the expectations and challenges associated with the upcoming electoral process. The roundtable took place against a backdrop of national political uncertainty, adding further complexity to an already fragile governance landscape.

Kosovo is currently navigating a period of significant political uncertainty, marked by an ongoing institutional vacuum since the February parliamentary elections. Despite more than 30 attempts, the Assembly has not been constituted, leaving key institutions in limbo ahead of what appears to be an inevitable electoral cycle. While a new governing coalition remains a theoretical possibility, developments to date suggest that early general elections are becoming more probable than a negotiated coalition agreement.

The only viable coalition option that remains—between Vetëvendosje (LVV) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)—appears unlikely, given the parties' public postures and deep divergences on key issues. All other coalition configurations are no longer feasible. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), for instance, has positioned itself in a way that precludes alliances both with LVV and with other opposition parties, effectively limiting all coalition scenarios.

LVV and PDK, if they did choose to partner, could form a numerically stable government capable of electing the president, but such a coalition would face deep ideological and policy divides, especially concerning dialogue with Serbia and relations with the international community.

A key point of contention is the timing of local versus general elections. LVV strongly supports holding joint elections, viewing this as a strategic opportunity to focus its campaign efforts on the general elections—where it performs better—rather than the local elections, where its candidates have historically underperformed. In contrast, both PDK and LDK prefer to hold local elections first.

LDK is expected to launch a 15-point party platform, which it intends to present to other political actors in an attempt to revitalize its positioning ahead of any electoral contest.

Broader Political Agreement and Inclusion of Kosovo Serbs Essential for Long-Term Stability

The issue of the reintegration of Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo remains unresolved and is heavily dependent on the composition and policy direction of the future government. Equally important is the question of how the relationship between central and local levels of governance will be defined, particularly regarding the functioning of local governments and the Kosovo Police, which remains under central control. This is further complicated by the unresolved issue of the Special Units' (SOU) continued presence in the north—especially within municipal buildings—raising concerns about the long-term implications of their deployment and the need for a clear institutional solution.

The return of Kosovo Serb mayors is expected following the local elections scheduled for October, but this does not necessarily imply meaningful reintegration. Rather, it may signal a move towards institutional passivization, with mayors formally assuming office but refraining from active governance.

Reintegration will also be shaped by the availability of qualified personnel, many of whom have left the public sector or emigrated. The current local administrations have largely employed unqualified individuals, which complicates the prospects for effective governance even if reintegration proceeds.

The legal standing of several decisions taken by current local administrations in the four northern municipalities is questionable. For instance, the decision to sign agreements with regional utility providers may face challenges, but it is unlikely that incoming administrations will attempt to overturn them. Instead, institutional stagnation and passive resistance are expected.

There is also concern regarding selective rule of law enforcement, with growing public perception that central authorities only act when politically expedient. This raises the broader question of how central authorities will respond when new local governments make decisions perceived as “contrary to the interests of Kosovo”.

A significant factor in the current political deadlock is the absence of pressure from the international community, particularly Washington, DC. Many actors appear to be waiting for clearer signals from abroad before taking decisive action. This passive stance reflects the perception that Kosovan political actors are not fully empowered or willing to make bold moves without external prompting.

The international response was initially unusually strong, with punitive measures imposed in reaction to governance issues in the north, particularly at a time when active resistance and the threat of escalation were present. However, as that threat subsided, reactions to controversial local decisions have become increasingly muted and inconsistent—suggesting that, in the absence of immediate instability, such actions no longer draw significant international attention or concern.

This reflects a deeper problem: Kosovo’s future—especially in relation to the Kosovo Serb community—cannot be resolved without a broader political agreement. The persistent pattern of entering negotiations without genuine willingness to compromise remains a major barrier to progress.

There can be no sustainable solution without the meaningful inclusion of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo's institutional and political life. Their role is not only central to internal normalization but also carries significant weight for the future of Kosovo-Serbia relations and broader regional stability. In this context, Kosovo Serbs are not merely a domestic issue, but a key factor in achieving lasting normalization.

The Kosovo Serb community is politically and socially exhausted. Institutional abandonment, brain drain, and prolonged exclusion from functional governance have placed them in a survival mode. Many qualified individuals have left, and there is little capacity or will for re-engagement without strong incentives.

The community's expectations for reintegration differ significantly from those of the Albanian majority. While Kosovo Albanians often demand more than what Kosovo Serbs are willing or able to accept, Kosovo Serbs seek minimal changes or a return to the status quo. These mismatched expectations will continue to hinder meaningful reintegration unless openly addressed.

The political situation in Kosovo is defined by a triangular relationship between Pristina, Belgrade, and the international community. No actor appears willing to concede leverage, and meaningful progress seems contingent on a broader strategic vision, particularly from international actors.

There is a pressing need for a new political agreement—one that defines long-term expectations and frameworks for coexistence and governance. Without this, recurrent institutional paralysis, fragmentation, and mutual distrust will continue to define Kosovo's trajectory.

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