

2022 : ELECTIONS

UP - CLOSE

The deceptive pluralism of the election campaign



CRTA:

**Preliminary media
monitoring report**

February 15th – March 4th

PRELIMINARY MEDIA MONITORING REPORT COVERING 15TH FEBRUARY – 4TH MARCH

After several months in which political pluralism was almost non-existent due to the dominance of government representatives on television stations with national coverage¹, CRTA's data show that during the first three weeks of the campaign there was a change in the coverage and reporting of opposition election actors.² This change is marked by growing media representation of the opposition, which is a consequence of the introduction of blocks of election programming³ on television stations with national coverage. Nevertheless, further analysis of the data shows bias in the reporting on both government candidates and some opposition candidates.

The coverage of government representatives compared to opposition representatives in the first three weeks of the campaign was more balanced compared to the period before the campaign. When political actors appeared on television, representatives of the government appeared 72% of the time (85% in the period before the campaign), while representatives of the opposition parties appeared 28% of the time (15% in the period before the campaign). (Chart 1).

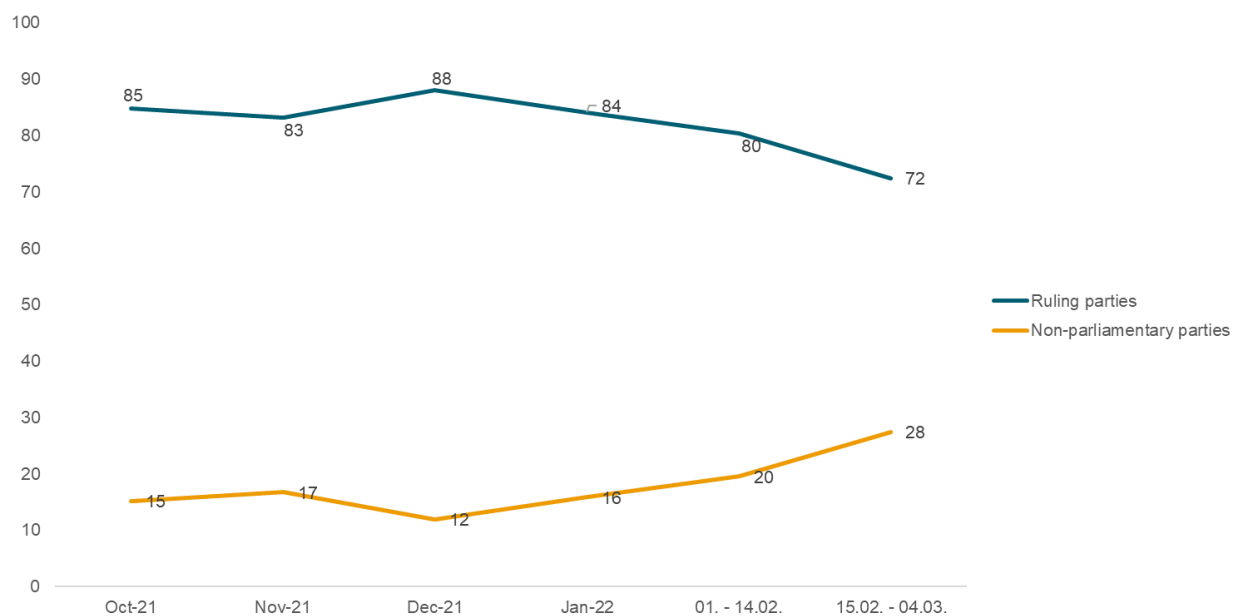


Chart 1: Coverage of representatives of ruling parties and opposition parties on television stations with national coverage

However, the tone of reporting on government actors remained unchanged compared to the pre-campaign period. Most of the time, government representatives were represented neutrally

¹ CRTA Observation Mission, *Izbori 2022 - Kampanja pre kampanje - Izveštaj za period oktobar 2021 - februar 2022*, https://cрта.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Izbori-2022_kampanja-pre-kampanje_oktobar-2021-februar-2022.pdf

² Following the media monitoring methodology, in the period from October 1, 2021 to March 4, 2022, CRTA covered over 370 hours of programs dedicated to election actors in prime time (extended prime time from 5.30 pm to midnight) on all television stations with national coverage (RTS, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy and TV B92). You can read more about CRTA's media monitoring methodology here: <https://link.cрта.rs/3e>

³ The election bloc is a special part of the election schedule that is separated from other programmes and advertising by an introduction and a closing segment, in which the media report on the election activities of election actors or broadcast informational material submitted by political parties that is not paid advertising.

(81 percent), then positively (19 percent), and seldom negatively. On the other hand, changes were noted in the way that opposition representatives were reported on. There was an increase in the time in which they were reported on in a neutral tone (from an average of 62 to 71 percent), while the time in which they were covered in a negative tone decreased (from an average of 33 percent, down to 23 percent). The time in which opposition actors were presented in a positive tone remained at approximately the same level (from 5 to 6 percent).

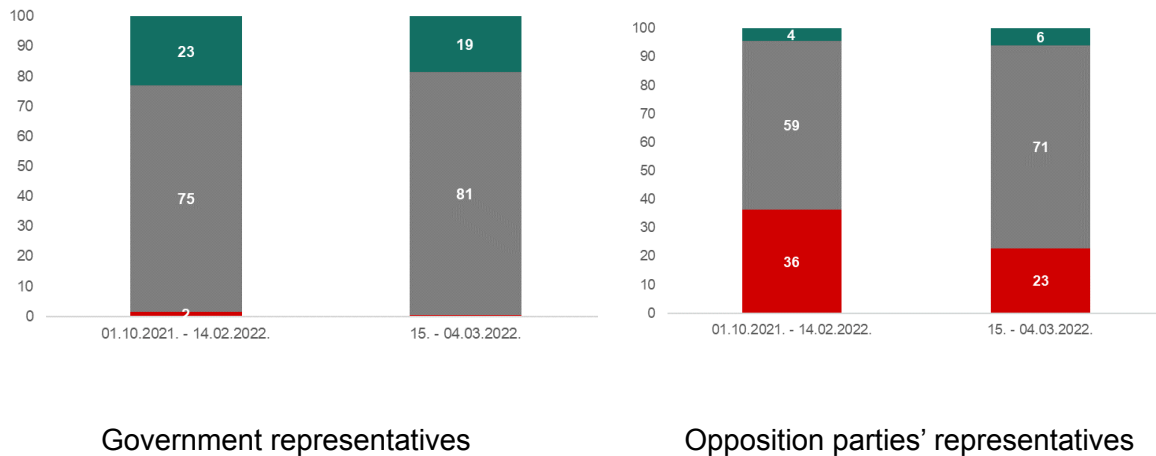


Chart 2: Tone of coverage of electoral actors according to party affiliation on television stations with national coverage

Changes in how electoral actors were presented in the active or passive roles were also noted. The active role means that the electoral actor can address the audience directly in the first person. The passive role means that others - guests, interlocutors, or presenters - talk about the electoral actor. In the case of government representatives, the changes are minimal. Almost three-quarters of the time, government officials had the opportunity to address voters directly, i.e., in the active role, on television stations with national coverage. On the other hand, there was a marked increase in the coverage of opposition actors in the active role - from 40 percent in the period before the election campaign to 53 percent in the first three weeks of the campaign.

It is important to note that all the observed, positive trends in the reporting on opposition parties' representatives arose as a direct consequence of the introduction of dedicated election programming to television stations with national coverage. After dividing the time that CRTA monitored into regular parts of the schedule, which are outside of the election campaign programming, and election programming, it is clear that ruling party representatives enjoy far more time in the regular programming, while representatives of opposition parties are covered more in the dedicated election programming. Representatives of the ruling parties take 84 percent of the time in the regular parts of the schedule, and 47 percent of the election

programming, while representatives of the opposition parties occupy 16 percent of the regular schedule and 53 percent of the dedicated election programming (Chart 3).

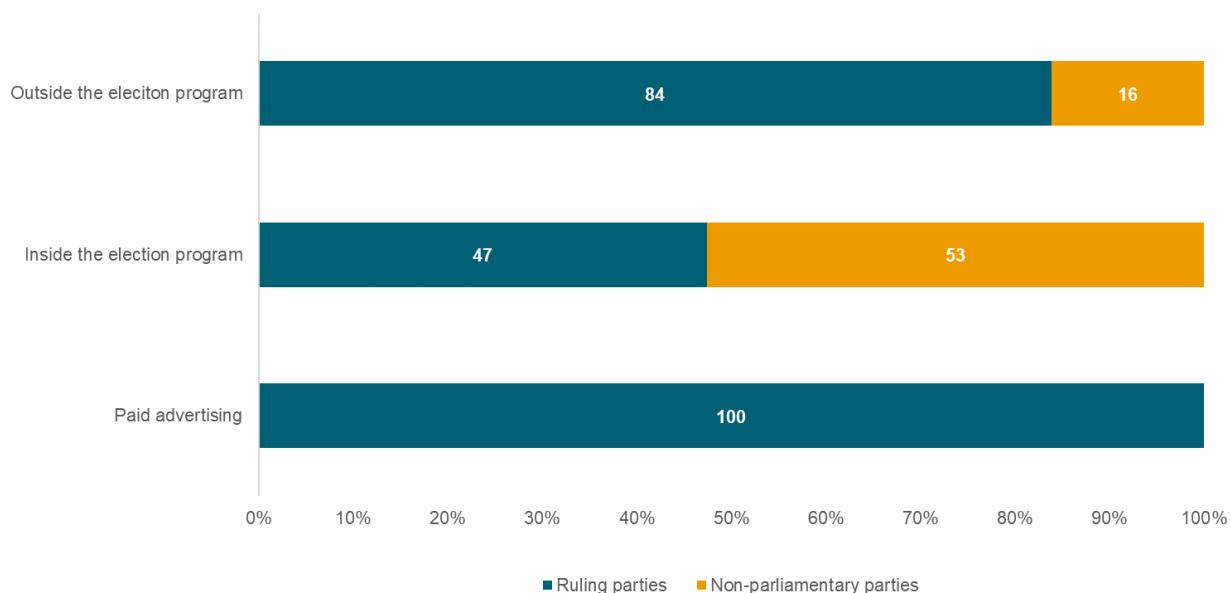


Chart 3: Coverage of election actors during the campaign in the dedicated election programming and regular parts of the schedule on television stations with national coverage

Additional analysis of the data obtained from media monitoring points to the conclusion that national television stations favour conservative, traditionalist opposition parties, some of which advocate extreme views (NADA, Patriotic Bloc, Sovereignists, SRS, and Zavetnici) over opposition parties with more liberal attitudes (United for Serbia, Moramo, and SDS). The data obtained about this division indicate that all parties and coalitions are most often represented in a neutral light, but that those who advocate liberal views are more often negatively represented (38 percent of the time) and rarely positively (1 percent). On the other hand, parties and coalitions that favour conservative and traditionalist attitudes are more often presented positively (11 percent) than negatively (5 percent of the time). Conservative and traditionalist opposition actors also directly address the audience in the first person more often (65 percent) compared to other opposition actors (41 percent).

REPORTING ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Aleksandar Vučić, in his role as the President of the state, the president of the ruling party, and as a presidential candidate since March 8, is the political actor that is reported on most. Just before the start of the campaign, his share of the political coverage was 92 percent, while all other announced presidential candidates had a combined 8 percent of the total time. In the first three weeks of the campaign, the time dedicated to Aleksandar Vučić decreased from 92 to 85 percent, while for all other presidential candidates it increased from 8 to 15 percent (Chart 4).

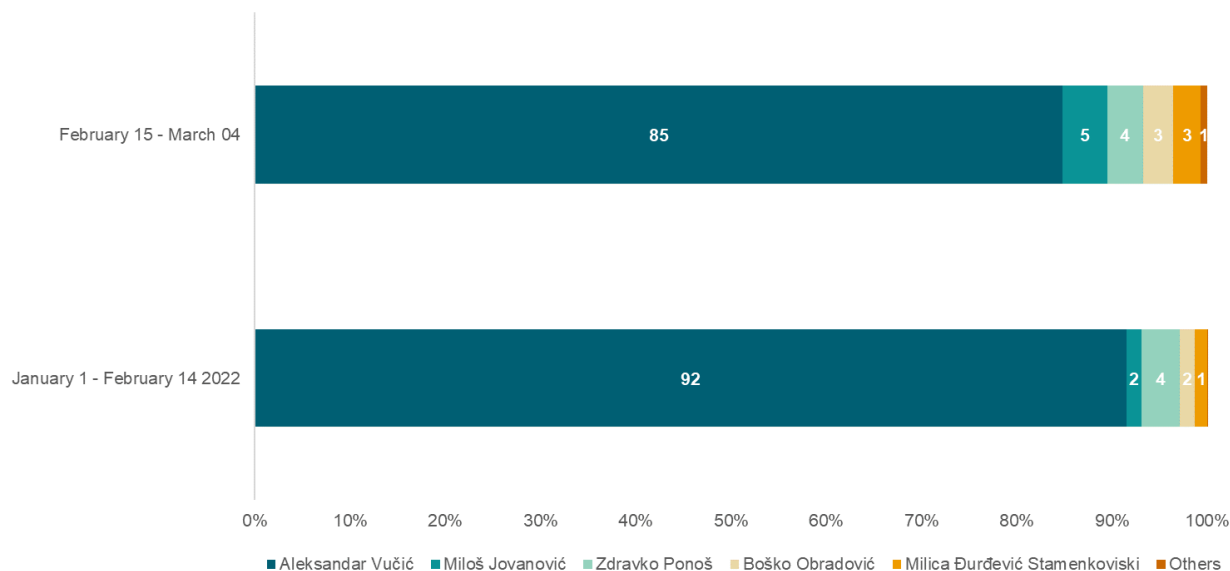


Chart 4: Coverage of presidential candidates on television stations with national coverage

Aleksandar Vučić was most often reported on in a neutral tone (80 percent), and then in a positive tone (20 percent), while there was almost no reporting in a negative tone. In addition to the neutral tone (77 percent), the second most represented presidential candidate, Miloš Jovanović, was reported on more often in a positive tone (17 percent) than in a negative tone (6 percent). An exception to the predominantly neutral reporting was noted only in the case of Zdravko Ponoš, the third most represented presidential candidate. He was most often reported upon negatively (72 percent of the time), then neutrally (26 percent), and finally positively (1 percent). Boško Obradović was most often reported on neutrally (77 percent), then negatively (18 percent) and then positively (5 percent). Milica Stamenkovski Đurđević was presented predominantly neutrally (88 percent), then positively (12 percent), while in the first three weeks of the campaign there was no negative reporting about her.

Four of the five candidates for president of Serbia usually got the opportunity to address the audience directly in programmes on television stations with national coverage: Aleksandar Vučić (76 percent), Miloš Jovanović (81 percent), Boško Obradović (68 percent) and Milica Stamenkovski Đurđević (78 percent). Just one candidate, Zdravko Ponoš, was more often in the passive role (88 percent), i.e., others talked about him, and he was not present to address the audience directly.

REPORTING ON INDIVIDUAL TELEVISION STATIONS

The manner of reporting on individual television stations with national coverage indicates that the public broadcaster, RTS 1, and the commercial television station Prva, reserved

approximately equal time for representatives of both the government and opposition parties (60 versus 40 percent of the total time) (Chart 5).

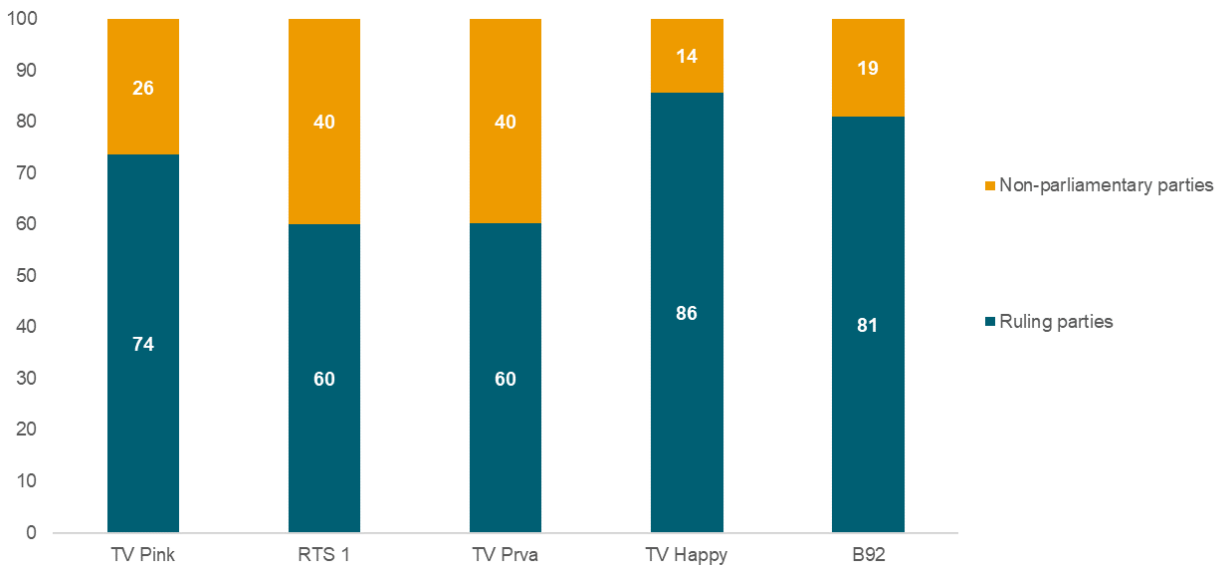


Chart 5: Coverage of representatives of the ruling parties and opposition parties on television stations with national coverage

The data indicate that RTS 1 had the most neutral reporting (94 percent for government representatives and 98 percent for representatives of opposition parties) and that all representatives had equal opportunity to represent themselves in the active role (78 percent for government representatives and 79 percent for opposition party representatives).

B92 TV and Pink TV stand out the most for their biased reporting on election actors in the first three weeks of the campaign. On B92, 81 percent of the total time was given to representatives of the ruling parties, while just 19 percent was allocated to representatives of opposition parties. On Pink TV, 74 percent of the total time was provided to representatives of the ruling parties, and just 26 percent to representatives of the opposition parties. Both television stations spent most of their time reporting neutrally on all election actors. However, Pink TV stands out because it reported positively on government representatives 39 percent of the time and negatively in 1 percent of the time, while representatives of opposition parties were covered negatively 41 percent of the time and positively 15 percent of the time. B92 television did not report negatively on government representatives, while it reported on them positively 13 percent of the time, and covered opposition representatives negatively 53 percent of the time and positively just 1 percent of the time.

CRTA'S OBSERVATION MISSION'S REPORTS FOR THE REGULATORY BODY FOR ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Since starting its long-term monitoring, CRTA has submitted a total of 14 reports to the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), regarding violations of the provisions of the Law on Electronic Media and the Law on Advertising. During the first three weeks of the election campaign alone, CRTA's Observation Mission filed seven complaints with REM against the following media:

No.	Media	TV station	Violation of media laws	Summary
1	B92 d.o.o.	B 92	Violation of the obligation to provide registered political parties, coalitions, and candidates with representation without discrimination during the election campaign (promoting and referring to the ruling party's electoral list and granting a privileged position to public authorities in the news programme, outside the election block) Article 47, paragraph 1, item 5) of the Law on Electronic Media, specified in item 5, Recommendations to commercial media service providers on the manner of conduct during the election campaign	On February 17, 2022, during the informative show "B92 Presek", which was not part of the scheduled election coverage, an article was shown in which Aleksandar Vučić was presented as the President of the Republic of Serbia, in which he referred to the Instagram account "Budućnost Srbije AV" and a post containing the slogan "Together we can do everything!". At the end of the article, the visual identity of the website "Deeds Speak" (Dela govore) is shown and the internet address of that site - delaprave.rs - was shown.
2	PINK MEDIA GROUP d.o.o.	Vesti	Violation of the obligation to provide registered political parties, coalitions, and candidates with representation without discrimination during the election campaign (promoting and referring to the ruling party's electoral list and granting a privileged position to public authorities in the news programme, outside the election block)	The election rally of the list "Aleksandar Vučić - Together we can do everything" was shown in its entirety during the information program, outside the schedule's election block
3	ZONA PLUS d.o.o	Zona plus	Article 47, paragraph 1, item 5) of the Law on Electronic Media, specified in item 5, Recommendations to commercial media service providers on the manner of conduct during the election campaign	

4	SOS KANAL PLUS d.o.o.	Sos kanal plus	Presentation of an election-themed programme by a media service provider who did not give prior notice that they would broadcast news and current affairs programs	The election rally of the list "Aleksandar Vučić - Together we can do everything" was shown in its entirety by the television station, which has a license exclusively for showing sports programmes.
5	TV Most d.o.o.	TV Most	Exceeding the allowed duration of advertising within one full hour; Violation of the obligation to provide registered political parties, coalitions, and candidates with representation without discrimination during the election campaign	The election meeting of the proposers of the proclaimed electoral list "Aleksandar Vučić - Together we can do everything" held in Merošina was broadcast live.
6	SAT-TV COMMUNICATIONS eksport-import d.o.o.	SAT TV		During the broadcast of the gathering, the emblems of the Serbian Progressive Party and the list "Aleksandar Vucic - Together we can do everything" including the slogan "Deeds speak" were displayed.
7	BELLE AMIE d.o.o.	Belle Amie		Article 35 of the Law on Advertising; Article 47, paragraph 1, item 5) of the Law on Electronic Media

Up to the finalisation of this report, REM has not responded to any reports submitted by CRTA's Observation Mission, before or during the campaign.