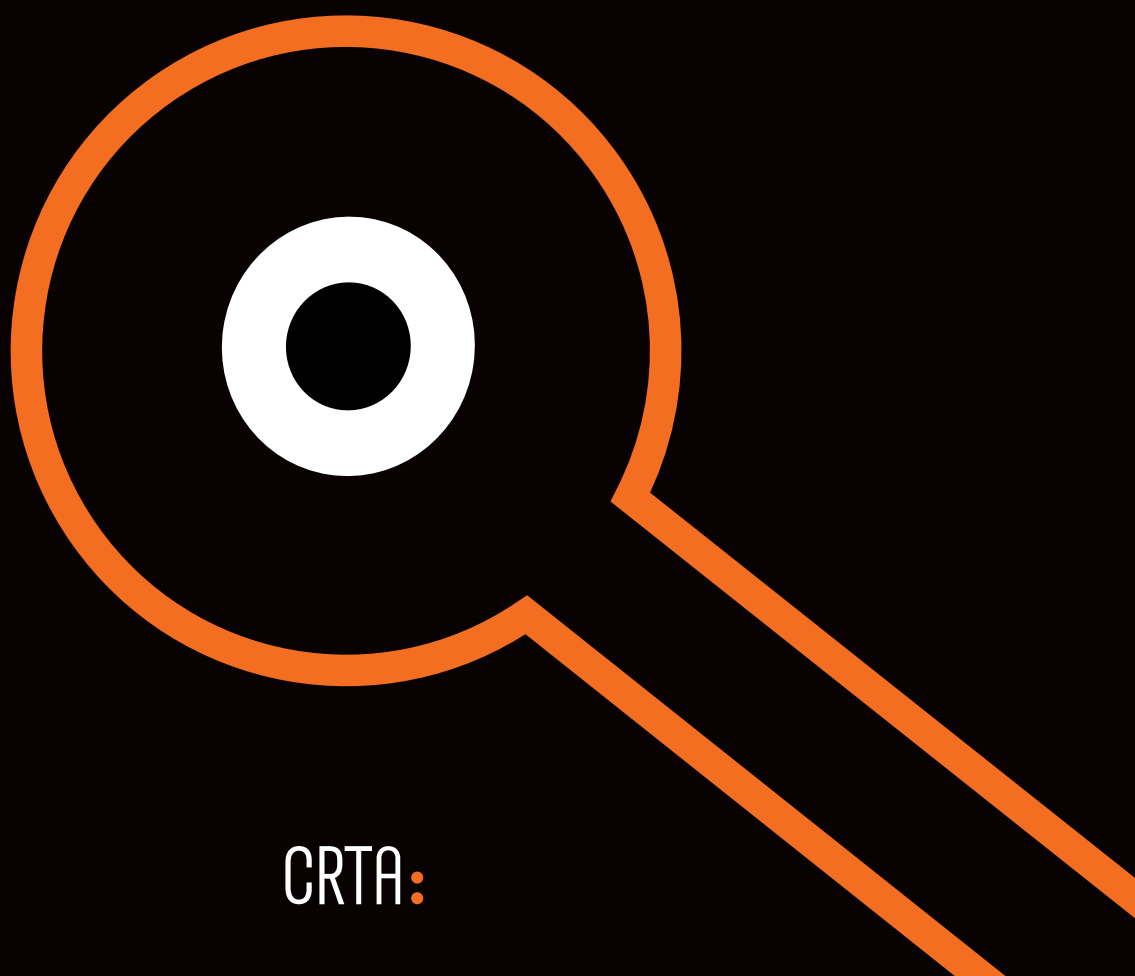


ELECTIONS : 2023

Final Election Observation Report

Summary

February 2024



CRTA:

CRTA FINAL ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORT

2023 Parliamentary and Belgrade Elections

SUMMARY

The extraordinary parliamentary and Belgrade elections were not free and fair.

The election outcomes emerged as a result of the unlawful advantages gained by the ruling party, with the complicity of several state institutions and authorities - primarily the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as bodies of certain local self-governments.

From the moment when the elections were officially called, institutions increasingly disregarded legal constraints, leading to local election results in Belgrade not reflecting the freely expressed will of the citizens, and significantly compromising the legitimacy of parliamentary election outcomes.

Responsible institutions are ignoring a mass of evidence and indications of not only gross violations of democratic principles but also a series of criminal acts in the election process. This further reinforced the principles of impunity and legal uncertainty, for which prosecutorial bodies bear the greatest responsibility.

The spectrum of severe endangerments of voters' and candidates' rights includes unscrupulous pressures on citizens, manipulations of the voters registry, forgeries of support signatures for nominated lists, misuse of citizens' personal data, and falsification of the election results publication date in the Official Gazette, committed to prevent the opposition from utilizing the legal deadline for submitting complaints to the Constitutional Court.

Such law violations would not have been possible without the passivity and direct involvement of institutions, i.e. civil servants at various levels of hierarchy. Initiating criminal and disciplinary proceedings to establish responsibility and punish the initiators and perpetrators of the criminal acts destroying the electoral integrity is a prerequisite for any further discussion on the electoral process.

From the observation mission's standpoint, it is disturbing to note that chronic problems of elections in Serbia have been somewhat overshadowed by the onslaught and weight of evidence about illegal and illegitimate electoral engineering, including organized voter migrations. These include political clientelism and pressures on voters, media inequality, misuse of public resources and office - which were even more pronounced in comparison with previous elections.

The findings of the CRTA Election Observation Mission show serious irregularities at 13 percent of polling stations in the parliamentary elections, while in the Belgrade elections, the share of such polling stations amounts to as much as 21 percent.

Main Features of the Election Campaign and Election Day

- **Erasing the line between the state and the (dominant) party** has evolved into a situation where the **state apparatus acted as a mechanism to carry out the campaign** of the Serbian Progressive Party. The use of the state for party interests manifested in broadly - from extraordinary budgetary provisions to the engagement of state institutions in spreading hate speech and defamation of the opposition. The intensity of the abuse of the function of the President of the Republic is indicated by the fact that as many as 60 percent of citizens thought that Aleksandar Vučić was a candidate in these elections, and almost a quarter of citizens were under the illusion that presidential elections were underway.
- Due to **proven (deliberately and unintentionally produced) inaccuracies in the voters registry**, confusion arose about who has the right to vote and where, which has increased suspicion that the elections reflect the real will of the citizens.
- Without precedent and without explanation, a decision was made to hold extraordinary local elections simultaneously with the extraordinary parliamentary and Belgrade elections in a third of local governments in Serbia. This enabled organized migration of voters from municipalities not organizing elections to Belgrade and other cities where elections were held, all to achieve better results for the Serbian Progressive Party at the local level. For the purpose of organizing voter migrations, manipulations of the voters registry were carried out, mostly by breaking the law that regulates the residence of citizens. **Such practice has compromised the equality of elections and essentially endangered the constitutional and legally guaranteed right to local self-government of every citizen.**
- **Impunity for criminal offenses in the electoral process was enabled by the absence of reaction of the prosecution** by official duty in cases where public evidence was presented, such as in cases of illegal interventions in the voters registry, falsified signatures of voters in the process of submitting election candidacies, vote-buying, multiple voting, pressure on voters, etc.
- Even half of the declared lists at the Belgrade elections are under founded suspicion of **forging signatures of support for the candidacy**. It turned out that these criminal acts enabled the authorities, by **constructing the appearance of a pluralistic electoral offer**, to secure control over decision-making in the City Electoral Commission. The unprecedented postponement, i.e. falsification of the date of publication of the Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade with the final results of the Belgrade elections, **has abolished the right to an effective legal remedy.**
- Employees in the public and state sector, as well as the most vulnerable social groups, namely beneficiaries of the social protection system, were **denied or limited freedom of choice due to exposure to pressures and other mechanisms of political clientelism.**
- Media inequality, or **imbalance in favor of the ruling party, was even more drastic than in previous elections.** Instead of professionally providing objective information

about the complete electoral offer and the socio-political context in which the campaign took place, **the most influential media, including the Public Media Service RTS, subjected citizens to an extreme propaganda.** Although he was not a candidate, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, occupied almost a third of the time in prime time and two-thirds of the time in news programs on televisions with national coverage.

- **REM, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, once again demonstrated almost complete disregard for its own legal obligations,** i.e. ensuring equality of electoral contestants in the media and protecting voters' right to quality information.
- The campaign took place in an atmosphere full of tensions. The media, but also the highest state officials, spread **incendiary, dehumanizing rhetoric, and in many cases, electoral actors, citizens, and even election observers were subjected to verbal and physical violence.** In these elections, CRTA observers were victims of a brutal physical attack for the first time, which occurred in front of police officers in the yard of the local police station, where they were headed to report the criminal act of circular voting.
- Due to cases of vote-buying and circular voting, CRTA filed a record number of complaints with the police. Frequently recorded irregularities during the election day were also: **the absence of measures for identity verification and protection of the rule "one person - one vote", violation of secrecy and controlled voting, multiple voting, the presence of unauthorized persons at polling stations, pre-filled excerpts from the voters registry,** etc.
- **The powers, capacities, and authority of the election administration have again proven to be insufficient to protect the integrity of the election process** despite increased transparency and proactivity of some of its parts.

The mentioned facts clearly confirm that the relatively short period since the previous elections (April 2022) was not used to improve electoral conditions and that the existing legal framework is ineffective.

Government representatives have shown a concerning deviation from international democratic standards in the treatment of election observers. Instead of investigating evidence of irregularities and discussing chronic problems in elections, the public witnessed unfounded accusations and insults directed at international observers and the CRTA Election Observation Mission by the highest state officials, including President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić and Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, as well as media close to the authorities.

Prerequisites for Discussion on Better Elections

The CRTA Election Observation Mission concludes that it is not possible to approach the improvement of the legal framework and the practice of conducting elections, i.e. the holding of the next elections in Serbia, until certain prerequisites are met.

1. Establishment of timely and non-selective accountability for violations of the law in elections. The fight against impunity is a fundamental prerequisite for the rule of law and the

building of citizens' trust that the institutions of Serbia, state bodies, and public institutions serve to protect the laws and interests of the state and the public within their competencies, standards of ethics, and professional service, not allowing any party or private interest to be prioritized over this obligation.

- *Determine the responsibility for the lack of reaction by the prosecution in the electoral process and selective reaction to citizens' complaints. Call for criminal and disciplinary responsibility of the lead officers in the basic public prosecutor's offices in Belgrade, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, and the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, on the basis of abuse of official position and failure to use authority to control the conduct and supervision over the work of lower public prosecutor's offices.*
- *The prosecution must urgently and non-selectively engage in establishing the truth and responsibility for violations of the law in the electoral process, including acts committed under the auspices of the state institutions of Serbia, primarily in the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government (including the Administrative Inspectorate), as well as in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Consulate in Banja Luka.*
- *State institutions, bodies, and institutions must initiate disciplinary proceedings and use all mechanisms of internal control against officials who have irresponsibly, without the authority, and unlawfully made changes to the voters registry, changed the residence and domicile of citizens, and committed other abuses of position.*
- *Notaries who participated in the falsification of voter support statements for the candidacy of electoral lists must be prosecuted urgently.*
- *The competent public prosecutor's offices must initiate proceedings to determine the criminal responsibility of officials in police stations who, through negligent work in service and abuse of official position, made changes of residence contrary to prescribed obligations and procedures.*
- *The competent public prosecutor's offices must initiate criminal proceedings against those responsible for compiling inaccurate voters registries under Article 158 of the Criminal Code.*
- *The Administrative Inspectorate must file a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings against each responsible person in the bodies responsible for updating the voters registry who did not ensure its accuracy and timeliness.*
- *Upon the constitution of the National Assembly, as soon as possible, it is necessary to initiate the procedure for the dismissal of all eight members of the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media due to improper and negligent conduct and at the same time issue a public call for proposing candidates for the election of new members of the Council.*

- *Upon the constitution of the new composition of the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, conduct a procedure to determine potential violations of obligations or non-compliance with the conditions provided by the license at media service providers to whom REM issues broadcasting licenses and, in case of violations, take legally prescribed measures that include revocation of the license.*
- *The governing boards of public media services, which would be elected by the new composition of the REM Council, should initiate procedures for the dismissal of general directors and editors in chief of the news program, and conduct competitions to select individuals for these positions who will perform their duties in accordance with the law and the principles of public media services.*

2. An accurate and uncompromised voters registry is a key prerequisite for holding democratic elections, since the will of the voters cannot be determined on election day without it. As in previous electoral processes, the negative perception of the voters registry in the public is based on the lack of timely and sufficient data and facts about its state and is a source of public distrust in the electoral process. Two key problems related to the voters registry that have arisen in the electoral process are migration, i.e. the "relocation" of voters, and the inaccuracy of the voters registry. The first problem is significant in the context of local elections, especially those held in the capital city, while the second problem recurs from election to election.

- *It is necessary for an independent commission composed of international and domestic experts to conduct a revision of the voters registry in accordance with international standards and recommendations of the ODIHR. After determining the factual situation, it should be proceeded without delay with compiling an accurate voters registry and establishing mechanisms that ensure its integrity.*

3. It is necessary to significantly improve professional standards in the work of the Radio Television of Serbia and Radio Television of Vojvodina so that these houses truly, and not just nominally, function as the public media service of the citizens of Serbia. The free formation of voters' will, as the backbone of free elections, largely rests on truthful, complete, and timely information and the promotion of political ideas' pluralism in electronic media. Opening public media services RTS and RTV to different political options and significantly greater dedication of these houses to the obligation of objective and timely information and education of citizens is the first step in establishing political pluralism in the media.

1.1 The Course of the Election Campaign

In less than two years, **hastily and without socio-political consensus**, the second snap parliamentary and Belgrade elections were held. Snap provincial elections were also called, and without precedent or clear explanation a decision was made to hold extraordinary local elections about six months before the regular term in more than one-third of the municipalities in Serbia.

Elections were called in circumstances of **pronounced, pre-acquired advantages of the government** in the media, abuse of institutions and public functions for campaigning against political opponents, and waves of one-time monetary aid for different social groups ahead of and during the elections. Elections were called in an atmosphere of political, social, and economic tensions, and massive and prolonged civic protests due to mass murders that took 19 lives in May 2023, mostly of children and youth. The election campaign was also marked by a large number of social protests which the authorities labeled as opposition activities.

Although without the formal and technical restrictions for participating in and organizing elections, the electoral process has revealed all the shortcomings of the existing model of election administration and institutional control over the enforcement of the law.

It has been shown that the absence of sanctioning law violations from previous elections led to even more severe abuses and the weakening of control mechanisms. As with the 2022 elections, **this time the candidacy process was compromised by the forgery of voter support signatures**. Half of the declared electoral lists for the Belgrade elections are under suspicion of having forging signatures of support for candidacy. **The questionable signatures are the ones certified in municipal administrations. Historically, this is potentially the most extensive case of forgery in elections in Serbia**, which remained without an institutional response by the conclusion of this report. There were also reports of obstructions of the opposition in collecting signatures for candidacy in several municipalities in Serbia.

Claims of manipulations with the voters registry have emerged in the public. The lack of timely and complete information about the state of the voters registry from election to election has raised serious suspicions of the integrity and potential abuses of the voters registry. A large number of citizens have approached CRTA due to **voting invitations that arrived for people who, as they claimed, do not live at their addresses. Despite allegations of organized voter migrations, primarily for voting in local elections in Belgrade**, Serbian institutions, primarily the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, have not taken steps to remove public doubts about manipulations with the voters registry.

Pressures on voters have deepened, now spread throughout the country, and conducted through various mechanisms - primarily in the public administration system, social and healthcare services, including both their employees and their users. More intense pressures in the last weeks of the campaign were observed by heightened cases of intrusion into personal data, health histories, and places of residence, along with the now usual and widespread demands for employees and users of public sector services to vote for the party or to assist its infrastructure in the campaign.

Data obtained by CRTA observers also raise suspicions that parties misused private data of various groups of citizens for targeted pressures and bribing of voters. Electoral clientelism was intensified in the final stage of the campaign. Targeted distribution of material gifts to socio-economically vulnerable citizens is one of the indicators of abuse of data from public records on the social status of citizens. Also, this period was marked by testimonies about direct exchanges of material gifts or services for votes. Interlocutors pointed to an **atmosphere of fear**, but also to a **deep distrust of institutions**, which, as they say, prevents them from reporting such cases.

The direct participation of the state in the campaign was even more pronounced than in previous electoral processes. Throughout the entire election campaign, it was difficult to discern the boundary between the activities of the ruling party and the state. In just over 45 days of the election campaign, CRTA observers recorded about **800 appearances of high state officials in local communities. Only 11 percent of municipalities and cities had no recorded visit by any state official. About 260 cases of abuse of public resources in the campaign across Serbia were also recorded, in which the strongest ruling party predominantly participated.**

Appearances of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, flooded the public space, leaving the impression that presidential, not parliamentary, provincial, and local elections were underway in Serbia. Over 60 percent of citizens were of the opinion that the President of Serbia was a candidate in the elections, while almost a quarter believed that presidential elections were being held in Serbia. Although formally no longer the president of the Serbian Progressive Party, the state president, Aleksandar Vučić, represented the central figure by which the ruling list was named and based its campaign on the brand "AV". **This central figure in the campaign was like an umbrella for the party, the state, and the people, communicating that they are on the same side, in a unified front, which led to equating the President of Serbia not only with the party but also with the state and the people.**

The election campaign was held in a state of even greater media inequality among participants than in previous elections - government representatives occupied a total of 72 percent of media time until election day, compared to 64 percent during the 2022 elections. In the remaining time, television stations with national coverage often presented **opposition candidates in a negative tone.** Legal obligations to introduce electoral blocks during the campaign period, special rules for the Radio Television of Serbia, recommendations for commercial media, and the ban on media reporting on the activities of public officials did not contribute to balanced and objective informing of voters about the electoral offer. While representation in strictly formal electoral blocks was almost equal, the overall imbalance in representation stemmed from regular, otherwise more-watched, news programs - in which the **ruling majority occupied more than 90 percent of the time.**

Hostility and hate speech disseminated by ruling parties and the most influential media, but also by some actors from the opposition, were more pronounced than in any elections observed by CRTA since 2016. Dangerous insinuations that the opposition and other actors plan to violently dispute the election results, prepare an attack on the President of Serbia, his family and the state and that the only goal of the opposition is "hatred", "causing chaos" and "destabilizing Serbia" were disseminated through institutional channels,

statements of the highest officials, and the most influential media. On the other hand, addresses by opposition representatives included strong criticism of the government, which in some cases was presented through the use of labelling, stereotyping, and speech that promotes intolerance.

Messages of intolerance and hate by representatives of political parties were not only addressed to political opponents but were also indirectly and directly **aimed at the media, civil sector, and citizens**. Individuals associated with the "ProGlas" initiative, which led a campaign for election turnout and collected more than 190.000 signatures of citizen support, were also the target of verbal attacks. Public figures who participated in the panels of this initiative were accused by the ruling party and media close to the authorities of "waging a special war against the state".

Several cases of violence, incident situations, and attacks on individuals in the last weeks of the campaign were recorded. During the campaign, **CRTA identified 40 cases of incidents with elements of verbal and physical violence.** Interlocutors of CRTA observers coming from the ranks of both the government and the opposition, as well as institutions, testified about **pressures in local environments attempting to prevent equal political competition and the holding of public events by actors critical of the current government.**

Regulatory institutions and bodies remained invisible. The Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), despite increased obligations, was completely passive and non-transparent in these elections, with open disregard for the law. REM only published part of the campaign monitoring data after election day, and only those collected in supervision over public media services and cable televisions, while delaying the publication of findings related to private televisions with national coverage. **By hiding part of the data, REM created a distorted picture of pluralism in the campaign.** The first complaints were also considered only after the election day, beyond the legal deadlines. The only procedure that REM initiated was not concluded by the day of concluding this report. **The actions of the Agency of Prevention of Corruption, although far less passive, remained without effect due to weak professional integrity and independence in work.**

Due to various irregularities and violations of the law in the elections, **CRTA filed nearly 100 complaints with different institutions:**

- **CRTA filed 29 complaints with the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), but REM did not act on any of them during the campaign despite legal obligations and deadlines.** Only after election day REM informed CRTA that in the case of five complaints there was no basis for initiating proceedings, while it did not comment on the other complaints almost two months after the end of the campaign.
- **CRTA filed 51 complaints with the Agency for Prevention of Corruption** for cases of abuse of state office and misuse of state resources (14), as well as unauthorized party activities during the campaign (37). The Agency has so far decided on 46 complaints and in 23 cases found a violation of the law.

- Due to cases of negative campaigning, CRTA also **filed five complaints with the Election Campaign Oversight Committee of the National Assembly.**
- **CRTA filed seven complaints with the police regarding the allegations of observers who, during the election day, noticed events indicating vote buying.**
- Based on complaints received from citizens, **CRTA prepared and submitted five criminal complaints, including four against unknown officials in the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the General Consulate of Serbia in the Republic of Srpska, and the city administrations of Novi Sad and Belgrade for manipulations with the voters registry and voting rights, and one criminal complaint against the unknown person for compiling an inaccurate voters registry.**

In this electoral process, CRTA repeatedly addressed competent institutions, the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, and the **Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, through direct letters or public appeals, asking them to make available data that would dispel doubts about manipulations with the voters registry and voting rights.** The data that would enable the necessary analysis of residence changes in Belgrade were not published, nor did they fully arrive at CRTA's address.

No case of urgent reaction by the prosecution based on publicly available information and evidence of criminal offenses related to the elections was recorded. All public information relates to the actions of individual prosecutions on some of the citizens' complaints, where the number of complaints and formed cases is known, but not the activities undertaken. It is known that the Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade formed five cases based on information received from the City Electoral Commission of Belgrade and the Republic Electoral Commission regarding cases of forging citizens' signatures. **It is shocking and unprecedented that the prosecution informed the public that the electoral administration is responsible for violations of the law in the electoral process.**

Despite publicly available claims, reports, and information about cases of illegal assignment of residence to individuals who do not meet the necessary conditions for obtaining residence in Belgrade, as well as about organized voter migrations, the prosecution in Belgrade did not undertake any action, nor did it make any statement. The prosecution's reaction was also absent in the case of an investigative article published by CINS, which raised suspicions of a series of criminal offenses around the organization and operation of the "call center" of the Serbian Progressive Party (receiving and giving bribes in connection with voting, abuse of official position and personal data, illegal financing of political activities, etc).

In the case of attacks on CRTA observers on election day in the yard of the police station in Odžaci, the Public Prosecutor's Office in Sombor formed a case, qualifying the attack as the criminal offense of "violent behavior". In this specific case, based on available information, it is shown that **police officers did not adequately respond to prevent the attack on observers, nor did they ensure their safety** even though they were aware of a serious and immediate threat. There are also **indications that the police did not take all necessary measures to find the perpetrators, as well as to discover and secure evidence.**

1.2 Course and outcome of the election day

Snap parliamentary elections in Serbia, as well as snap local elections in Belgrade, were held on December 17, 2023. In the parliamentary elections, 6,500,666 voters had the right to vote at 8,273 polling stations (of which 29 are in correctional facilities and 81 polling stations are abroad, in 35 countries), while in the Belgrade elections, 1,613,369 voters had the right to vote, at 1,180 polling stations.

The CRTA Election Observation Mission observed the parliamentary and Belgrade City Assembly elections by using two representative and random samples of 500 polling stations in Serbia and 500 in Belgrade (excluding foreign countries, correctional facilities, and voters from Kosovo and Metohija). Based on the results collected from the sample, turnout in the parliamentary elections was almost identical as in the previous elections in April 2022 - 58.9 percent (margin of error 0.9%). The turnout in the Belgrade elections of 58.3 percent (margin of error 0.4%) is 1.1 percent points higher than in the elections in April 2022, and even 7.3 percentage points higher than in 2018.

A large number of irregularities were recorded at polling stations for both levels of elections. **CRTA's observers witnessed underdeveloped electoral and political culture which not only tolerates but encourages behaviors that breach the established law and procedures.** Insufficient training, carelessness, and frivolous approach of members of polling boards were noted for the most part in smaller and rural areas, and areas with a predominantly elderly population.

In as many as **20 percent** of the polling stations in the parliamentary elections and **17 percent** in the Belgrade elections, **UV lamps were not used in accordance with the law. The identity of voters was not properly established at 13 percent** of polling stations in the parliamentary elections, while in Belgrade the percentage of those stations was only three percent. These findings point to the **widespread normalization of non-compliance with procedures, which opens up the space for further electoral manipulations.**

At the polling stations for the Belgrade elections, there were disproportionately more irregularities related to the voters registry, compared to the parliamentary elections. In every fifth polling station in Belgrade (20 percent), there were cases where voters were not found in the voters registry, while this is the case in almost every tenth polling station in the parliamentary elections (nine percent).

The reports of CRTA's observers from the election day corroborate the findings of long-term observation, which suggest that parties in power intensively pressured and bribed voters, as well as that the mechanisms by which these parties exercise control over voters are strict and organized in advance. One such mechanism is the **abuse of the voters registry in order to organize the migration of voters** to vote in local elections. Voting secrecy was violated at around five percent of polling stations both in Belgrade and in Serbia.

Circumstances that raise suspicions of vote buying were recorded at over ten percent of polling stations in Belgrade (11 percent) and Serbia (12 percent). In Belgrade, somewhat more often than in the rest of Serbia, cases of **pre-filled ballots** indicating circular

voting have also been observed. **In Belgrade, more often than in Serbia, cases of voters being brought to vote against their will were recorded.**

Several cases of physical violence have also been recorded at polling stations in Belgrade and Serbia, with one of them including an **attack on CRTA observers in the yard of the local police station in Odžaci**. CRTA's **observers were the target of pressure and threats at the polling station or in the vicinity of the polling stations**, which was recorded on the election day itself (somewhat more often in Belgrade than in the rest of Serbia). Still, the extent of threats became clear only in the days after the elections when observers started reporting additional irregularities because they were too scared to do so on election day.

During the election day, CRTA submitted **seven complaints to the police on suspicion of vote buying and circular voting**, as well as **two complaints regarding intimidation and physical attacks on observers**.

The final assessment of the CRTA's Election Observation Mission is that every fifth polling station in Belgrade (21 percent) was contaminated with serious irregularities that affected the outcome of the vote, while 13 percent of such polling stations were detected in the parliamentary elections.

A total of 152,700 voters had voting rights at the mentioned 21 percent of polling stations in Belgrade, and 72,992 voters had the right to vote at 13 percent of polling stations in the parliamentary elections.

CRTA's findings on the number of compromised polling stations in Belgrade are the result of cross-checking several different statistical analyses and observer reports on election day. CRTA followed the information obtained from long-term observation about illegal and illegitimate changes in the voters registry for the purpose of organizing the migration of voters from other parts of Serbia and neighboring countries to Belgrade, and other places where the elections were held on December 17. On election day in Belgrade, CRTA observers reported from 71 sampled polling stations individual situations that indicated organized voter migration, including cases of supervised voting, escorted voting, and potential manipulation of the voters registry and voter identity.

The cases of "voter migration" recorded by the CRTA's observers during the election day in Belgrade are only the tip of the iceberg. An additional analysis that compared the names of voters registered for the local elections in Belgrade in 2023 and the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 and 2018 showed that a group of voters from Bosnia and Herzegovina resides at over 1,400 addresses in Belgrade, which gives them the right to vote in local elections.

1.3. After election day

The process leading to the proclamation of the final election results, namely regarding the protection of voters' rights, was burdened by the opposition's and the public's distrust in the outcomes of election day, primarily regarding the Belgrade elections. The backdating of the publication of the overall report on the results **jeopardized the right to a legal remedy, the right to an effective legal remedy, and thus compromised legal certainty with the aim of**

preventing legal protection before the Constitutional Court. Additionally, the backdating compromised the integrity of the electoral process in Belgrade and called into question the legality of the actions of those responsible in the Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade, and the city administration. At the same time, the backdating resulted in the City Electoral Commission (GIK) violating the deadline for awarding mandates to councilors as prescribed by the Law on Local Elections.

The distrust of part of the public in the integrity of the election results and the opposition's demand for the repeated elections at all levels due to committed electoral fraud culminated in **protests in front of the building where the Republic Electoral Commission (RIK) convenes, and days of hunger strike of several MPs and election candidates from the list “Serbia Against Violence”.** The absence of RIK's response, conditioned by the lack of formal and substantive possibilities to address the described irregularities in the electoral process, further deepened the distrust of part of the public in the work of the election administration and highlighted the need for election administration reform.

Although the right to observe elections represents an important component of electoral process, and despite the presence of international election observers from ODHIR, parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and OSCE, and European Parliament, the position of observers was essentially worsened in this electoral process. Hostility towards domestic and foreign election observers was particularly promoted by statements from the highest state officials and pro-government media with the aim of discrediting their work and findings.