

CRTA:



**Audit of  
political engagement  
in Serbia 2022**

Belgrade, February 2023

## Audit of political engagement in Serbia 2022

The goal of this research was to identify the attitudes of Serbian citizens in relation to questions of political interest and assess the extent to which they are willing to participate in democratic processes which include various types of civic participation - from voting in elections to calling to, and participating, in civic activities.

**This research illustrates the democratic state of society. The extent to which citizens are prepared to participate in social processes, exercise their civic rights and influence decision-makers are good indicators of the “health” of a certain democracy.**

### Methodology

Data collection method: Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) through mobile phone Random Digit Dialling

Target population: adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia (without Kosovo)

Size of sample: 1026 respondents

Type of sample: random sample, representative of the Republic of Serbia (without Kosovo); 80% mobile phones (Random Digit Dialling); 20% landlines (random sample of landline numbers)

Stratum: 48 in total, per gender (male, female), per age (18-34, 35-64, 65+), per region (Belgrade, Vojvodina, Central and Western Serbia, South and Eastern Serbia) and per type of settlement (urban, rural)

Post-stratification: per gender, age, region and type of settlement

Questionnaire (46 questions)

Margin of error:  $\pm 3,10\%$

Response rate: 21%

The average duration of the interviews: 16 minutes

Polling period: 19-24. November 2022

## **Socio-political context**

Elections were held in Serbia on April 3, 2022, in which the ruling coalition of the Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia retained the majority in the National Assembly and Aleksandar Vučić won a second presidential term. The elections in most polling stations took place in accordance with laws and procedures, but in an atmosphere full of tensions. In the period before and after the election day, the ruling parties had a pronounced advantage over the opposition candidates, an advantage which was most evident in the uneven representation in the media.

The first sitting of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in the Thirteenth convocation was held on August 1, 2022 - almost four months after the elections. The opposition parties, which participated in the boycott of the Assembly in 2019 and which boycotted the elections in 2020, are once again represented in the National Assembly. Their presence was noted in the parliamentary debates at the first sitting of the new convocation.

The formation of government was a long process and Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, along with the members of the new government, took office only at the end of October. After the elections, speculations about the possibility of early elections at the national and local levels started to emerge.

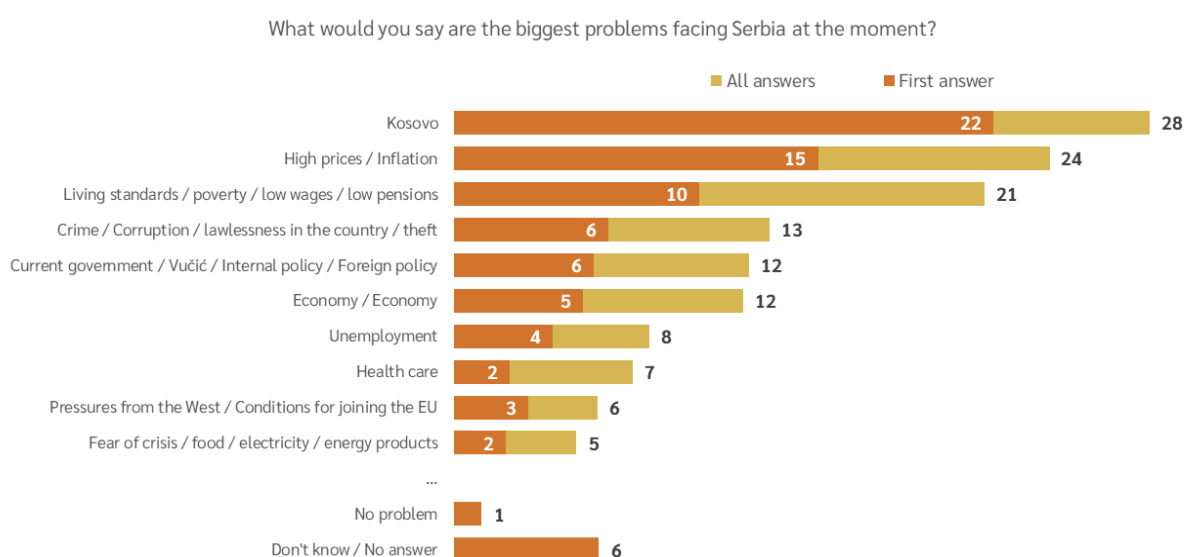
## **Summary of main findings**

### **The biggest problems for the country and citizens**

Citizens believe that Serbia is facing two major problems. First and foremost, they mention the very bad economic, i.e., financial situation, and then the Kosovo issue. Finances are seen as a problem for the country, but also as a problem that personally affects citizens. Kosovo, on the other hand, is perceived almost exclusively as a problem for Serbia, not as a personal problem. Among the other problems that Serbia confronts, those related to the current government and the (non)functioning of institutions, as well as the current unstable international situation, stand out. In addition to the financial situation, among personal problems, citizens also mention problems related to work and employment, as well as to health and healthcare.

While finances are an omnipresent problem for the citizens of Serbia, there are great differences among citizens regarding Kosovo and the problems related to the current government and the functioning of the state.

- *If perceived as a problem, Kosovo more often affects the oldest citizens, those who are informed about political events through television, who have the most trust in pro-government media and who are closer to the parties in power.*
- *The issue of crime, corruption and lawlessness in the country is more often highlighted by citizens with a higher level of education, citizens who are informed primarily via the Internet, who trust critical media and are inclined towards the opposition parties.*
- *Citizens who trust the critical media and are closer to the opposition parties perceive the current government as a problem to a much greater extent.*



## Attitudes towards democracy

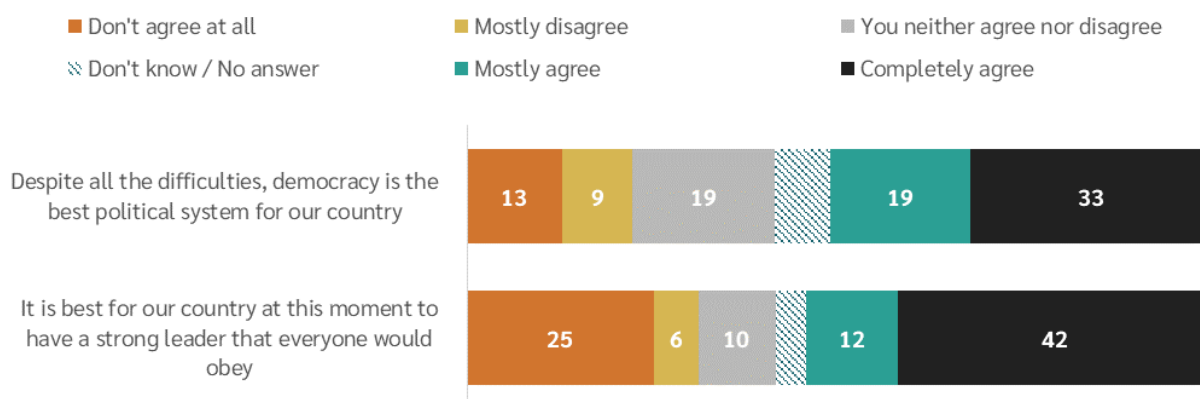
About one half of citizens acknowledge that democracy is the best political system for Serbia. At the same time, a similar portion of citizens believe that it is best for our country at this moment to have a strong leader whom everyone would obey. Citizens' views on the issue of preferred political system overlap – a quarter of citizens accept both a democratic system and a system with a strong leader at the same time. Faced with a choice of one of these two systems, the citizens are almost completely evenly divided.

If you had to choose, what would you say, which political system is the best for our country at the moment?



- A system with a strong leader is preferred by citizens with a lower level of education, who live in rural areas, who are in a worse financial situation, citizens who state that they do not know much about politics and those who are not overly socially active.
- Citizens with higher education, who live in Belgrade and urban areas in general, those with a mediocre or higher standard of living, citizens who emphasise that they know a lot about politics and are more socially active, as well as those who believe exclusively in critical media, i.e. incline towards opposition parties choose a democratic political system significantly more often.

Democracy vs. Strong leader



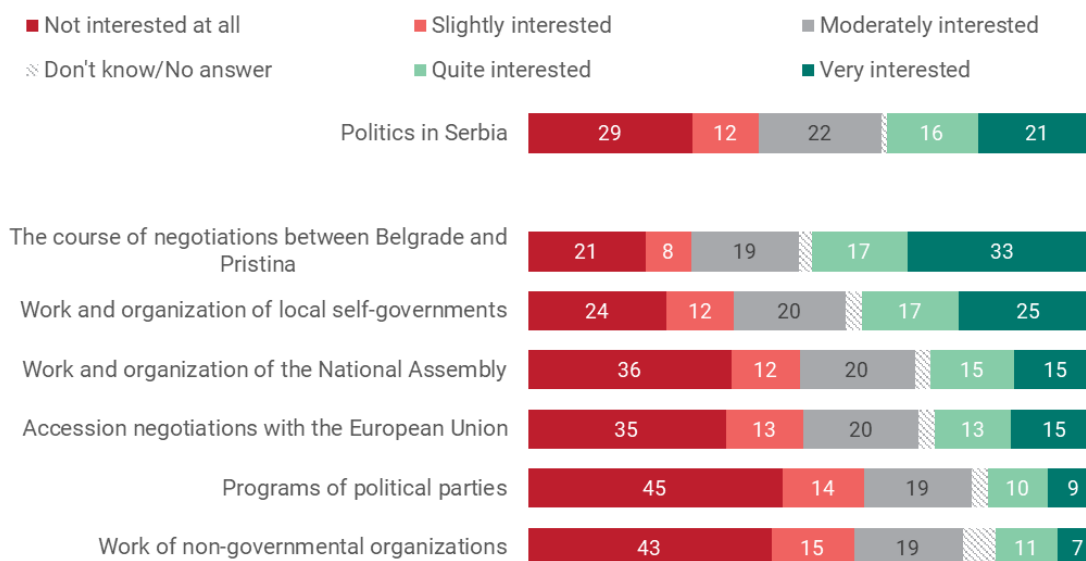
## Interest in political topics and perception of politics

The interest of Serbian citizens in politics and political topics is generally not high. A little over one third of citizens point out that they are generally interested in the topic of politics in Serbia. The only specific topic that interests the majority of Serbian citizens is the course of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina. One in two citizens of Serbia is interested in this topic. Citizens are significantly less interested in accession negotiations with the European Union, the work of the National Assembly of Serbia or the work of local self-governments. The programmes of political parties and the work of non-governmental organisations are the least interesting topics for citizens.

Interest in political topics is fairly stable and has not changed significantly in the last three years, with the exception of the Kosovo issue, where there is an increase in interest. Moreover, there is a slight increase of interest in the work of the National Assembly.

- *In Serbia, the oldest citizens are generally more interested in politics, those living in urban areas, who are primarily informed through television, citizens who consider that they know a lot about politics in Serbia, as well as more socially active citizens.*
- *Interest in politics is significantly related to the political inclination of citizens. Those who point out that they are closer to the political parties in power or those in the opposition express an interest in politics to a significantly greater extent than those who are not close to either political option.*
- *The youngest citizens, citizens who live in rural areas, as well as citizens who are informed about political and social events through family and friends or through social networks, are less interested in politics.*
- *When it comes to individual topics, elderly citizens, who lean towards the parties in power and trust the pro-government media, are more interested in the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, as well as in the work of the National Assembly. Citizens who are closer to the parties in power are also more interested in the work of local self-governments.*
- *Citizens who favour the opposition parties and trust only critical media are more interested in negotiations with the European Union, as well as in the work of non-governmental organisations. Citizens with higher education and more socially active citizens are more often interested in EU negotiations. Women are much more interested in the work of non-governmental organisations than men.*

In general, how much are you interested in...

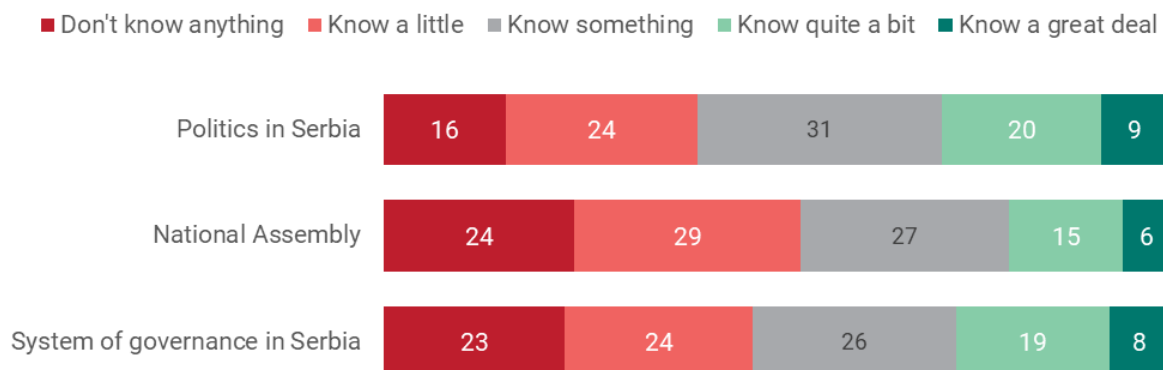


## Knowledge about political topics

The majority of Serbian citizens estimate that they do not have enough knowledge about politics and political topics. A little over a quarter of citizens stress that they know a lot about politics. The same percentage believes that they know a lot about the government structure, while only one in five citizens knows about the work of the Assembly.

- *Men, citizens with a higher level of education, those who live in urban areas and who have a higher standard of living believe they are more knowledgeable about politics and political topics*
- *More socially active citizens, those who are more interested in politics, as well as those who trust only critical media and lean towards the opposition parties, stress to a greater extent that they have knowledge about political topics.*

What would you say, how much do you actually know about...



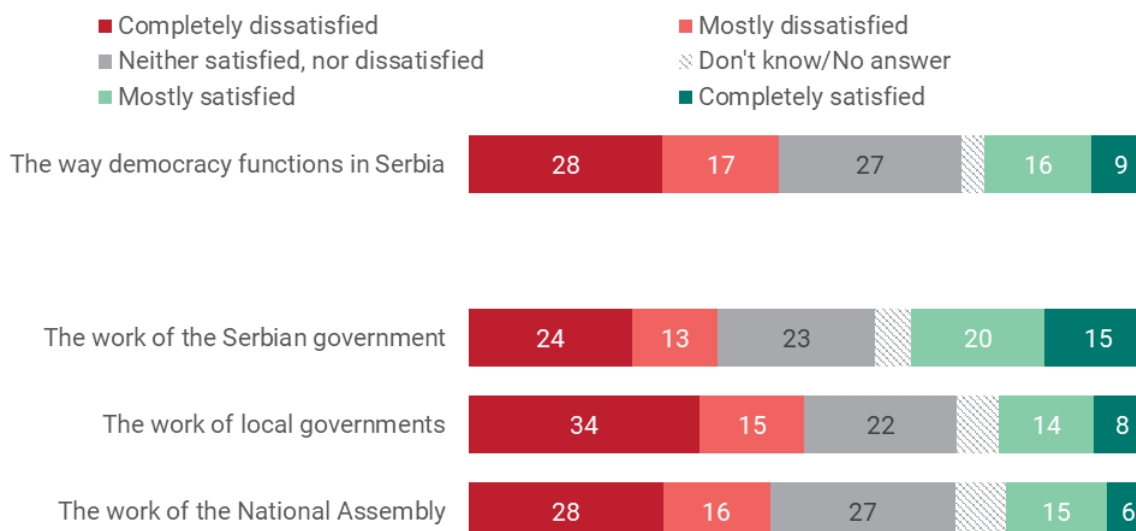
## Satisfaction with democracy and institutions

Citizens assessed the functioning of democracy in Serbia as poor. Only every fourth citizen is satisfied with the current functioning of democracy in the country. The evaluation of the work of the National Assembly and local self-governments is at the same level, while only the work of the government is evaluated slightly better. A third of citizens positively assess the work of the government.

- *Regardless of whether it is an assessment of the functioning of democracy in Serbia or an evaluation of the work of individual institutions, more positive evaluations are given by older citizens, those with lower education, and those who live in rural areas.*
- *Positive evaluations are more often given by citizens who are more interested in politics, as well as by citizens who trust pro-government media and are inclined towards parties in power.*
- *Negative evaluations are more often given by more socially active citizens, those who believe in critical media and are in favour of the opposition parties.*



To what extent would you say you're satisfied with...



## Assessment of the work of the National Assembly and MPs

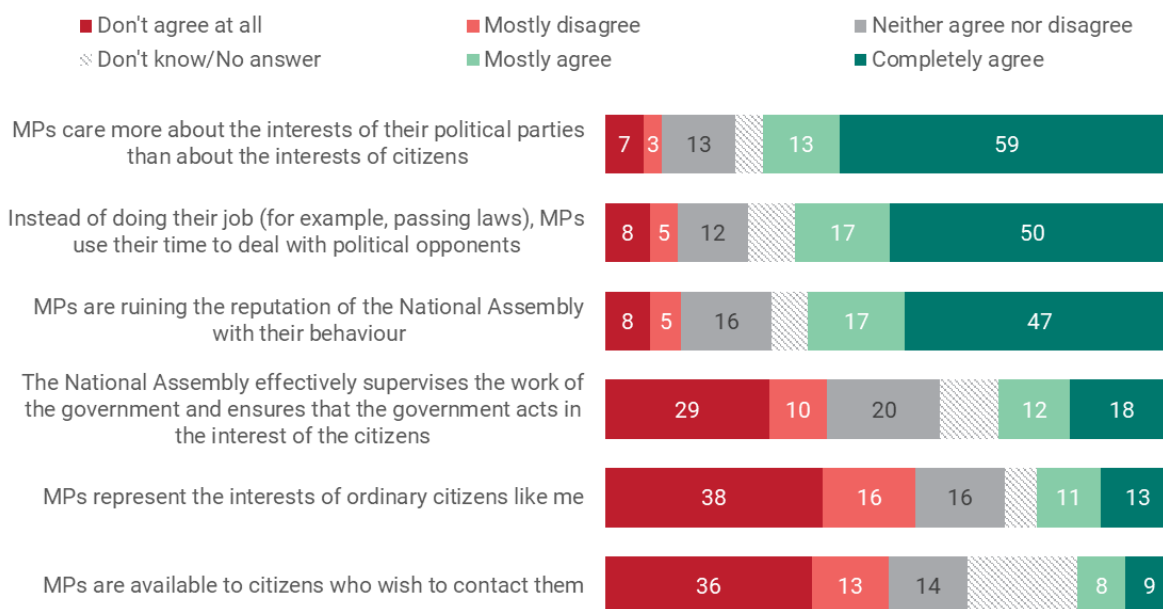
The majority of citizens have a very critical attitude towards the work of the National Assembly and MPs. Three-quarters of citizens think that MPs care about the interests of their parties, two-thirds think that they spend their time arguing between parties instead of doing their job, and that they ruin the reputation of the Parliament. At the same time, only one third of citizens believe that the Assembly does its job and efficiently oversees the government. Only a quarter believe that MPs represent the interests of ordinary citizens, and a fifth believe that MPs are accessible to citizens. It is important to note that this critical attitude towards the work of the Assembly and MPs is also widespread among citizens who are close to the parties in power.

In the last three years, there has been a noticeable increase in the citizens' conviction that MPs in the Assembly care more about the interests of their political parties, that MPs are ruining the reputation of the Assembly by their behaviour, that the Assembly does not efficiently monitor the work of the government and that MPs are not available to citizens.

- *The view that MPs care more about the interests of parties than about citizens, that they use their time to deal with opponents, and that they undermine the reputation of the Assembly is more prevalent among citizens with a higher level of education and those who live in urban areas. The same views are more often shared by citizens who assess that they have more knowledge about politics, as well as citizens who trust critical media and gravitate towards opposition parties.*
- *Elderly citizens (65 and over), those with primary education, those living in rural areas and those in a poor financial situation agree more often with the view that the*

*Assembly efficiently oversees the work of the government, that MPs take care of citizens' interests and that MPs are accessible to citizens.*

To what extent do you agree with the following statements...



## Perception of politics

One half of the citizens perceive politics as an arena in which all citizens should participate, while the other half believe that citizens should not have such an active role in society. As a matter of fact, a fifth of citizens believe that it is enough to vote in elections, while a quarter of Serbian citizens believe that politics should be left entirely to politicians.

- *Younger citizens, those who live in urban areas, more socially active citizens, those who are more interested in politics, as well as citizens who trust critical media and are in favour of the opposition parties see politics as a space for active participation of citizens to a greater extent.*

## Which understanding of politics in Serbia is closer to you?

- All citizens should always be actively engaged with politics
- It is enough for citizens to engage in politics by voting in elections
- Politicians should be the only ones to deal with politics, not ordinary citizens
- ⊗ Don't know / No answer



## Possibilities of influencing changes in society

Although the majority believes that all citizens should participate in politics, a significantly smaller percentage of citizens believe that personal involvement could lead to the desired changes in society. Only a third of the citizens believe in the possibility of changes, but still a slightly larger space for changes is seen at the local level.

- *Citizens who are interested in politics and who think they know a lot about politics more often believe that it is possible to influence changes through their involvement. Younger citizens are more convinced of changes at the local level.*

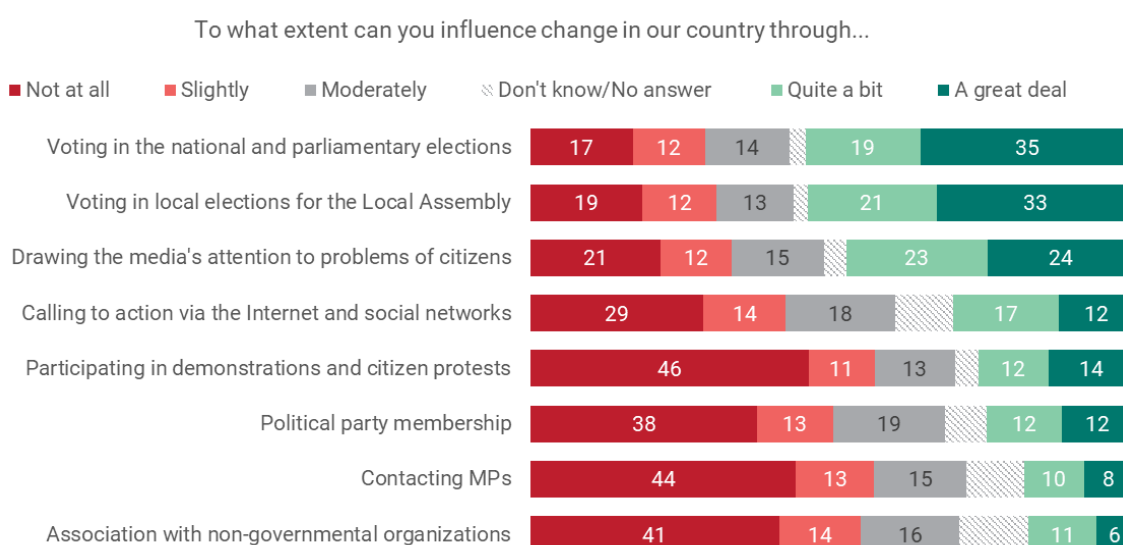
When considering the ways in which citizens believe they can influence changes in society, voting in the national, parliamentary and local elections is rated significantly more positively compared to other activities, such as organising actions via the Internet, participating in protests and demonstrations, or connecting with non-governmental organisations. Besides voting, the only more feasible way to influence changes in society, according to citizens, is to draw the media's attention to existing problems.

In the last three years, there has been a noticeable positive trend of belief in the efficiency of all examined ways to influence changes in the country.

- *Voting in elections and contacting members of parliament as a way to bring about change are more often noted by citizens who are closer to the parties in power. Citizens with primary school education and those who follow political events on*

television more often than others see voting in elections as a way to influence changes in the country.

- In contrast to voting in elections, drawing the media’s attention to citizens’ problems, organising actions via the Internet, participating in demonstrations and connecting with non-governmental organisations are more often mentioned by those who are closer to the opposition parties.
- Participating in demonstrations and protests and connecting with non-governmental organisations as a way to bring about changes are cited much more often by citizens who trust only critical media.
- A positive attitude towards media attention and association with NGOs is more characteristic of women than men.



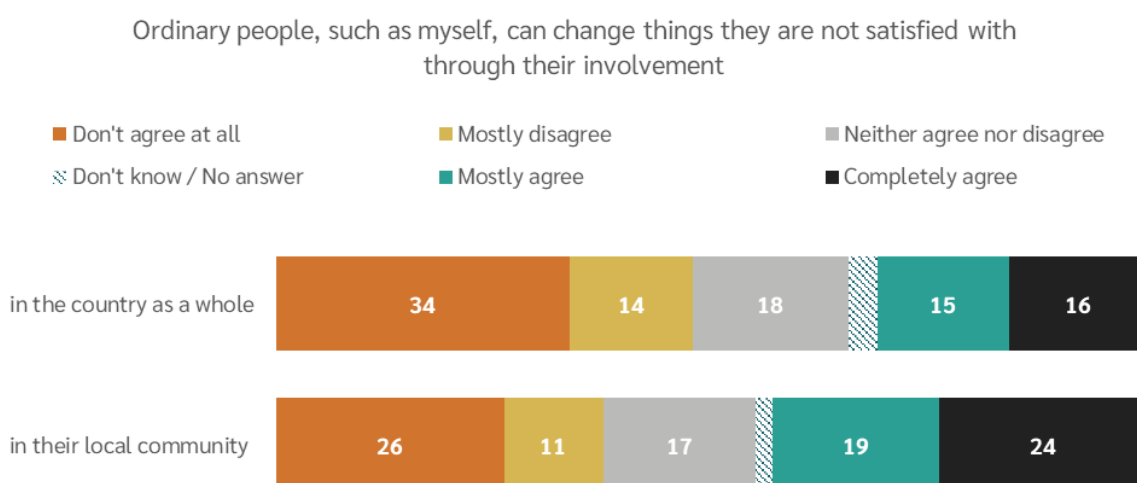
## Civic participation

In the last year, one in five citizens participated in actions or initiatives to solve a problem in the local community. Among the citizens who participated in solving problems in the local community, a half solved communal problems, and a third solved environmental problems. In the last three years, the share of citizens who state that they participated in an action in the last year has been decreasing. Given the coronavirus pandemic, this is not a surprising finding.

- Men, citizens with a higher level of education, as well as those who are close to either the party in power or the opposition party more often initiated and participated in actions or initiatives launched in the last year.

Four fifths of citizens did not participate in solving problems in the local community. The most frequent reason (for a third of citizens) was lack of time, while a fifth of citizens state that they are not interested, i.e., they do not believe that actions can achieve anything. The share of citizens who do not have confidence in such actions is decreasing year by year, but the number of those who underline lack of time or lack of desire to participate is growing. Although this seems like a negative finding, it should be kept in mind that it is much easier to convince people to allocate a part of their time to participate in a certain action, than to restore lost confidence in the efficiency of such actions in general.

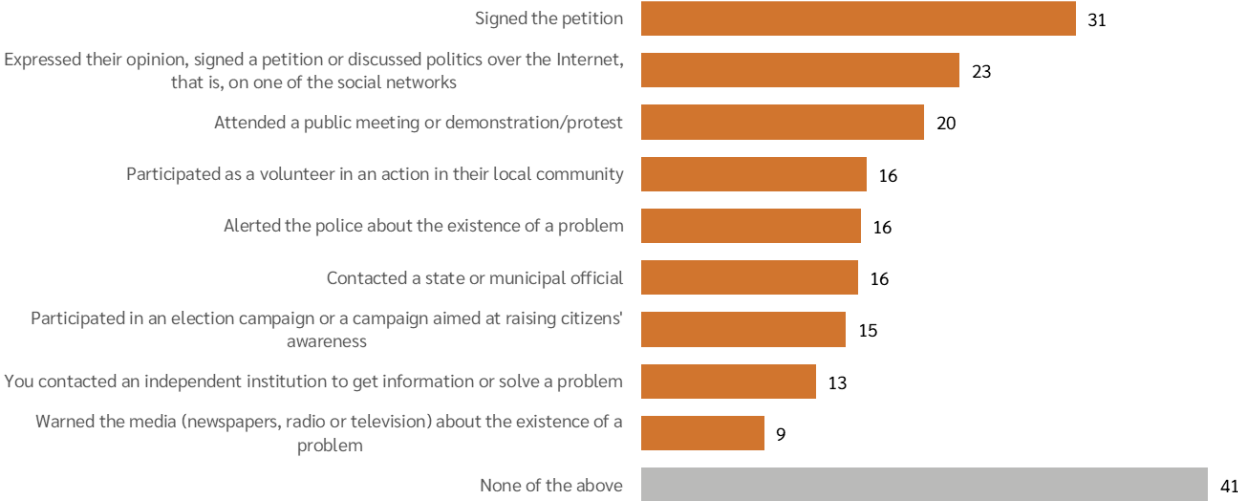
- *The youngest and oldest citizens, as well as those who consume pro-government media, more often point out that they are not interested in such actions. On the other hand, citizens who trust the critical media, as well as those who are closer to the opposition parties, emphasise to a greater extent that they do not believe that such actions can achieve anything.*



In the last two to three years, citizens have most often participated in actions such as petition signing, discussing politics over the Internet, but they also gathered in protests or demonstrations. It is interesting that drawing the media attention to existing problems is the type of action in which citizens were least often involved, even though a large number of citizens pointed out that drawing the media attention is one of the best ways to influence changes in the country.

- *The most common activities such as petition signing, discussing politics over the Internet, or attending a public meeting or demonstration/protest were significantly more often mentioned by citizens who trust critical media and those who lean towards the opposition parties.*

Have you undertaken any of the following activities in the last two to three years?

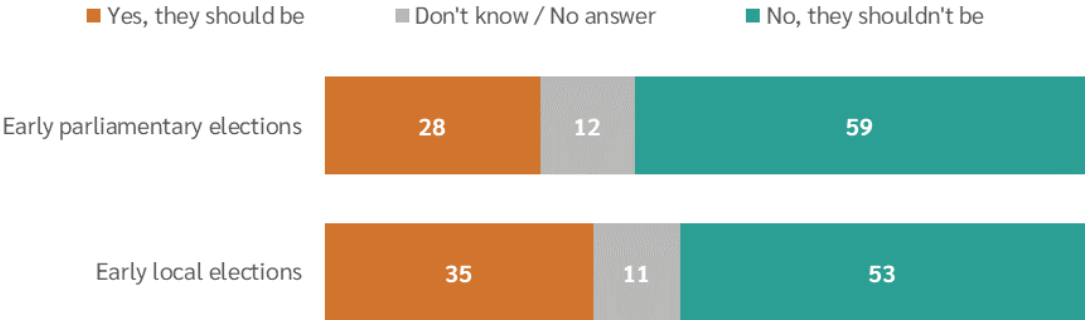


### Early elections

Regardless of whether the elections are parliamentary or local, the majority of citizens believe that the elections should not be held before the deadline set by law.

- *The holding of early parliamentary elections is more often supported by younger citizens from urban areas, as well as by citizens who believe in critical media and those who are closer to the opposition parties.*
- *On the contrary, citizens who are more interested, i.e. know more about politics and the state more often than others that parliamentary elections should not be held early.*

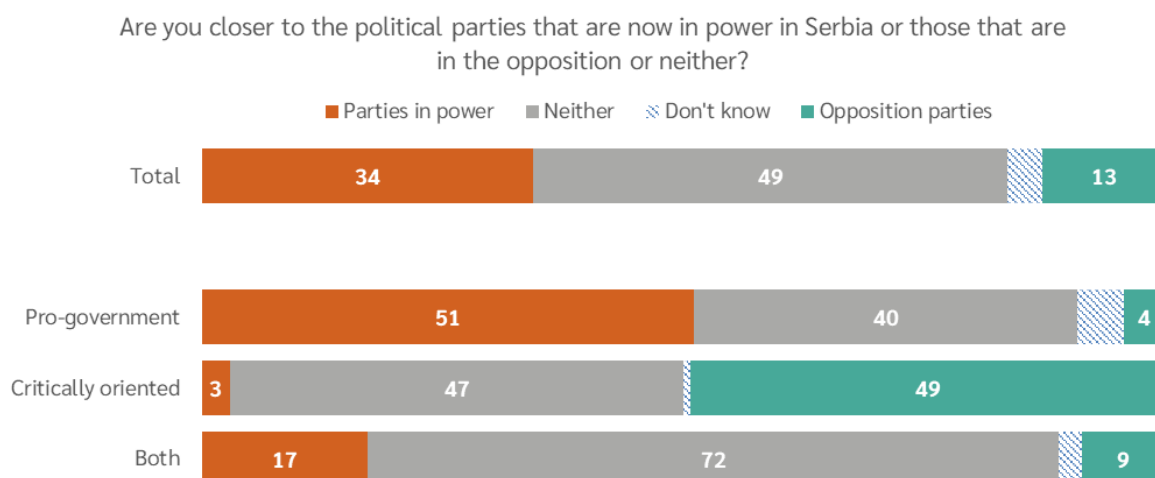
In your opinion, should early elections be held?



## Political preferences

A third of citizens state that they are closer to the parties in power, while 13% state that they are more inclined to the opposition parties. The largest portion of citizens (one in two) points out that they are not close to either option. Between 2020 and 2022, a trend of political mobilisation was noticeable, which lasted until the 2022 April elections, after which there was passivisation and a renewed increase in the share of politically indifferent citizens.

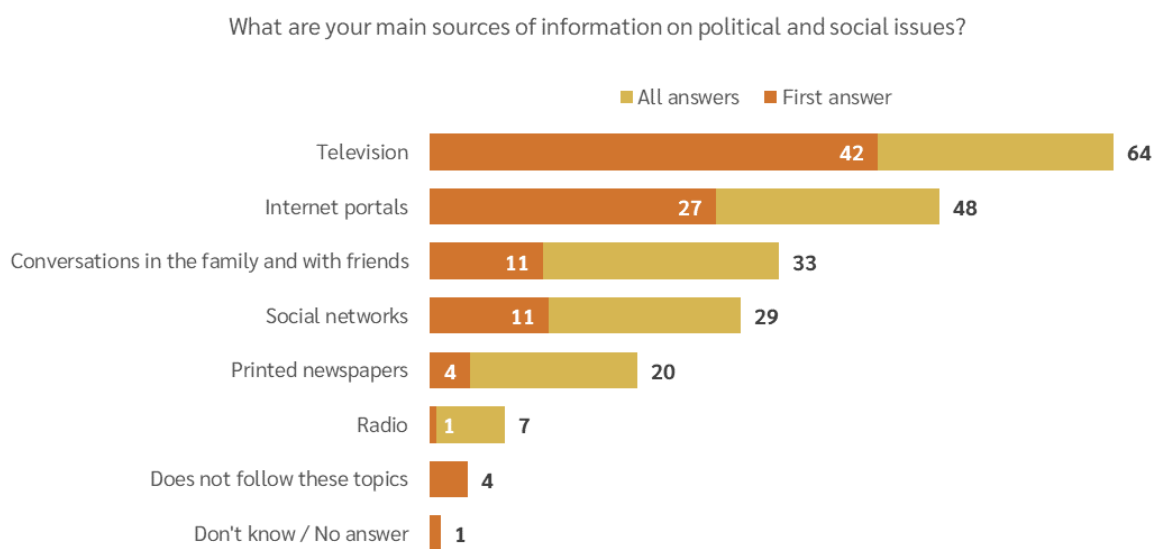
- *Elderly citizens often feel closer to parties in power, as well as those with a lower level of education, citizens living in rural areas and those with lower standard of living. Citizens who trust pro-government media are also more likely to favour parties in power.*
- *Citizens with a higher level of education and citizens from Belgrade and urban areas in general are more often inclined to the opposition parties. Citizens who state that they know a lot about politics, who trust critical media, who are more socially active and who follow the news via internet portals are more likely to favour the opposition parties.*



## The media

Television and Internet portals are by far the two most common sources of information about political and social events. Since 2020, there have been no major differences in the share of citizens who use certain sources of information on political and social topics.

- For keeping up with events, elderly citizens use television more often than the other media, just like those with lower education, citizens living in rural areas and those in a bad financial situation. Television as a source of information is more often used by citizens who are inclined towards parties in power.
- Internet portals are more often used by people with higher education, as well as those who are closer to the opposition parties. News via social networks is more often followed by the youngest citizens, as well as those who live in urban areas.

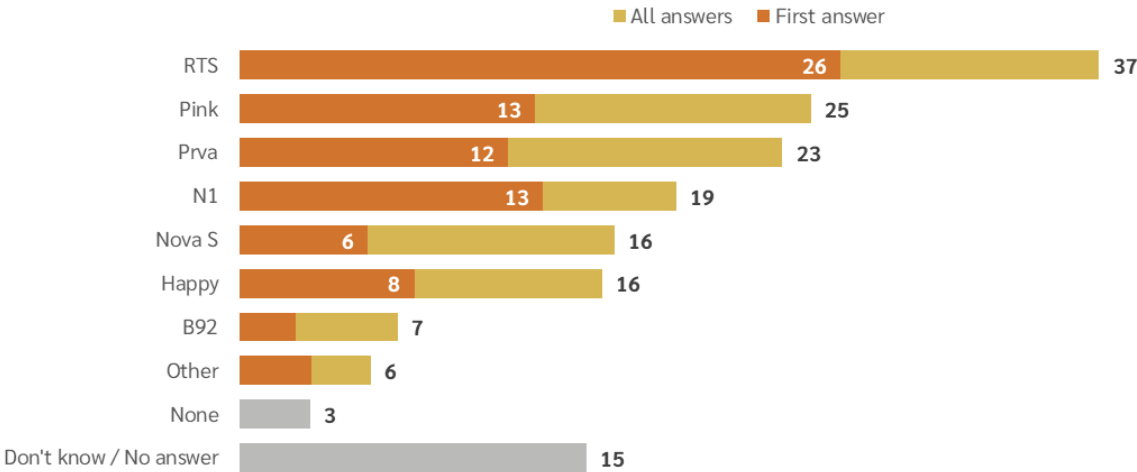


The majority of citizens still have the most trust in public broadcaster RTS. The trust enjoyed by individual television stations has been quite stable in the past two years and there have been no major changes.

- The oldest citizens, those from rural areas and citizens with lower education have more confidence in Pink and Happy. The same applies to citizens who state that they are interested in politics, but also to those who say that they do not know much about politics.
- Younger citizens, those from urban areas and those with higher education have more trust in N1 and Nova S. Citizens who state that they know a lot about politics, more socially active citizens, as well as citizens who are closer to the opposition parties have more trust in N1 and Nova S.



Please select the television you trust the most





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