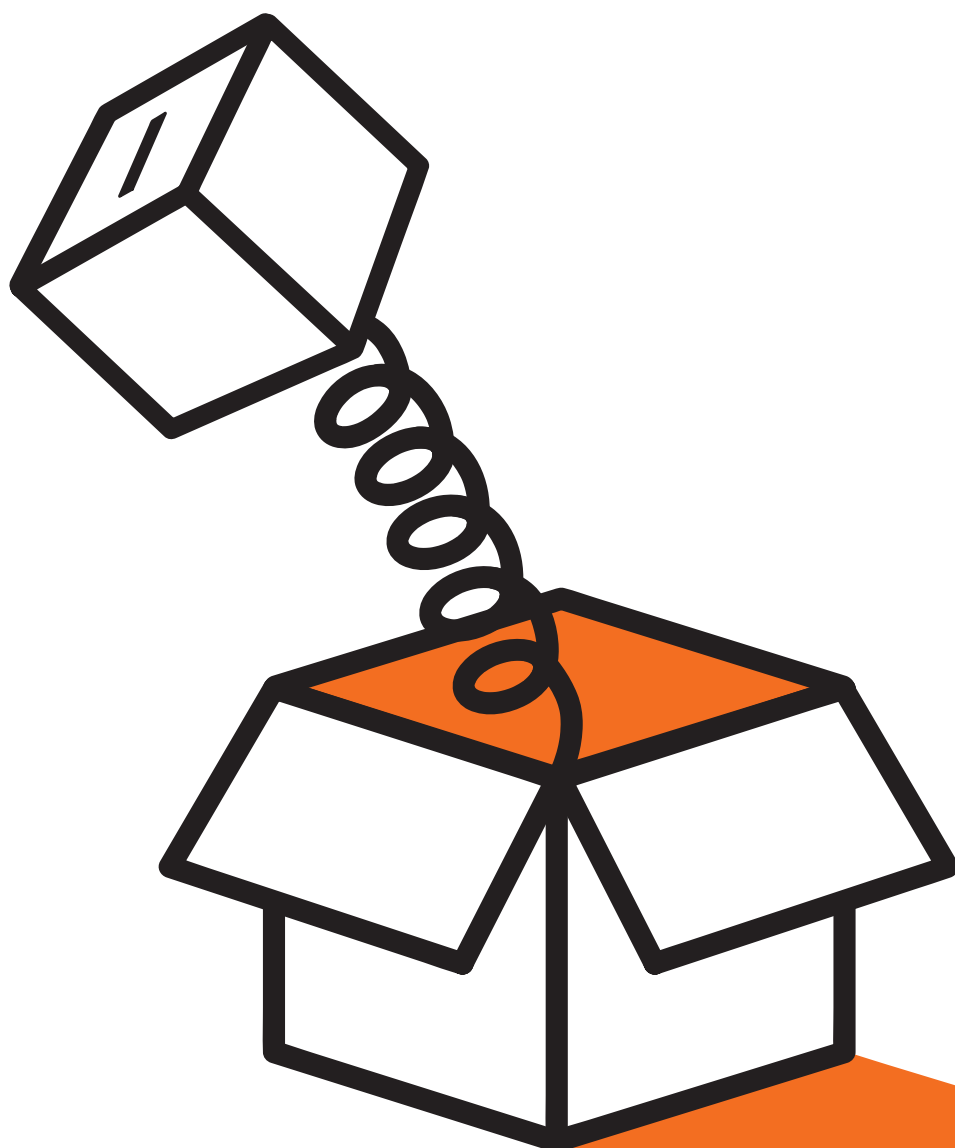


CRTA Election Observation Mission Report

Election Year 2026/2027

CAMPAIGNING WITHOUT THE PAPERWORK

March - September 2026





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CHAPTER 1

SUMMARY

Although regular presidential elections in Serbia are expected in the spring of 2027, throughout this pre-election year the ruling majority has kept society in a state of permanent uncertainty as to whether, when, and which snap elections - parliamentary or presidential - will be called.

CRTA Election Observation Mission assesses that over this period the parties in power made full use of state power and resources, and of their access to the media space, to deepen the inequality among political actors. By controlling the decision on whether, when and at what level elections would be held, the ruling majority secured a strategic advantage that was not available to other political actors.

The observation findings show that in a series of key areas the state and the ruling political party have become almost entirely identified with one another. The changes on the legislative, institutional and media fronts during the pre-election period, and their role in deepening the inequality between future electoral contestants, are deeply concerning.

Many previously observed trends - the misuse of public resources, media inequality, the establishment of direct or indirect political control over the media, the propagandistic discrediting of political opponents, clientelism and corruption, pressure on voters, the compromised state of the voter register, the weakness of institutions in protecting voters' rights and the integrity of the electoral process, and the influencing of citizens through one-off financial measures from the republic budget - reached critical proportions during the pre-election period.

Conditions of this kind produce a systemic advantage for the ruling party, call into question the fairness of political competition, and endanger the right of citizens to form and express their choice without pressure and with access to complete and truthful information.

Of particular concern is the new and serious politicisation of the state's security and repressive apparatus, deployed to intercept the communications of the government's political opponents. Independent expert examinations, both domestic and international, have confirmed that since the beginning of 2026 the telephones of at least 14 members

of the Student Movement and of the opposition parliamentary party the Green-Left Front were infected with the controversial Pegasus spyware.

This aggressive surveillance must also be viewed in the context of the ongoing media campaign surrounding the "colour revolution", raising concerns that it represents a politically motivated threat to electoral competition rather than measures justified under the Constitution and the law. Since the beginning of the year, CRTA observers have recorded more than 1,300 manipulative headlines in the opening segments of the main television news programmes and on newspaper front pages alone, almost half of them aimed at discrediting political opponents, with an intensification in August.

This campaign is further encouraged by irresponsible statements from the most senior government officials - including the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić - to the effect that political opponents will incite violence on election day. Such statements create an atmosphere of fear, deepen inequality ahead of the coming campaign, and undermine citizens' confidence in electoral integrity and in the very institutions whose role is to protect the elections and citizens from scenarios of this kind.

Many political actors targeted by these discrediting campaigns therefore did not respond to President Vučić's parallel calls for social and political dialogue, which he made through the media during the observation period. Those invitations resulted only in talks with the parties of the ruling coalition. Dialogue of this kind is not a substantive response to the social and political crisis, but another in a series of political tactics.

There have also been significant changes in the judiciary, as well as personnel changes in the police, which raise questions about the risk of deepening political influence in these institutions. During this period the criminal complaint against unidentified persons who on election day in 2023 attacked and injured CRTA observers in the yard of a local police station was dismissed for lack of evidence.

The government presented the summer amendments to the electoral laws, to the Law on Prevention of Corruption and to the Law on Financing of Political Activities as the fulfilment of ODIHR's recommendations. CRTA Election Observation Mission assesses that those amendments created the conditions for eight of the 54 recommendations from the 2023 and 2024 elections to be fulfilled - of which only one is a priority recommendation. It concerns the provision governing officials' public appearances during the campaign, whose real effects will only be capable of assessment in practice.

The adopted amendments bring limited improvements but do not resolve the chronic problems, while some of the provisions may further deepen the inequality between actors. The limit on permitted annual donations by natural persons to political actors was re-

duced sixfold. The threshold for tax control was also lowered. New, extra-parliamentary actors have thereby been placed in an unequal position relative to parliamentary parties, which have additional sources of income at their disposal - including budget funds and the possibility of borrowing. The introduction of a cap on election campaign expenditure is a positive step, but the maximum permitted amount of six million euros has been set at the level of the average spending of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) at parliamentary elections from 2016 to 2023 - a sum that other electoral contestants have so far found unattainable. Mandatory training for polling board members will be a condition for their appointment from January 2028 and will not apply to the coming elections. The new rule under which a single voter may support the candidacies of several candidate lists opens space for the tactical multiplication of the number of candidate lists.

The ruling coalition plans to increase its advantage in the financing of both regular operations and the election campaign still further, through extraordinary payments from the republic budget. A practice familiar from earlier elections is now without precedent. Through just two of the several announced one-off financial measures, the government will pay out almost one billion euros in cash to the citizens of Serbia. This sum is double each of the comparable packages disbursed ahead of the 2022 and the 2023 election campaigns, and it will be paid out during the election campaign itself if election day falls on 25 October. The prevalence of a clientelistic approach to voters in this pre-election period is also indicated by the fact that every seventh of all the SNS activities CRTA Election Observation Mission recorded across Serbia had elements of clientelism - from the distribution of parcels and major household appliances to other material benefits.

Because the competent institutions spent months delaying, obstructing and withholding access to the necessary data, no comprehensive audit capable of confirming the accuracy and integrity of the voter register will be carried out by the legal deadline of 28 October. The upcoming elections will therefore be yet another election in Serbia held without a prior audit of the voter register. In August 2026, CRTA Election Observation Mission documented serious indications that the SNS had been unlawfully holding and collecting the personal data of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who also hold Serbian citizenship, in order to register them to vote abroad outside the law and before any elections had been called.

Should snap elections be called at this moment, they will be met by a complete absence of media regulation. The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) has been non-functional for 22 months, and there is still no end in sight to the political deadlock that has left the REM Council without an elected president and without the ability to take decisions.

In parallel with the REM deadlock and the alarming spread of problematic content in the

media, over the past eight months CRTA has recorded at least nine major interventions in the media market, in editorial policy and in the programming line-ups of telecommunications operators. All these changes share a common feature: a further concentration of the media space in the hands of owners close to the ruling majority, preferential treatment for media that favour the ruling party, and the gradual exclusion of operators and channels publicly regarded as critical of the government. Between January and September 2026 the following took place: (1) the sale of the media arm of United Group's business; (2) the further expansion of Telekom Serbia in the cable operator market; (3) the takeover of the cable operator SBB; (4) the change of leadership and editorial management at the public media service Radio Television of Serbia (RTS); (5) the sale of local television channels; (6) the sale and establishment of new local online portals; (7) the takeover of Total TV by Telekom Serbia and the integration of its subscribers into Telekom's satellite platform, with the removal of certain channels, including N1 and Nova; (8) a pilot project through which the channel line-up of an unknown number of Yetel subscribers was changed by switching off certain channels, including N1 and Nova S, compensated by a reduction in their bills; and (9) the six-month opening of 30 television channels for free viewing via aerial, among them Informer TV, Kurir TV, Blic TV, K1 and Euronews Serbia, without licences for that coverage.

Monitoring of RTS's main news programme *Dnevnik 2* showed a further widening of the gap in the time devoted to actors of the government and of the opposition: the ruling majority receives 96 per cent of that time and the opposition just 4 per cent. President Aleksandar Vučić was by far the most present political figure in *Dnevnik 2* between April and August 2026 - he received more than half of the total time devoted to all political actors, which is almost four times his presence in *Dnevnik 2* during the pre-election period and the campaign for the 2022 presidential elections. The time devoted to positive reporting about President Vučić was more than 11 times longer than in 2022, and the share of positive tone rose from 18 to 51 per cent.

Since the beginning of the year President Vučić has addressed the public through television cameras more than in the same period in previous years - on average more than once a day. Between January and the end of August, 371 addresses were recorded, almost a third of them in August alone. By way of comparison, the holder of the nominally strongest executive position in Serbia, Prime Minister Đuro Macut, had given just nine interviews and television appearances by the day the proposal to dissolve the National Assembly was publicly submitted, on 7 September.

President Vučić's already extensive presence in the public sphere was further amplified by a parallel nationwide tour, in the course of which his addresses frequently went beyond the powers of the President of the Republic, dealt with matters falling within the

competence of the Government of Serbia and its ministries, and spoke negatively about political opponents. It also remains unclear who organised the events that made up the tour - the state or a political party - and whether the competent institutions, including the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, are exercising oversight of compliance with the law.

These phenomena, which encourage the erasure of the line between the state and the party, are not a set of isolated activities by individual actors: this is a pattern, visible through the volume of the data and in other fields as well. In the last four months alone, CRTA Election Observation Mission recorded more than 1,200 activities of senior state officials, of which 18 per cent contained elements of the misuse of public resources and public office. The line between the institutions and the party was deliberately blurred: state officials appeared at openings, health campaigns and household visits which were formally not party rallies but which carried recognisable promotional content - banners, slogans and T-shirts bearing the name of the announced candidate list, "United Serbia".

CRTA formalised specific elements of a possible breach of the law through an initiative submitted to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption concerning the "United Serbia" rally in Užice on 29 August. On that occasion, President Vučić urged citizens to vote for the list and spoke about securing an election victory. CRTA asked the Agency to establish whether the Law on Financing of Political Activities had been breached, on the suspicion that funds intended for the party's regular operations were used for electoral activities before a dedicated account had been opened - an account which by law is opened only after the elections are called. Further questions of lawfulness are raised by the organised distribution of the President's letter to pensioners and recipients of social benefits through the Republic Fund for Pension and Health Insurance and Post of Serbia, in the course of which, according to the mission's findings, personal data were collected from citizens - telephone numbers and signatures - without any clearly stated purpose or retention period. Besides this initiative, CRTA also submitted seven complaints to the Agency; as of the publication of this report their outcomes are unknown.

Set against the coordinated institutional and party activity of those in power, the most organised new actor to emerge in the opposition space is the Student Movement, whose activities were recorded in half of the towns and municipalities in Serbia. The movement has built its own field infrastructure (the "A Student in Every Village" campaign, training for polling board members) and is seeking to connect with broader social groups. It is precisely that visibility that also makes it the most exposed target: it is the most negatively portrayed actor on RTS (58 per cent negative tone), and its representatives and supporters face physical attacks and pressure without an adequate police response (Mionica, Bor). The strongest coalition at the previous parliamentary elections, Serbia Against Vi-

olence, did not act as a unified bloc during this period, because its member parties do not share the same positions on the coming elections - some parties support the Student List, some are forming the Platform for a European Serbia, some are forming the "People's Serbia" alliance, and some are running independently. Even so, the activities of these opposition parties were recorded in at least 50 municipalities, though predominantly as localised initiatives.

From May to September, on average almost every other day saw one verbal or physical incident connected with citizens' political engagement in local communities. The most dramatic incident occurred in Užice on 29 August, ahead of the SNS's rally in that city. The clash broke out when the rally's stewards attempted to move citizens out of a café's outdoor seating area on Partizan Square, after which several supporters of the government physically attacked the assembled citizens. At least two people were injured. Allegations were made publicly that members of the police were among the attackers, but their identity and status had not been established by the time this report was published.

Taking into account that the pre-election environment is marked by the erasure of the line between the state and the party, which deepens already familiar practices of misusing public resources and institutions; that a culture of impunity has led to new breaches and to the disregard of rules; that the inflammatory rhetoric of public officials and of the most influential media goes beyond the heat of political contest and encourages intolerance towards political opponents; that the most senior state representatives are persuading the public that their opponents want the outcome of election day to be violence, together with the circumstance of rising violence between opposing sides during the pre-election period; the fact that the absence of pluralism in the media has deepened; that serious allegations of pressure on citizens have been recorded, as have allegations of the misuse of official records containing citizens' personal data; that the audit of the voter register will not be carried out; and that there are new suspicions of manipulation of the voter register - all of which endangers the integrity of, and citizens' confidence in, the coming elections - CRTA Election Observation Mission calls on:

- *state institutions and public officials not to take part in promoting inflammatory rhetoric and encouraging an atmosphere of fear, but to secure safe conditions for holding free and fair elections and to give reasoned answers to all doubts about the integrity of the electoral process;*
- *parties, electoral contestants, the media and other participants in public life to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and from spreading rumours that further undermine citizens' confidence in the electoral process and in the elections;*
- *the Agency for Prevention of Corruption to initiate oversight, as a matter of urgency, of*

political parties suspected of having run an election campaign before elections were called and of having spent funds intended for regular operations for purposes other than intended; to align its methodology for observing the application of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and the Law on Financing of Political Activities with the conditions in which the campaign is being conducted; and to inform the public actively about the steps it is taking ex officio;

- the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of the Interior and other bodies of significance for the Unified Voter Register to ensure, without further delay, that the Commission for the Audit, Verification and Control of the Accuracy and Updating of the Voter Register has the conditions for an effective audit, including searchable and technically usable access to the source records and to the relevant historical and administrative data, and the possibility of an appropriate IT and information-security examination of the system;*
- the competent institutions to consider the findings and recommendations of the Commission's first report, expected at the end of October 2026, as a matter of urgency, and to implement them as a priority;*
- the competent prosecution office and the Administrative Inspectorate to examine, urgently and effectively, the documented and publicly reported suspicions of abuses connected with the voter register, including possible fictitious residence registrations, organised voter migration, abuses of citizenship procedures and possible unauthorised use of official data, and to inform the public accordingly;*
- the competent prosecution office to examine the allegations of election-related criminal offences, including to investigate the recorded cases of pressure on voters and the suspicions of misuse of citizens' personal data, and to inform the public of its findings and of the outcome of proceedings;*
- Radio Television of Serbia, in addition to ensuring full equality for electoral contestants and reporting on all subjects on which there is a public interest in being informed, also to fulfil the educational function it has as a public media service, by producing content that educates citizens about elections and that encourages citizens' participation in democratic processes and in political life;*
- the media to ensure equality for electoral contestants in their programming and to refrain from unethical reporting on electoral candidates;*
- the professional service of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, in the circumstances of the political deadlock in the REM Council, to take steps without delay to make its work transparent and to ensure the capacity to resolve all the open cases left over from the almost two years in which the REM Council did not exist, and to pre-*

pare to consider cases of breaches of the law before and during the election campaign, so that draft decisions are ready for adoption once the REM Council is constituted.



CHAPTER 2

KEY FEATURES

The campaign before the campaign

- *CRTA submitted an initiative to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption (Article 42 of the Law on Financing of Political Activities) for oversight of the SNS over the "United Serbia" rally in Užice, on the suspicion that it spent election campaign funds for purposes other than intended before the elections had been called.*
- *More than 1,200 activities of senior state officials in four months (May to August), 18% of them with elements of the misuse of public resources; President Vučić the most active.*
- *Almost one billion euros in one-off state payments announced through just two measures - double each of the packages disbursed ahead of the 2022 and the 2023 elections.*
- *Every seventh recorded activity of the SNS had elements of clientelism.*

Security and threats

- *The telephones of at least 14 members of the Student Movement and the Green-Left Front were infected with Pegasus spyware.*
- *More than 1,300 manipulative headlines since the beginning of the year, almost half of them aimed at discrediting political opponents.*
- *The Speaker of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, publicly attributed to students the intention of drawing up lists for "shooting, hanging and head-shaving" - CRTA filed a criminal complaint for racial and other discrimination.*
- *An incident - a threat, a clash or an attack - recorded on almost every other day.*

The legislative framework

- *Of the 54 ODIHR recommendations from 2023 and 2024, the conditions were created for 8 to be fulfilled (only 1 of them a priority recommendation) and 20 partially.*
- *The limit on donations by natural persons was reduced sixfold; the campaign expenditure limit (six million euros) was set at the level of the SNS's average spending between 2016 and 2023.*
- *The Republic Electoral Commission did not adopt the instruction on training for polling boards in time, but did order 30,000 voting booths under an urgent procedure before the elections were called, without a clear legal basis for them.*

Institutions

- *The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) has been deadlocked for 22 months - not a single decision has been taken since 2024.*
- *The High Prosecutorial Council is deadlocked as well - like the REM Council, it can neither elect a president nor take decisions, and so does not fulfil the mandate the law prescribes for it.*
- *Of the 53 criminal complaints CRTA has filed in connection with elections since 2023: 16 were dismissed and 17 are in pre-investigation proceedings, including the attack on observers in Odžaci in 2023, dismissed after two and a half years.*
- *Ministry of the Interior: the leadership of at least 6 key units was replaced and more than 60 experienced police officers were retired.*

The voter register

- *The audit will not be completed by the legal deadline of 28 October - the Commission still has no full access to the source records.*
- *New: it was documented that the SNS is unlawfully collecting the data of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who hold Serbian citizenship, in order to register them to vote abroad outside the prescribed procedure; in one case this covered more than 1,000 people.*

The media

- *9 major changes in the media market between January and September, including the*

removal of N1 and Nova from the packages of some Yettel subscribers and Telekom's free opening of around 30 channels via aerial, among them media predominantly favourable to the government.

- *RTS: the government received 96% of the time against 4% for the opposition; President Vučić received more than 50% of the total time devoted to political actors and almost four times as much time as during the 2022 presidential campaign.*
- *Vučić alone made 371 live addresses in the media, almost a third of them in August.*

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Since the 2023 parliamentary elections, the political landscape in Serbia has changed considerably: a new political actor has emerged - the Student Movement - with a demonstrated capacity to mobilise broad public support and to match the ruling coalition.¹ The "Students in Blockade", who blocked universities in Serbia from December 2024 until mid-2025,² in May 2025 called for snap elections to be held, after the government had spent six months failing to meet their demands despite the largest protests in the history of Serbia.

Early elections are not an exception in Serbia. Four of the last five parliamentary elections were snap, and with parliamentary, presidential and local cycles alternating, the country has been in, what amounts to, a continuous pre-election campaign for fifteen years. For the ruling majority, snap elections have become a routine instrument - a way of renewing and reconfirming its mandate at a moment of its own choosing. Consistent with that pattern, in late 2024 and early 2025, at the very outset of the protests, the authorities again raised the possibility of elections, and even of an advisory referendum on confidence in the President; the Government resigned in January 2025.

This time, however, the pattern did not repeat. Although snap elections had long been the instrument through which the authorities picked a favourable moment, under the new circumstances they judged that elections would bring more risk than benefit. In April 2025 a new Government of Serbia was elected, headed by the politically anonymous Prime Minister Đuro Macut. Instead of channelling the political crisis into elections, as it had previously done, the ruling majority chose delay and buying of time - a significant change of strategy.

¹ The "Students in Blockade" organised some of the largest public gatherings in Serbia: Belgrade, 22 December 2024 (100,000 people, Public Assemblies Archive, <https://link.crt.a.rs/w3>); Belgrade, 15 March 2025 (275,000-325,000, <https://link.crt.a.rs/w6>); Novi Sad, 1 November 2025 (110,000, <https://link.crt.a.rs/w5>); Belgrade, 23 May 2026 (180,000 people, <https://link.crt.a.rs/w4>).

² The university blockades and the student protests began after 16 people lost their lives when the canopy of the recently renovated railway station in Novi Sad collapsed on 1 November 2024. <https://link.crt.a.rs/wn>

Three phenomena that decisively shape the context

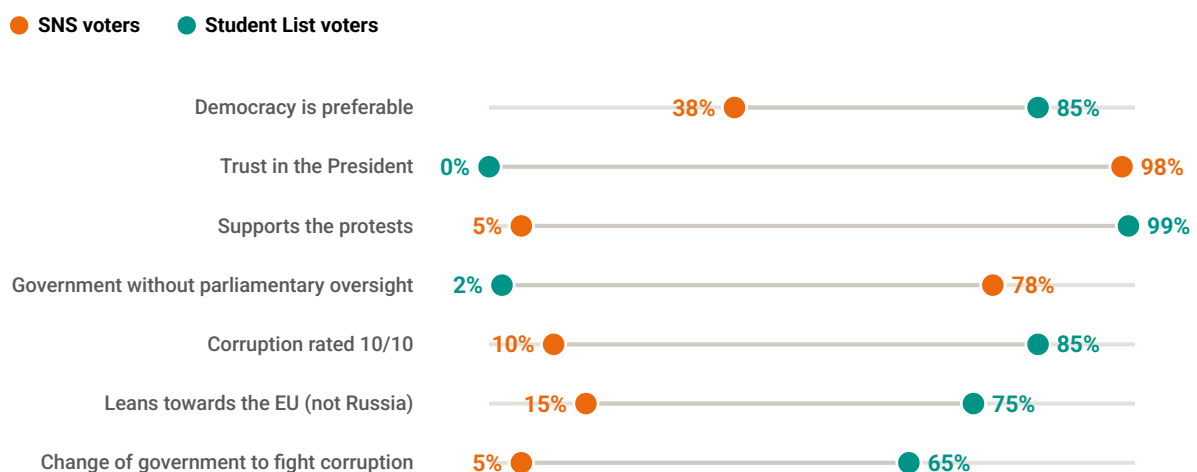
The social and political context in Serbia ahead of the announced elections is marked by three phenomena that have long been present but have grown significantly over the past two years: deep polarisation in society, the threat of violence, and the equating of the state with the ruling party.

Polarisation

The clear divisions in society across a range of questions are seen most sharply through two prisms: which political actor citizens support, and which media they follow.

Two Serbias, by political preference

Share of citizens holding each view, by the list they vote for



Source: CRTA / Stanford DAL survey, June 2026 · face-to-face · n=2,324 · values = share holding the view

Graphic 1

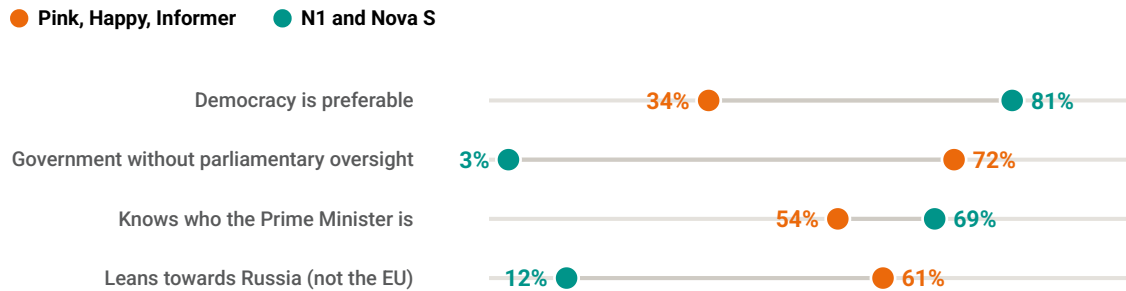
Data from CRTA's June public opinion survey³ indicate that the poles in society cluster clearly around two centres of gravity - the media people follow and the political option they support. SNS voters follow pro-government media, have relatively high trust in institutions, a low degree of attachment to democracy, and lean far more towards Russia than towards the European Union.

On the other side, citizens who identify as supporters of the Student List hold, by a convincing majority, that democracy is the best form of government, identify corruption as

³ CRTA, CRTA-Stanford public opinion survey, June 2026, <https://link.cрта.rs/wo>

Two information worlds, by media

Share of citizens holding each view, by the media they follow



Source: CRTA / Stanford DAL survey, June 2026 · face-to-face · n=2,324 · values = share holding the view

Graphic 2

the country's greatest problem, and get their information from independent media - which are themselves in the process of changing ownership.⁴

Social dialogue

The division in society is inseparably bound up with the absence of political and institutional dialogue. President Vučić has issued several invitations to dialogue, including consultations with political parties in April 2026 on snap elections and on the country's foreign policy direction. None of those invitations, however, was received favourably on the other side of the political spectrum: most opposition parties and the Student Movement were not part of those talks. Some parties and parliamentary groups have been boycotting the work of the National Assembly for more than a year (DS, DSS).

Set against these sporadic invitations to dialogue, Government officials and pro-government media have been running a continuous campaign to discredit those who hold different views. Between January and August 2026, CRTA's media monitoring recorded more than 600 manipulative headlines discrediting those who hold different views - and that is counting only the lead items in the main television news programmes and the front pages of newspapers. The dramatically narrowed space for dialogue is also reflected in the chronic absence of pluralism in the most influential media and at the public broadcaster, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS). Through three years of monitoring pluralism in the country's most-watched evening news programme - RTS's *Dnevnik 2* - CRTA established that the ratio of average airtime given to political representatives of the govern-

⁴ On the well-founded assumption that the new ownership structure will lead to a turn in editorial policy; see further the chapter on the media.

ment and of the opposition stood at 91 per cent to 9 per cent over the period from 2022 to 2024.

Polarisation and the impossibility of consensus are also visible in several important bodies whose members are elected from different constituencies, such as the High Prosecutorial Council⁵ and the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM),⁶ which are unable either to elect a president or to adopt decisions, and therefore do not discharge the mandate the law assigns them.

The threat of violence

Since the protests began in 2024, violence in public space has become markedly more frequent - at protests and public gatherings, and even in the course of election day at local elections across Serbia. The university blockades from which the Student Movement emerged were a response to a physical attack by local officials of the ruling party on a silent vigil⁷ held in tribute to the victims of the canopy collapse. Violence also accompanied the large protests: clashes between police and citizens occurred, as a rule, after the organisers had declared the protest over and asked participants to disperse peacefully. Cases of police brutality⁸ and excessive use of force,⁹ documented in video recordings¹⁰ and in citizens' testimonies,¹¹ have not been prosecuted.

The "sound cannon" case - that is, the alleged use of an acoustic device against citizens who were silently paying tribute to the victims during the Belgrade protest that drew more than 300,000 people in March 2025. Civil society organisations collected more than 4,000 citizens' testimonies¹² describing what people experienced; experts from Earshot concluded, on the basis of forensic analysis¹³ and interviews with witnesses and victims, that an LRAD had most probably been used against those present. Government officials initially denied possessing an LRAD; they then maintained that it had not been "unpacked",¹⁴ and after images of LRAD devices mounted on police vehicles that day were made pub-

5 Savremena politika (28 April 2026) „Ponovo nije izabran predsednik Visokog saveta tužilaštva”, <https://link.crt.rs/wb>

6 Cenzolovka (1 September 2026) „Ni treći put predsednik Saveta REM-a nije izabran: Ko koga vuče za nos i isteruje mak na konac?”, <https://link.crt.rs/wp>

7 Radio Slobodna Evropa (16 June 2025) „I treći učesnik napada na studente u Beogradu priznao krivicu”, <https://link.crt.rs/wq>

8 BBC News na srpskom (14 August 2025) „Neredi u Srbiji: Policija pretukla momka u Valjevu, demolirane prostorije SNS”, <https://link.crt.rs/we>

9 Radio Slobodna Evropa (21 August 2025) „Studentkinja o pretnji policajca silovanjem na protestima: Pitala sam ga - 'Šta pričate Vi'”, <https://link.crt.rs/wg>

10 N1 (15 August 2025) „Koja je ovo 'mera': Javnost šokirana snimkom uhapšenih mladića koji kleče ispred zida”, <https://link.crt.rs/wf>

11 „Svedočanstva policijske brutalnosti”, database of citizens' testimonies, <https://link.crt.rs/wh>

lic, they maintained that it had not been deployed.¹⁵ More than a year after the event, the Higher Public Prosecution Office began questioning individuals who had claimed that the sound cannon was used, on the argument that in doing so they had committed an offence against the constitutional order. One indictment has been filed, against the analyst Aleksandar Radić,¹⁶ who was the first to speak publicly about the sound cannon. In April 2025, acting on an application by 47 citizens of Serbia, the European Court of Human Rights issued an interim measure¹⁷ requiring Serbia to refrain, for the time being, from using acoustic devices to control assembled citizens.

Government representatives and officials of the ruling party consistently blame the violence on "blokaderi" (blockaders) - the label the government applies to demonstrators - that is, on citizens of an opposition disposition. The claim of a "violent seizure of power" and of a "colour revolution" is advanced almost daily (around 10,000 mentions of a colour revolution on the most-visited news portals in 2025, and around 1,900 in 2026). Several dozen people¹⁸ have been charged with criminal offences against the constitutional order, largely on the basis of intercepted meetings, intercepted messages or statements made in the media. Government officials consistently accuse¹⁹ "foreign powers and intelligence services" of supporting, financing or instigating a "colour revolution",²⁰ with the implication that Western European countries and Croatia are meant. In this narrative of a "colour revolution", the Serbian authorities receive public backing from the Russian intelligence service²¹ and from Russian officials.²²

12 „Svedočanstva zvučnog napada“, database of citizens' testimonies on the events of 15 March 2025, <https://link.crtar.rs/wr>

13 Earshot (6 June 2025) "Sonic Attack on a Silent Vigil", <https://link.crtar.rs/wi>

14 Danas (18 March 2025) „Ivica Dačić za Danas: Prvobitna izjava da MUP nema zvučni top je bila nespretna“, <https://link.crtar.rs/wj>

15 Radio Slobodna Evropa (19 March 2025) „Od Srbija nema 'zvučni top', do Srbija ima 'zvučni top': Hronologija kontradiktornih izjava“, <https://link.crtar.rs/wk>

16 CRTA Plus (17 July 2026) „Vojni analitičar optužen zbog tvrdnji o zvučnom topu, zatražena potraga pošto je napustio Srbiju“, <https://link.crtar.rs/wl>

17 CRTA (30 April 2025) „Evropski sud za ljudska prava naložio Srbiji da se uzdrži od upotrebe zvučnih uređaja za kontrolu okupljenih građana“, <https://link.crtar.rs/w7>

18 Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights - YUCOM (16 July 2025) „Optužba za nasilno rušenje ustavnog poretka u službi obračuna s političkim protivnicima?“, <https://link.crtar.rs/w8>

19 Euronews Srbija (7 January 2026) „Vučić: Nemamo suštinsku opoziciju, sve kontrolišu strani centri moći“, <https://link.crtar.rs/xp>

20 Istinomer (5 November 2025) „Nisam proglasio pobjedu nad 'obojenom revolucijom“, assessment of a statement by Aleksandar Vučić, <https://link.crtar.rs/ws>

21 Radio Slobodna Evropa (15 September 2025) „Ruska obaveštajna služba optužuje EU da stoji iza protesta i targetira medije u Srbiji“, <https://link.crtar.rs/wa>

22 RT Balkan (30 June 2025) „Kremlj: Mogući tragovi obojene revolucije u Srbiji, imamo poverenja u Beograd“, <https://link.crtar.rs/w9>

The equating of the state with the ruling party

Separation between the state and the party has long been one of ODIHR's priority recommendations.²³ Criticism directed at President Vučić or at the SNS is frequently construed as an attack on the state. Vučić often repeats that a change of government would bring down the state itself.

Officials of the ruling party have maintained from the outset that the student and citizens' protests endanger the security and constitutional order of Serbia. Alongside condemnation of the demonstrators and of those allegedly supporting them from abroad, there has also been frequent criticism of those parts of the institutions that did not act with the same intensity - above all in the police, the public prosecution and the judiciary.

The replacement of almost the entire leadership of the Serbian police in late 2025 and early 2026 followed a televised address by President Vučić in which he explained that only two police units had been prepared to "preserve public order and peace" at the protest of 15 March in Belgrade. Members of those two units - units that have themselves frequently been accused publicly of excessive use of force - went on to take key posts²⁴ in the Criminal Police Directorate and in other police units.

After the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime opened proceedings concerning the General Staff building in central Belgrade, in which one of the accused is Minister Nikola Selaković, SNS proposed amendments to the judicial laws that seriously curtail the independence of the courts and the autonomy of the public prosecution. The MP who introduced the legislation, Uglješa Mrdić of SNS - hence the name "Mrdić laws" - set out the reasons for it on K1 television in the following words:²⁵ "Because they started arresting ministers from SNS. Because in the end they wanted to arrest President Vučić, let us be open about it. Because they would have started arresting people. They wanted to carry the colour revolution through to the end, to bring down the state."

²³ Priority recommendation no. 1, 2024 local elections: "In line with OSCE commitments, measures should be taken to ensure the separation of the state and the party, as well as the impartiality of the public administration during the campaign." Priority recommendation no. 5, 2023 parliamentary elections: "The law should ensure a clear separation between public office and the campaign activities of office holders. The authorities should take measures to prevent the misuse of office and state resources, and should address all violations proactively through proportionate and dissuasive sanctions." Priority recommendation no. 4, 2022 presidential elections: "The authorities should take measures to prevent the misuse of official position and public resources. The law should ensure a clear separation between official functions and the pre-election activities of office holders. The competent state bodies should proactively sanction violations and address them through proportionate and dissuasive sanctions." Priority recommendation no. 3, 2020 parliamentary elections: "The authorities should take measures to prevent the misuse of official position and public resources. Monitoring of compliance with the law should be effective, and violations should be sanctioned with penalties that are proportionate and have a deterrent effect against repetition of the sanctioned conduct."

²⁴ CRTA Plus (12 February 2026) „Smene i imenovanja u vrhu MUP-a“, <https://link.crtars/wt>

²⁵ Nova.rs (3 February 2026) „Hteli su da uhapsu ministre i Vučića: Mrdić potvrdio da je novim setom zakona sprečeno hapšenje funkcionera SNS“, <https://link.crtars/wu>

Following protests by professional associations and by the public, but above all in the face of an exceptionally sharp reaction from the European Commission and from European officials, in June 2026 further amendments to the judicial laws were adopted, which in practice withdrew the "Mrđić laws".

Foreign policy and European integration

The European Union's enlargement process acquired entirely new energy and momentum in 2026, and Serbia was not left out of it. Over the course of the year, Serbian authorities made efforts to complete certain steps and to meet the conditions for unblocking the accession negotiations of Serbia and unfreezing funds from the Growth Plan. A new operational team for EU accession was formed, headed by the head of the mission of Serbia to the EU, Danijel Apostolović, who was subsequently also appointed chief negotiator. Laws that under the Reform Agenda's timetable should have been adopted as early as 2024 were adopted; the process of electing the REM Council was unfrozen; and the Commission for the audit of the voter register was established. On that basis the Serbian authorities expected Cluster 3 to be opened in early summer. Strong support for unfreezing the integration process came from the European Commission and from several influential member states, but consensus among the member states was not reached - above all because of the close relationship between Serbia and Russia, and because of concerns about the state of the rule of law. Civil society organisations assessed that the reforms undertaken were not sufficient to conclude that Serbia had made measurable progress towards democratic standards, pointing out that the amended electoral laws do not guarantee any improvement in electoral conditions, that the Commission for the audit of the voter register does not have access to the data that would allow it to carry out its mandate, and that the REM Council has not been elected in full composition and that the conditions for it to perform its statutory functions have not been created.

Serbia has remained declaratively committed to the EU integration process beyond July as well - legislative and diplomatic activity continued through the summer, and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, visited Belgrade. The failure to align the foreign policy of Serbia with that of the European Union is one of the key outstanding steps and one of the criticisms voiced by individual member states; with this visit the Serbian authorities signalled that not imposing sanctions and continuing cooperation with Russia do not preclude bilateral cooperation with Ukraine. The visit was not an occasion to condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine; the principal messages for the domestic public were the European path of the two countries, economic cooperation, and confirmation that Ukraine does not recognise the independence of Kosovo.

In February, President Vučić and the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, addressed a joint letter to the European public in which they proposed a radical change to the European integration process: instead of aspiring to full membership, their proposal seeks access to the single market and to Schengen without a right of veto in decision-making bodies. Some elements of this proposal are also contained in other proposals for reforming the accession process put forward during the year by EU member states and other actors.²⁶

THE POSITIONING OF POLITICAL ACTORS AHEAD OF THE ELECTIONS

President Vučić has announced on several occasions that he will resign²⁷ from the office of President in order to enter the campaign as a candidate for Prime Minister. Following a party rally in June 2026, the SNS announced that it would contest the elections under the slogan "United Serbia", without specifying who would make up the coalition. Some of SNS's coalition partners have announced that they will run separately - among them the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and the Social Democratic Party of Serbia (SDPS),²⁸ and Bogoljub Karić's Strength of Serbia Movement - though none of them explained running separately by reference to any disagreement with SNS policy, nor did they rule out a coalition with SNS after the elections. Aleksandar Vulin's Movement of Socialists implied that it would not contest the elections in coalition with SNS, saying that it did not wish to burden any partner with its stance towards the EU, and that it did not want the EU to remove it from the list.²⁹ In July, and particularly in August, President Vučić, ministers and public officials from SNS recorded a large number of field activities, touring towns and villages across Serbia.

The parties that made up the opposition coalition Serbia Against Violence at the previous elections will contest the coming elections in different formations: some, such as the Democratic Party and the Green-Left Front, have decided to support the Student List;³⁰ the Party of Freedom and Justice, Serbia Centre, the Movement of Free Citizens and the Solidarity movement have joined together in the Platform for a European Serbia, though they have not definitively confirmed that they will contest the elections in that

²⁶ EUCRTA, „Proširenje EU treba ubrzati, ali ne po cenu demokratije i vladavine prava“ (26 August 2026), <https://link.crtar.rs/wz>

²⁷ 021.rs (10 July 2026) „Vučić: Podneću ostavku nakon raspisivanja izbora, želim da u kampanji učestvujem kao običan građanin“, <https://link.crtar.rs/ww>

²⁸ SPS (1 September 2026) „SPS i SDP Srbije potpisali Memorandum o saradnji“, <https://link.crtar.rs/ww>

²⁹ Danas (20 July 2026) „Vulin: Pokret socijalista izlazi na izbore na listi gde EU neće moći ni da nas postavi, ni skloni“, <https://link.crtar.rs/wx>

³⁰ Ahead of the anticipated dissolution of the Assembly, on 27 August the Democratic Party renamed its parliamentary group „Poslanici uz studente: za kontrolu izbora“ (MPs with the students: for oversight of the elections). <https://link.crtar.rs/wm>

form. The People's Movement of Serbia, New Face of Serbia and the Ecological Uprising have formed the alliance³¹, "People's Serbia". Novi DSS and the Monarchists have announced that they will run in their traditional coalition, while other political parties and local movements are still positioning themselves.

The Student Movement announced its participation in the elections as early as 2025. The process of selecting parliamentary candidates was closed to the public; only the basic conditions that candidates for the Student List must meet were made known - that they are not students; that they are neither members of the ruling parties nor officials of opposition parties; that they have not held office in the executive or the legislature; and that they accept the programme objectives established by the Student Movement. The list of candidates was announced to be published only once the elections have been called.

³¹ Narodni pokret Srbije (28 August 2026) „NPS, NLS i Ekološki ustanak formirali savez 'Narodna Srbija'“, <https://link.cрта.rs/wy>

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Electoral legislative reform from 2022 to 2026

The calling of snap elections tests the capacity of institutions to apply the law within unpredictable and short deadlines, particularly where they are simultaneously faced with changes to the legal framework and the introduction of new obligations. The second round of amendments in four years to the electoral laws and to the laws on campaign financing and the prevention of corruption is taking place in 2026. In both cases the amendments came ahead of an (announced) calling of elections. Changes to the legal framework ought to be adopted in good time, so that all contestants, voters and competent institutions have sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the new rules and to prepare to apply them. Frequent amendments, particularly those adopted immediately before elections, cannot be assessed solely through the content of individual provisions, but also through their effect on the stability and predictability of the electoral framework. ODIHR has consistently drawn attention to the importance of a timely and inclusive electoral reform process.³²

³² ODIHR recommendations nos. 2 (2024), 1 (2023), 1 (2022), and 1 and 2 (2020).

Amendments to electoral legislation, 2022-2026

Significant amendments immediately before elections are nothing new: since 2022 the legal framework relevant to elections has been amended almost continuously.

- 2022.** ○ FEBRUARY - LESS THAN TWO MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS OF 3 APRIL
- A package of five laws**
- Law on the Election of MPs · Law on the Election of the President of the Republic · Law on Local Elections · Law on Financing of Political Activities · Law on Prevention of Corruption
- An intermediate level of election administration introduced for parliamentary and presidential elections.
 - Challenges to irregularities at a polling station tied to a direct threat to the rights of the individual voter concerned.
 - At local elections, appeals against decisions of local election commissions are decided by the Higher Courts.
- 2023.** ○ **Law on Electronic Media**
- Mandatory labelling of pre-election programming, a ban on covert political content and stronger REM oversight: tougher sanctions, shorter deadlines for acting on complaints and a monitoring methodology adapted to the campaign.
- 2024.** ○ **Law on Local Elections**
- The deadline for calling local elections extended from 120-45 to 150-45 days before the expiry of the assembly's term, and the deadline for holding them shortened from 45-60 to 30-60 days from the call.
- 2025.** ○ **Law on the Unified Voter Register**
- The Commission for the audit, verification and control of the accuracy and updating of the voter register established. At the same time, after changing permanent residence a voter acquires the right to vote in the new local self-government unit only after six months.
- 2026.** ○ **THE CURRENT AMENDMENTS**
- The package of electoral and anti-corruption laws back on the agenda, together with the Law on the Constitutional Court**
- The same package of laws as in 2022 is being amended, with the addition of the Law on the Constitutional Court. The amendments are being adopted on the eve of potential early elections.

Amendments to electoral legislation in 2026

Although the 2026 amendments were presented as a response to the recommendations of ODIHR and the Council of Europe, their scope remains limited, since for the most part they address individual questions within the electoral framework while structural problems have not been fully addressed. The effects of the new provisions will depend to a large extent on how they are applied, and on the capacity and conduct of the competent institutions.

The reform covered five electoral and anti-corruption laws: the Law on the Election of MPs, the Law on Local Elections, the Law on the Election of the President of the Republic,

the Law on Financing of Political Activities and the Law on Prevention of Corruption. The Reform Agenda of the Republic of Serbia set the end of 2025 as the deadline for these amendments, but the process was formally launched only at the beginning of February 2026. Amendments to the four electoral laws were adopted in May and to the Law on Financing of Political Activities in July 2026, while amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption were adopted on the last day of August 2026. The provisions were aligned on several occasions with opinions submitted by ODIHR. It is evident that through those comments, as in its earlier recommendations,³³ ODIHR consistently points to the need for electoral legislative reform to be carried out in good time, through a transparent and inclusive process that allows all relevant actors to be involved.

Bearing in mind that March 2026 marked the start of an election year with respect to the presidential elections, which in the regular course must be held in the spring of 2027, amending six important laws does not meet the criterion of timeliness - particularly if elections are called early at this or another level, as government officials have announced.

The amendment process was not sufficiently open and transparent. There was no substantive public consultation involving all social actors. The proposals were not significantly altered, nor were they further explained, following the numerous objections and suggestions raised during the public consultations held and through amendments tabled in the parliamentary procedure.³⁴

The CRTA Election Observation Mission assesses that, as of the newly adopted legislative provisions, a basis has been created for eight of the 54 ODIHR recommendations from the 2023 and 2024 elections to be fulfilled. Twenty recommendations have been partially fulfilled. Of the total number of fulfilled recommendations, only one is a priority recommendation.³⁵ This assessment is based on CRTA's findings and observation; ODIHR's official assessment will follow after the new elections and the publication of its final report.³⁶

³³ ODIHR recommendations nos. 2 (2024), 1 (2023), 1 (2022), and 1 and 2 (2020).

³⁴ According to available data, more than 130 amendments were tabled during the adoption of the amendments to the first four laws, of which eight were adopted in committee, mostly of a technical nature, while none was adopted at the vote. In the case of the Law on Financing of Political Activities, more than 40 amendments were tabled, and only one - again of a technical nature - was adopted at the vote.

³⁵ CRTA Plus: <https://link.crtars.rs/xq>

³⁶ According to ODIHR's most recent assessment, only four priority recommendations have been fully fulfilled since 2012; available at: <https://link.crtars.rs/xr>

Limited improvements that do not remove the risks of electoral abuse: amendments to the electoral laws and to the Law on the Constitutional Court

In amending these laws, the proposer invoked five ODIHR recommendations from 2023³⁷ concerning candidate registration, the professionalisation of the election administration, the status of minority lists, and legal protection in the electoral process. Although certain provisions improve the electoral framework, their effect is limited because some of the amendments may open space for abuse.

One of the key amendments concerns the removal of the restriction under which a voter could support only one candidate list.³⁸ Although this amendment formally contributes to greater pluralism and freedom of association, in the context of the electoral process in Serbia - burdened by a history of contestants of questionable authenticity taking part in elections, who have often also forged their candidacies - the provision as adopted may deepen and facilitate such practices.³⁹ The CRTA Election Observation Mission points out that, given the failure to prosecute abuses of voter support signatures at previous elections and the absence of reform of the election administration, there is a risk of legally "encouraging" the registration of candidate lists whose authenticity is in doubt.⁴⁰

A second key amendment concerns candidate lists of national minorities, and relates to specifying the criteria for acquiring the status of a minority list.⁴¹ The possibility for citizens' groups to submit minority lists widens access to an attractive space for abuse - lists of national minorities enjoy more favourable conditions for registration and for the allocation of seats, which may encourage bad-faith actors to take part in elections even though they do not authentically represent the interests of national minorities.

The amendments also introduce mandatory training for members of local election commissions and polling boards, together with an obligation on proposers to nominate persons who have completed that training, which is a positive change. However, the requirement that only trained polling board members serve at polling stations will apply only from 2028.⁴²

Also positive is the amendment removing the grounds for automatic rejection of candi-

³⁷ The 2023 ODIHR recommendations invoked by the proposer of the law are nos. 11, 2, 20, 12 and 24.

³⁸ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 11 (2023).

³⁹ CRTA considers that the proposed provision does not fully meet ODIHR's recommendation, which practice also confirms: at the 2023 elections in Belgrade there was suspicion of forged signatures on seven lists, while at the 2026 local elections 19 lists were identified with indicators of questionable authenticity. CRTA, Report on the long-term observation of the 2026 local elections, <https://link.crtars/xs>

⁴⁰ CRTA, 2023 Elections, Final Report, <https://link.crtars/xt>

⁴¹ The proposer invokes ODIHR recommendation no. 20 (2023).

⁴² This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 2 (2023).

date lists and allowing submitters 48 hours in which to remedy formal deficiencies.⁴³ This enables more equal participation by electoral contestants, particularly smaller political entities and citizens' groups, which often lack the capacity for legal support when registering.

Finally, the amendments to the Law on the Constitutional Court introduce urgency in electoral disputes by prescribing deadlines for the submission of documentation and for the Court to decide, and by extending the deadline for repeat elections.⁴⁴ Even so, CRTA points out that the real effects of that amendment will depend on the efficiency, independence and timeliness of the Constitutional Court's conduct in electoral disputes.

Stricter control mechanisms, but unequal effects from the new rules: the Law on Financing of Political Activities

The adopted amendments to the Law on Financing of Political Activities formally address a significant number of ODIHR recommendations,⁴⁵ but in themselves do not guarantee any improvement in the integrity and equality of the financing of political activities. Although new rules are introduced that may improve the transparency of financing, the control of campaign expenditure and the supervisory role of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, certain provisions may deepen inequality among electoral contestants, while their real effect will depend above all on consistent and effective application.

The most significant innovations concern the capping of campaign expenditure, the lowering of donation limits and the regulation of affiliated legal entities, the definition of third-party campaigning, clearer rules on borrowing by political entities and on the use of goods and services from public sources, and urgent deadlines for the Agency to act during the election campaign. Even so, several provisions place new and extra-parliamentary electoral contestants at a disadvantage relative to parliamentary parties, which receive budget funding or have other stable sources of financing, even though the electoral guarantee is being abolished. The real effects of the amendments will depend on their application in practice, and particularly on the capacity and readiness of the Agency to ensure effective and timely oversight.

⁴³ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 12 (2023).

⁴⁴ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 24 (2023).

⁴⁵ The amendments address nine ODIHR recommendations from 2020 to 2023.

May increase inequality	May reduce inequality
Limiting the donation ceiling for natural persons	Capping election campaign expenditure
Borrowing limit tied to public funds	Rules on the use of goods and services from public sources
Unlimited transfer of funds from the regular-operations account into the financing of electoral activities	Defining and limiting third-party campaigning
Abolition of the electoral guarantee in the specific context of elections in Serbia (lists of questionable authenticity)	Abolition of the automatic rejection of candidate lists and the possibility of remedying deficiencies within 48 hours
Allowing a voter to support several candidate lists, in the specific context of elections in Serbia (lists of questionable authenticity)	More detailed regulation of the "officials' campaign"

Abolition of automatic rejection of candidate lists and the 48-hour window to remedy deficiencies

The new provisions limit borrowing by political entities to 25 per cent of annual budget funds, prescribe a repayment deadline for loans taken for regular operations and prohibit their use for the campaign. An electoral contestant will repay a loan taken for the campaign by the time it submits its final report. CRTA points out that the level of borrowing remains high and that the purpose of loans and credit needs to be regulated precisely, so that regular operations and the campaign are clearly separated.

The rules on the use of goods and services from public sources⁴⁶ have been improved so as to require that goods and services be provided on equal terms, that decisions on their use be published, and that public institutions providing goods and services adopt internal rules. The application of those internal rules, and the response of the competent authorities to the contentious situations seen in practice so far, will be decisive in assessing how effective the new provisions are.

In the area of financing political entities, the amendments introduce lower donation limits, define affiliated companies and restrict circumvention of the prescribed limit.⁴⁷ CRTA

⁴⁶ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 13 (2023).

⁴⁷ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 18 (2020).

assesses that these provisions help prevent the concentration of financial support, but may also contribute to an unequal electoral contest. The unequal impact of the new provisions on political actors relates above all to the provisions on loans and credit, the electoral guarantee, own funds, and the limit on donations by natural persons.⁴⁸

A further innovation is the introduction of an upper limit on the total election campaign expenditure of a single electoral contestant, which did not previously exist: €6,000,000 for presidential and parliamentary elections, €1,500,000 for provincial, €1,000,000 for city and €400,000 for municipal elections, covering funds from public and private sources together.⁴⁹ The level of the threshold is, however, contentious. It has been set at a level that roughly corresponds to the ruling party's spending to date (Graphic 3),⁵⁰ and is several times above what all the other contestants combined have spent, so it does not reduce the existing disproportion in the campaign. Rather than limiting expenditure, a limit set in this way confirms it as the permitted maximum.

A particular innovation is the comprehensive regulation of the activities of third parties in the election campaign.⁵¹ For the first time the law defines third parties, introduces an obligation to register with the Agency, limits their campaign expenditure and requires electoral material to be labelled. Although these provisions improve control over concealed support for political entities, the challenge of distinguishing third-party campaigning from the legitimate expression of views on matters of public interest remains, as does the difficulty of avoiding an overly broad interpretation that would capture activities of civil society organisations which do not constitute political promotion.

In the area of transparency of financing and oversight, reporting rules have been improved through earlier submission of preliminary reports, shorter publication deadlines and the introduction of a machine-readable format.⁵² In addition, extending control through the submission to the Tax Administration of data on all providers of funds, goods and services raises the question of whether such automatic coverage is justified, given the possible deterrent effect on legitimate political support by citizens.

⁴⁸ See in more detail the section "The effect of the adopted provisions on the equality of electoral contestants".

⁴⁹ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 16 (2022).

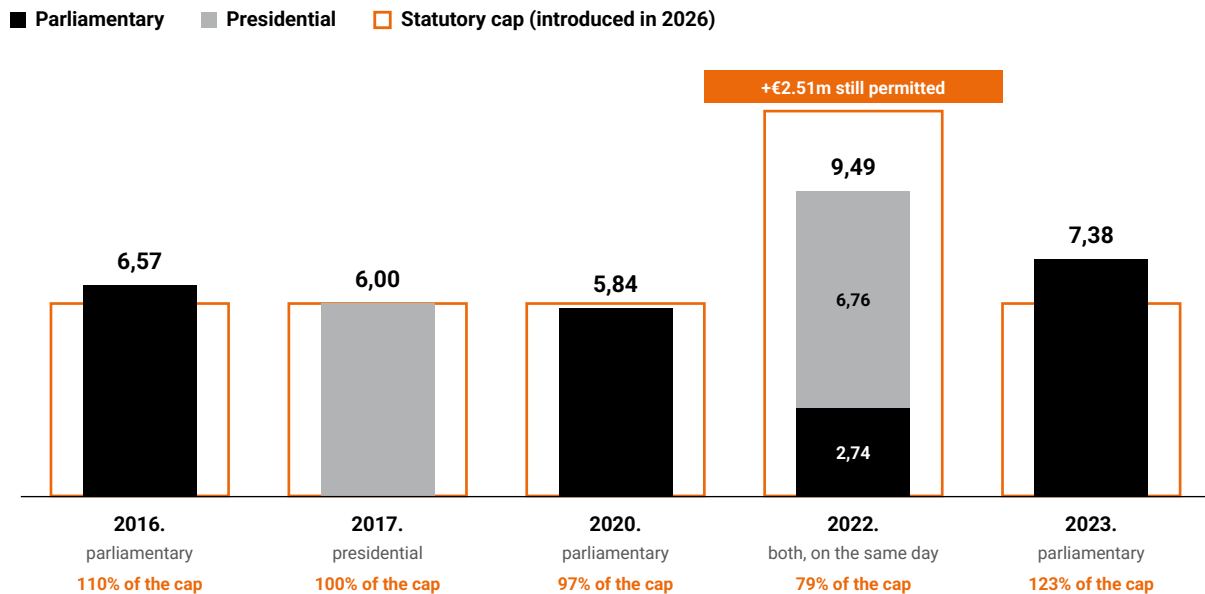
⁵⁰ SNS's final report on the financing of its election campaign for the 2023 parliamentary elections, available at: <https://link.crt.rs/xu>

⁵¹ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendations nos. 6 (2022) and 16 (2023).

⁵² This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 18 (2020).

The statutory cap on total election campaign expenditure matches the average of the funds the SNS has spent at elections since 2016, while in the event of a simultaneous campaign for the presidential and parliamentary elections it raises the maximum to 12 million euros

€ millions



Graphic 3: The statutory cap on total election campaign expenditure matches the average of the funds the SNS has spent at elections since 2016, while in the event of simultaneous presidential and parliamentary campaigns it raises the maximum to €12 million.

The Law on Amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption: strengthening the rules on the officials' campaign

Preventing the misuse of public office and public resources during the election campaign, and improving the transparency of the work of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, are the subject of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption, with reference to three ODIHR recommendations from 2022 and 2023.⁵³ CRTA assesses that the Law responds to a certain extent to the recommendations of ODIHR and GRECO, but that its effect will only be measurable once it is applied.

The most significant amendments concern the attempt to prevent the so-called officials' campaign.⁵⁴ The Law introduces new rules on the conduct of public officials: restrictions on the use of public gatherings and meetings to promote political entities, on participation in promotional activities of public authorities, subject to exceptions, and on issuing

⁵³ The new legislative provisions invoke ODIHR recommendations nos. 5 and 17 (2023) and 4 (2022). In more detail on the CRTA Plus website: <https://link.crtars/xv>

⁵⁴ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendations nos. 5 (2023) and 4 (2022).

statements in connection with the exercise of public office. It also regulates officials' use of social media and the role of the media in announcing their activities. CARTA notes that the concept of "promotional activity" is broadly defined, which leaves room for contradictory interpretations.

A particular problem is posed by the exceptions to the prohibition on public officials organising or taking part in promotional activities of public authorities. Once the candidate registration deadline has passed, a public official may not organise promotional activities of a public authority in that capacity, but the exceptions to that prohibition are broadly framed: where the promotional activity was planned before the elections were called, as regards its timing and manner of implementation; where it concerns public events that by established practice are held at a particular time and with the participation of the holder of a particular public office; and where the official's participation is necessary for the conduct of international relations. Exceptions framed in this way leave room for the great majority of promotional activities to be justified by reference to earlier planning or established practice, which calls into question the real effect of the prohibition.

The Law specifically regulates the obligation of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption to monitor the activities of public officials systematically.⁵⁵ The Agency is required to monitor certain officials, such as the President of the Republic and members of the Government, and to draw up a plan for monitoring other public officials on the basis of a sample formed by random selection and risk assessment, with a prescribed minimum number of officials depending on the level of the elections. Monitoring covers appearances in the media, at public gatherings and on the official accounts of public authorities, and also personal communication channels on which an official publishes information about activities undertaken in that capacity. The Agency publishes its findings once a week and, where it suspects a breach of the law, is required to initiate proceedings *ex officio* without delay.

Improving the Agency's conduct and transparency is likewise an important area of amendment.⁵⁶ The proposal introduces an obligation to issue formal decisions, a right of appeal and the possibility of initiating administrative proceedings, as well as special transparency rules for officials' campaign cases, including the publication of decisions and appeals.

The concept of public official has been broadened to include senior civil servants in appointed positions, certain advisers to holders of executive power, heads of public enterprises and representatives of the state in legal entities with majority public capital.

⁵⁵ These provisions draw on ODIHR recommendations nos. 5 and 17 (2023) and 4 (2022).

⁵⁶ This provision relates to ODIHR recommendation no. 17 (2023).

Broadening the concept is a positive innovation, but it needs to be defined more precisely so as to capture primarily those persons who in fact exercise public authority and take decisions of public significance.

The institutional independence of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption has been called into question, since its director is now able to remain in office for up to one year after the expiry of their term. If no new director is elected before that year expires, the director's assistant is appointed acting director, with no time limit on that mandate.

The effect of the adopted provisions on the equality of electoral contestants

The new legislative provisions do not automatically place future electoral contestants in a more or less favourable position, but certain provisions may have different effects depending on a contestant's position, while for others the outcome will depend on interpretation, application and the conduct of the competent institutions. The differing impact that follows from the adopted provisions, above all those of the Law on Financing of Political Activities, is reflected particularly in the following:

Loans and credit. Tying the permitted amount of borrowing to funds from public sources deepens inequality, in that entities with greater public financing also have greater scope to use that mechanism. In addition, a campaign loan is taken out by the political entity's responsible person as a natural person, and only if a commercial bank approves it, which in practice makes it available only to a limited extent. The prohibition on using loans for a contestant's regular operations is difficult to verify, since loans are not taken out earmarked for a specific campaign activity.

Own funds. There is no limit on the amount of regular-operations funds that a political entity may transfer to its campaign financing account. Parties that have accumulated public funds for regular operations over many years enter the campaign with an advantage over newly formed citizens' groups and extra-parliamentary parties, which do not receive such funds.

The limit on donations by natural persons. Reducing the limit on donations by natural persons to 2.5 average monthly salaries (RSD 273,655) most affects extra-parliamentary and new contestants, which - receiving no public funds for regular operations and having no own funds - rely predominantly on citizens' donations during the election campaign.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ By way of example, parliamentary parties may, in addition to their own funds, receive up to five average salaries per person for regular operations and a further 2.5 for the campaign.

The electoral guarantee. Abolishing the obligation to lodge a guarantee has made access to public funds easier for extra-parliamentary contestants and citizens' groups. At the same time, given that the legislative amendments have made it easier for all political actors to collect the required number of signatures when registering (a single person may sign several candidate lists), candidate lists of questionable authenticity can more easily take part in elections and can therefore more easily acquire the right to use public funds. Absent clear conditions and safeguards, such lists can acquire the right to the first tranche of public funds (40 per cent), which proportionately reduces the amount available to entities legitimately contesting the elections.

Assessment of institutional capacity to apply the relevant laws

The application of the new legislative provisions will depend to a significant extent on institutional capacity. What follows examines the readiness of the institutions that have been given additional powers and obligations under the new provisions, and of other bodies relevant to the electoral process, including their record of conduct to date in cases where the law has been breached. Particular attention is given to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and to the Republic Electoral Commission (REC), as the institutions on which significant new obligations have been placed. While no deadline has been prescribed for the Agency to prepare for its new competences,⁵⁸ the REC was required to adopt an instruction on the conduct of training by the end of August and to begin the training process. However, as of the closing of this report, the Agency has published only a vacancy notice for new posts, while the REC has not adopted that instruction - although it did adopt a decision to introduce voting booths to safeguard the secrecy of the ballot alongside screens, which is not expressly provided for in the Law on the Election of MPs.

The election administration

The 2026 electoral legislative reform expanded the REC's obligations, above all in the training and professionalisation of members of local election commissions and polling boards. The introduction of mandatory training, certification and a register of certified persons is a step towards professionalising the election administration. What remains unresolved, however, is the question of the REC's capacity to run that system, particularly given that the REC has no secretariat, that is, no professional service of its own, but

⁵⁸ The only deadline directly connected with other bodies' preparations to apply the new obligations under the Law on Financing of Political Activities concerns the obligation of public authorities and other entities that provide goods and services to political entities to publish the internal acts governing the rules on their provision. The availability and adoption of those acts were not, however, systematically checked for the purposes of this report.

borrowed one from the National Assembly. This challenge will not be directly relevant to potential snap elections before the end of 2026, or to the regular presidential and parliamentary elections in 2027, since the requirement to hold a certificate begins to apply on 1 January 2028. It could represent a significant constraint for elections held after that date.

The REC is required to adopt the Instruction on the conduct of training in good time, that is, within three months of the entry into force of the amendments to the Law on the Election of MPs, and is accordingly required to begin the training process immediately after adopting that instruction.

Under the new provisions the REC is responsible for organising training and issuing certificates of completed training, valid for three years, and for maintaining a register of persons holding a valid certificate. From 1 January 2028, authorised proposers will be able to nominate as members and deputy members of local election commissions and polling boards only persons holding a valid certificate of completed training.

Local election commissions also acquire a role in operating the training system, by supporting the REC in organising training, while the composition of electoral bodies will in future be conditional on holding the appropriate certificate. The effect of those provisions will depend on the REC's ability to provide training and certification in good time for a sufficient number of people to staff all electoral bodies.

As regards the protection of electoral rights, the REC's record to date points to a risk of uneven and insufficiently independent application of electoral legislation. Given the existing model for the composition of electoral bodies and their decision-making, it remains an open question to what extent professionalisation through training and certification will contribute to the quality of decision-making and to consistent protection of electoral rights. Experience so far provides insufficient grounds to expect that professionalising the members of electoral bodies will by itself change the way the REC decides - a body which, in previous electoral processes, in a considerable number of cases reflected the political interests of the majority rather than consistently applying the law and protecting the public interest.

In that context, the REC's conduct concerning the introduction of voting booths at polling stations is also significant. At its 12th session, held on 19 August 2026 and continued on 24 August, the Republic Electoral Commission adopted a decision to introduce voting booths to safeguard the secrecy of the ballot, on the reasoning that this implemented ODIHR's recommendations. The original proposal was amended so that voting booths are introduced alongside the existing screens. CRTA Election Observation Mission points out that introducing booths by means of a secondary act raises the question of legal

basis, given that their use is not expressly provided for in the Law on the Election of MPs, and that their use may create practical problems at polling stations, including the possibility of queues. During the discussion at the session, some REC members also raised questions of voter equality and possible abuse. At its next, 13th session, the REC adopted a decision to conduct a public procurement for 30,000 voting booths, invoking exceptional urgency even though snap elections had not been called by the time the decision was taken.

At the same time, the REC adopted a Decision amending the Instruction on nominating persons to polling boards for the conduct of voting, providing that after elections are held, data on the gender composition of the polling boards that conducted the voting are to be published.

The Agency for Prevention of Corruption

The limited capacity of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption represents a serious challenge to the effective application of its new and expanded competences, given that the new provisions significantly increase the volume and complexity of its work. Its record to date shows that the Agency has not had sufficient human or technological capacity to monitor the election campaign actively. The need to strengthen that capacity is also indicated by the vacancy notice published for nine new posts.⁵⁹

The question remains whether the Agency's existing and planned capacity will be sufficient to discharge its new obligations, given that applying them requires specific knowledge and practical experience, as well as enough time to train new staff and bring them to the point of working independently before the elections are called.

Among the Agency's particularly complex and sensitive new obligations is maintaining records on third parties, including receiving and publishing notifications of the opening of a dedicated account and reports on funds collected and spent. Also in the area of campaign financing, the Agency is to notify the competent authorities of political entities that have not submitted preliminary reports, so that the second tranche of public campaign funding is not paid out to them, and to provide the Tax Administration with data on all donors.

The Agency's obligation to monitor officials' activities during the election campaign is being expanded, including coverage of a larger number of officials through methods combining random selection with an assessment of corruption risk and with complaints previously submitted. The Agency will also be required to monitor the activities of the

⁵⁹ Available on the Agency's website: <https://link.cрта.rs/xw>

President of the Republic and members of the Government, to publish its monitoring findings weekly, and to initiate proceedings without delay where it identifies a suspected breach of obligations.

Within seven days of the elections being called, the Agency receives notifications and supporting documentation on planned promotional activities of public authorities and publishes a list of duly notified activities. Activities not on the list should not be held, with the exception of international cooperation activities, which may also be notified subsequently.

Finally, the Agency is required to act on complaints within shorter, statutory deadlines, both during the campaign and in regular proceedings (including shorter deadlines for notifying political entities, for deciding and for publishing decisions). The particularly short deadlines during the campaign are intended to ensure a timely response, while the deadlines for regular proceedings seek to put an end to the existing practice of untimely action. The Agency has failed to respond to certain complaints submitted by CRTA before the official election campaign even after several years, including complaints from 2022 and 2023, and no response has been forthcoming to seven complaints submitted between May and August 2026 either.

The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media

The limited functionality of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) represents a serious challenge to effective oversight of the media during the election campaign, owing to an institutional deadlock in the REM Council that has lasted almost 22 months. Effective and impartial oversight of media service providers is an important precondition for ensuring a level playing field for political actors and for voters' right to comprehensive and objective information. REM has important obligations during the election campaign, including adopting a binding oversight Plan and a Methodology for monitoring media service providers, adopting secondary legislation on media obligations during the campaign, continuously monitoring programming ex officio, acting on complaints from citizens and electoral contestants, and imposing measures for breaches of obligations relating to the election campaign.

The Council's inability to function significantly impedes the application of these mechanisms and compromises REM's capacity to respond to and sanction irregularities in real time. This diminishes the preventive effect of regulatory oversight and opens space for media service providers to operate with a reduced degree of legal and professional accountability, which may further deepen inequality in access to the media and make it harder for voters to exercise their right to equal and objective information.

Since 5 November 2024 REM has had no functioning decision-making body, after the previous Council's term expired by operation of law. The procedure for electing a new Council has been marked by significant delays and procedural irregularities. The competent Committee on Culture and Information of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia issued the public call for nominations only at the end of November 2024, instead of in May of that year. Because the procedures conducted were not in line with the law, the original election procedure was discontinued in April 2025. A new process, launched in May 2025, was marked by the parliamentary Committee's selective interpretation of statutory provisions when drawing up the list of candidates.⁶⁰

In November 2025 the Assembly elected eight of the nine Council members. The election in incomplete composition came about after the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Elvira Kovač of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, a party in the ruling coalition, called on coalition partners immediately before the vote not to vote for any candidate in the category of national councils of national minorities, thereby preventing independent members from forming a majority on the Council. Four of the newly elected members then resigned in December 2025, explaining that the competent committee of the National Assembly and MPs of the ruling majority were continuously breaching the law in order to ensure that candidates close to the government held a majority on the Council. In July 2026 the National Assembly adopted an authentic interpretation resolving the question of the legal effect of those resignations: on that interpretation, a Council member's term begins to run on the day they take office, so resignations submitted before taking office produce no legal effect within the meaning of Article 18(1)(4). Invoking the new legal situation thus created, the four members joined the work of the Council in July 2026. The competent committee also decided that the election of the ninth member, from the category of national councils of national minorities, would be repeated after the elections for the national councils of national minorities planned for the autumn of 2026; that election had therefore not been completed by the time this report was published.

Although the REM Council can function in an incomplete composition of eight members, a further problem that arises in practice is the absence of the majority required to adopt decisions. In the current eight-member composition, two equal blocs of four members have formed, and for that reason two attempts to hold a constitutive session to elect the Council's president were unsuccessful.

Ordinary decisions require a majority of five votes, while the adoption of key secondary legislation and the imposition of the most severe measures, such as the withdrawal of a licence, require a two-thirds majority.

⁶⁰ In more detail on CARTA Plus, "Kako je Srbija ostala bez funkcionalnog medijskog regulatora?", <https://link.cрта.rs/xx>

Because of this stalemate, the REM Council has not adopted a single decision from the expiry of the previous Council's term in 2024 to the present day.

The judiciary

Changes to judicial legislation during 2026 raise questions that are important for institutional independence⁶¹ and for the judiciary's ability to act effectively in cases involving breaches of electoral rights. The unplanned systemic changes in the judiciary did not concern improving the judiciary's capacity to handle electoral disputes and criminal offences against electoral rights. The manner in which the laws were amended, and individual provisions within them, nonetheless affect the broader institutional framework within which the courts and public prosecution offices will operate at elections.

A particular indicator of institutional capacity and efficiency at elections is how criminal complaints alleging breaches of electoral rights are handled. Since the 2023 parliamentary elections CRTA has filed 53 complaints,⁶² 26 of which relate directly to electoral actions. According to available data, 16 complaints have been dismissed. Seventeen complaints are at the pre-investigation stage, including cases in which the prosecution office is awaiting or has again requested information from the Ministry of the Interior. A similar pattern has been recorded in complaints concerning irregularities on election days, including suspected vote-buying, circular voting and attacks on observers.

In January 2026, a month after the package of draft laws was tabled, the set of so-called Mrdić laws was adopted under urgent procedure - amendments to the Law on the Public Prosecution Office, the Law on the High Prosecutorial Council, the Law on the Organisation and Jurisdiction of State Bodies for Combating High-Technology Crime, the Law on Judges, and the Law on the Seats and Territorial Jurisdiction of Courts and Public Prosecution Offices. These systemic laws, which were not part of the reform plan, suddenly appeared on the parliamentary agenda on the proposal of a single MP of the ruling majority from the parliamentary group "Aleksandar Vučić - Serbia Must Not Stop" - Uglješa Mrdić - departing from the usual practice whereby systemic legislative changes are initiated by

⁶¹ Of particular importance is the question of preserving the institutional independence and autonomy of judicial bodies, given the assessments by international institutions of certain provisions adopted during 2026. Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on the 28 January 2026 Amendments to Laws Governing the Judiciary and the Prosecution, CDL-PI(2026)007, 24 April 2026, <https://link.cрта.rs/xz>; and Follow-up Opinion, CDL-AD(2026)017, June 2026, <https://link.cрта.rs/y0>

⁶² These criminal complaints concerned a large number of criminal offences, including violation of the right to vote, compilation of inaccurate voter registers, abuse of the right to vote, unauthorised collection of personal data, abuse of official position, inducement to certify untrue content, forgery of an official document, trading in influence, violent conduct at a sporting event or public gathering, racial and other discrimination, incitement to national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance, obstruction of justice, ill-treatment and torture, negligent work in office, assault on an official, and others.

the Government of Serbia. Those laws were adopted under urgent procedure, without public consultation and without prior consultation of the relevant judicial institutions or of the Venice Commission. Using an MP's right of legislative initiative also had the consequence of circumventing the usual procedure requiring that opinions be obtained from the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and, in this case, from the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council on the proposed laws.⁶³ The provisions raised questions as to the autonomy of the public prosecution and the independence of the judiciary, particularly through changes to the position of chief public prosecutors, to the competences of the High Prosecutorial Council and to the organisation of specialised prosecution offices.

The Venice Commission - acting on a request from the Speaker of the National Assembly submitted only after the laws had been adopted and entered into force - identified in an urgent opinion of April 2026 shortcomings that diminish the guarantees of prosecutorial autonomy and judicial independence, and issued nine key recommendations. A new text of the law was subsequently prepared, on which the Commission gave a follow-up opinion in June 2026, assessing that seven of the nine recommendations had been implemented. What remained open were the position of prosecutors in the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and the autonomy of the Special Department for High-Technology Crime. A reform process of this kind points to institutional risks that may also matter for how the judiciary handles cases relating to elections.

The atmosphere in which elections are called is also shaped in significant measure by the pronouncements of the most senior state officials. In August 2026, on her account on the X network, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, publicly attributed to the students in blockade an intention to draw up lists of people they would "shoot, hang and shear". This was a message presenting one group of citizens, identifiable by their political conviction and civic activism, as a threat to the rest of society, sent from the position of the holder of the highest legislative office and then carried by media with national coverage. CRTA therefore filed a criminal complaint with the Higher Public Prosecution Office in Belgrade on the grounds of reasonable suspicion that the criminal offence of racial and other discrimination under Article 387(4) of the Criminal Code had been committed. When one political option is labelled in this way from the highest institutional position, participants in the electoral process do not enter the campaign as equal contestants.

Practice points to the limited effectiveness of the institutional response to suspected criminal offences connected with the electoral process, with cases held at the pre-investigation stage for prolonged periods indicating either passivity on the part of the prosecution

⁶³ Transparentnost Srbija, <https://link.crtars/y1>

or problems in cooperation with the police in gathering the necessary information. The same pattern is observed in other cases known to the public, which raises the question of the readiness of judicial bodies to respond in a timely and effective manner to breaches of electoral legislation.

At the 2023 elections in Odžaci, CRTA observers set off for the police station to report that several dozen ballots had been taken out of a polling station in Karavukovo. In the yard of the police station, unidentified men destroyed the car the observers were in, using batons. Two and a half years later, in May 2026, the Basic Public Prosecution Office in Sombor dismissed the criminal complaint on the reasoning that there were no grounds to suspect that a criminal offence prosecuted ex officio had been committed. Not all of the attackers were identified, and neither physical traces nor footage from nearby cameras was secured.

The Ministry of the Interior

Personnel instability and the shortcomings observed in the conduct of the Ministry of the Interior during previous electoral cycles represent a serious challenge to the Ministry's readiness to protect the integrity of the electoral process effectively. The role of the police in protecting the integrity of the electoral process is particularly significant as regards the safety of electoral contestants, the prevention of violence, and action in cases of election-related criminal offences. Frequent personnel changes in key positions, together with the record of previous electoral cycles and problems in cooperation with the prosecution, raise the question whether the Ministry will be able, during the coming elections, to act in a timely, impartial and effective manner in cases where there are indications or suspicions that criminal offences have been committed, and to ensure the protection of all electoral contestants.

Between November 2025 and August 2026 the leadership of at least six key organisational units of the Ministry of the Interior was replaced: the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, the Gendarmerie, the Border Police Directorate, the Criminal Police Directorate, the Unit for the Protection of Certain Persons and Facilities, and the Service for Combating Organised Crime. According to publicly available information, more than 60 experienced police officers were also retired.⁶⁴

In November 2025 Igor Žmirić was appointed commander of the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit, Radoslav Repac commander of the Gendarmerie, and Dragiša Simić head of the Border Police Directorate. In December, Marko Kričak⁶⁵ - until then commander of the

⁶⁴ In more detail: Radar, <https://link.crt.rs/y2>

⁶⁵ Marko Kričak (b. 1984) joined the Security Information Agency in 2018 and transferred to the Ministry of the Interior in 2022, under the statutory possibility of transfer for BIA members to the police without having first com-

Unit for the Protection of Certain Persons and Facilities - was appointed head of the Criminal Police Directorate, with Ivan Ristić appointed in his place. Marko Zafirović, previously deputy commander of the Unit for the Protection of Certain Persons and Facilities, was subsequently appointed head of the Service for Combating Organised Crime.⁶⁶ What all these appointments have in common is that the leadership posts in the Criminal Police Directorate and the Service for Combating Organised Crime were filled with officers from a unit whose remit covers neither criminal investigations nor public order and safety.

The changes were accompanied by changes within individual organisational units, particularly the Criminal Police Directorate.

International bodies have also drawn attention to the risks such practice carries: the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommended that Serbia establish a more open and transparent procedure for appointing the police director and other senior police positions, precisely as a measure to prevent politicisation, together with stronger guarantees for sufficiently independent and transparent oversight of police conduct.⁶⁷ Such dynamics raise questions about continuity of work and the professional capacity of the police, particularly in units that play a key role in detecting criminal offences and in acting on requests from the public prosecution. Also of particular concern is the way certain police actions - those of the Criminal Police Directorate in particular - are presented in the media, especially where they are directed at universities, civil society organisations and other actors. On several occasions information about action taken was available to certain media before the competent authorities had officially confirmed it, with reporting that presumed guilt in advance. Such practice raises the question of selective disclosure of information from pre-investigation proceedings, undermines the presumption of innocence and calls into question the purpose of certain operations.

In August 2026 the new head of the Criminal Police Directorate, Marko Kričak, was also

pleted basic police training. In the same year he was appointed deputy commander, and in 2023 commander, of the Unit for the Protection of Certain Persons and Premises. The First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade opened pre-investigative proceedings against him and members of that unit over the treatment of detained protest participants in August 2025; the Internal Control Sector did not submit the requested report on that event to the prosecutor's office. After his appointment to head the Criminal Police Directorate, on 31 March 2026 that directorate, on the orders of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, carried out a nine-hour search of the Rectorate building of the University of Belgrade; its arrival and course were followed by several television stations, with the meeting between police officers and the Rector broadcast almost in real time. In more detail: <https://link.crtars/z2>. Statement of the Ministry of the Interior: <https://link.crtars/10m>

⁶⁶ In more detail: Radar, <https://link.crtars/yy>, <https://link.crtars/z1>

⁶⁷ GRECO, Fifth Evaluation Round - Preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies, Evaluation Report: Serbia, GrecoEval5Rep(2021)1, adopted at GRECO's 90th plenary meeting (Strasbourg, 21-25 March 2022), published 5 July 2022, para. 4. Available at: <https://link.crtars/z8>. The status of implementation of these recommendations was last assessed in the Second Compliance Report on Serbia in the fifth evaluation round, adopted at GRECO's plenary meeting of 8-12 June 2026.

appointed deputy national coordinator of the National Coordination Body for the Prevention of and Fight against Terrorism.⁶⁸ The body is responsible for coordinating activities on the prevention of and fight against terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism leading to terrorism at the national level.

Experience from the previous local electoral cycles, during 2025 and 2026, further confirms these risks. Cases were recorded of the police failing to respond, or responding inadequately, to pressure on and physical attacks against activists, journalists and observers. In Mionica, police officers were present during an attack on CARTA observers⁶⁹ but did not intervene or identify the attackers, while in Bor several attacks on students, activists and journalists were recorded, as well as on a CARTA observer and lawyer,⁷⁰ with no adequate police response. In addition, the presence of police at and in the immediate vicinity of polling stations is becoming increasingly frequent, particularly since the 2025 local elections. Cases in which the police refuse to cooperate with the prosecution and do not act on its requests or orders are also a matter of concern.

⁶⁸ In more detail: Mašina, <https://link.carta.rs/z6>

⁶⁹ In more detail: <https://link.carta.rs/zf>

⁷⁰ In more detail: <https://link.carta.rs/z7>

THE VOTER REGISTER

Overall assessment and context

The coming elections will be another in a series that Serbia enters without having carried out an audit of the voter register, despite the establishment of the Commission for the audit, verification and control of the accuracy and updating of the voter register and the launch of the audit process. As a result, notwithstanding the increased transparency of the voter register compared with earlier electoral cycles, one of the principal recommendations that ODIHR and domestic observers have been repeating and building on from one cycle to the next for more than ten years will not be fulfilled. The space for manipulation and unlawful handling of the voter register remains wide, and it threatens to undermine the integrity of the coming electoral process and citizens' confidence in it. Above all, not a single criminal offence connected with the voter register from previous elections has been sanctioned. On the eve of the coming elections, new information concerning the unauthorised registration of voters is shaking the public. In August 2026, CRTA Election Observation Mission documented that the SNS is holding and collecting, without authorisation, the personal data of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who hold Serbian citizenship, in order to register them to vote abroad outside the law and before any elections have been called.

The Unified Voter Register (UVR) remains one of the key questions of electoral integrity in Serbia and one of the principal sources of public distrust in elections.⁷¹ The problem cannot, however, be reduced to the question of whether the UVR is accurate. The key question is whether there are sufficiently effective and independent mechanisms through which its accuracy, currency and integrity can be checked systematically, including checking the data against the records from which the UVR is updated.

Confidence in the UVR, already seriously damaged, was further eroded after the 2023 elections. By way of reminder, CRTA Election Observation Mission documented organised voter migration - that is, coordinated temporary changes of residence with the aim

⁷¹ CRTA, public opinion survey, September 2024.

of influencing the results of local elections - as well as concentrations of voters at particular addresses and other patterns pointing to possible fictitious residence registrations. In its final report on the 2023 parliamentary elections, ODIHR likewise found that the limited possibilities for checking the UVR, the absence of detailed data on changes of residence, allegations of deceased persons remaining on the register and allegations of mass voter migration in connection with local elections had seriously undermined public confidence in the accuracy of this register.⁷²

An important distinction needs to be drawn with respect to the expected snap parliamentary elections. Parliamentary elections are held under a proportional system in a single nationwide constituency, which means that moving a lawfully registered voter between municipalities does not in itself change the balance of votes at parliamentary elections. Even so, the experience of organised voter migration remains directly relevant to assessing the quality of the voter register, because it demonstrated the scope for manipulating residence data, weaknesses in the control of source records, and an insufficient institutional response to suspected abuse. A separate question is posed by new entries on the voter register of persons who acquire citizenship of the Republic of Serbia and register residence in Serbia while in fact living in one of the neighbouring countries.⁷³

It was precisely because of long-standing doubts about the quality of the UVR and the limited scope for checking it independently that a new audit mechanism was established at the end of 2025, and that the Commission for the audit, verification and control of the accuracy and updating of the voter register was formed at the beginning of 2026. Its first report, which is to show the extent to which the accuracy and integrity of the UVR can be verified, is required by law by 28 October 2026.

CRTA Election Observation Mission assesses that by that deadline a comprehensive and independently verifiable assessment of the accuracy, completeness and integrity of the voter register will not be possible, and that what can be expected instead are partial checks and findings on individual anomalies, weaknesses and risk patterns in the UVR. The key constraint is no longer access to the UVR data alone, but the possibility of systematically checking identified irregularities against the source records and linking them to the administrative procedures and information systems in which they originated. This assessment is consistent with the concern ODIHR recorded in July 2026, when its interlocutors - precisely because of impeded access to data and time lost - expressed doubt that the audit would be able to produce a comprehensive result before the elections.⁷⁴

⁷² ODIHR report on the 2023 elections. https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/1/3/563505_0.pdf

⁷³ <https://link.crtars.rs/zp>

⁷⁴ OSCE/ODIHR, Needs Assessment Mission Report 2026, section D, Voter Registration, pp. 10-11. <https://link.crtars.rs/z9>

ODIHR's long-standing recommendations. The question of auditing the voter register is not new. For several electoral cycles now ODIHR has repeated recommendations aimed at checking its accuracy and increasing transparency. In its final report on the 2022 presidential and parliamentary elections, ODIHR set out as its third priority recommendation that a full audit of the UVR and of the civil registry be carried out, with the participation of political parties and civil society.⁷⁵ After the 2023 elections ODIHR refined the recommendation further, calling for a review of laws, regulations and practices in order to enable access to the data necessary for a meaningful audit of the UVR, with the participation of relevant stakeholders and in compliance with personal data protection standards.⁷⁶ Following the 2024 local elections, ODIHR called for: a full audit of the UVR and of the civil registry by independent experts, with the participation of the competent ministries, political parties and civil society; and the publication of sufficiently detailed voter data to make a genuine check of the accuracy of voter numbers possible.⁷⁷ The common denominator of these recommendations is not merely the removal of individual errors from the register. ODIHR consistently links the accuracy of the register, the possibility of independent scrutiny, and public confidence.

Reform of the Law on the Unified Voter Register and the formation of the Commission

The amendments to the Law on the Unified Voter Register, adopted in November 2025, established the Commission for the audit, verification and control of the accuracy and updating of the voter register.⁷⁸ The rights of the public and of observers to access data were also expanded and additional transparency mechanisms were introduced.

The National Assembly appointed the Commission's first membership on 28 January 2026.⁷⁹ The Commission began work during February,⁸⁰ and is required to submit its first audit report to the National Assembly by 28 October 2026. The Commission is empowered to analyse data from the UVR and from other records relevant to its maintenance.

⁷⁵ 2022: ODIHR, Republic of Serbia, Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections, 3 April 2022, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Warsaw, 19 August 2022, p. 32, Priority Recommendation 3.

⁷⁶ 2023: ODIHR, Republic of Serbia, Early Parliamentary Elections, 17 December 2023, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Warsaw, 28 February 2024, p. 11, Priority Recommendation 4.

⁷⁷ 2024: ODIHR, Republic of Serbia, Local Elections, 2 June 2024, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Warsaw, 30 August 2024, pp. 10-11 and Priority Recommendations 3-4.

⁷⁸ Law on Amendments to the Law on the Unified Voter Register, Official Gazette of the RS, no. 96/2025, in particular Articles 14, 22j-22l and Article 8 of the transitional provisions.

⁷⁹ National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Decision on the appointment of members and deputy members of the Commission for the audit, verification and control of the accuracy and updating of the voter register, 28 January 2026, Official Gazette of the RS, no. 8/2026.

⁸⁰ <https://link.crtars.rs/100>

nance, to check updating processes and the legal grounds for changes, to analyse the functioning of the information system, and to initiate field checks.

The first two months of its work were needed for the accelerated constitution of the Commission and the adoption of its rules of procedure, plan and methodology, leaving around seven months for the audit itself. Four of the remaining seven months, however, were spent on efforts to secure access to basic voter data and to the history of changes in the UVR. Broader access to those data was granted at the beginning of July, after several months of talks between the Commission and the competent institutions, while establishing the technical conditions to process them required additional time.

This enabled the Commission to carry out considerably more serious analysis of the UVR itself, including statistical analysis, checks on data quality and internal consistency, and the identification of possible duplicates, unusual concentrations of voters and other patterns requiring further checking. The possibility of systematically checking such findings against the records from which the UVR is updated nonetheless remains significantly constrained.⁸¹

Beyond the framework of the voter register data, the Commission was also granted a limited service for checking the data of individual voters against the civil registry, the citizenship records and the residence records. That access is, however, designed only for checking a specified individual, not for a systemic audit of the voter register, which makes any more comprehensive check of suspicious cases or patterns identified in the UVR particularly difficult.

The range of available data is also limited. In the case of residence, for example, the currently registered residence can be checked, but not the history of previous residences. In the case of citizenship, the check is largely reduced to whether a given personal identification number appears in the records, without the data needed to analyse the timing and legal basis of the acquisition of citizenship, the date of entry, any second citizenship, or the procedure and the authority that handled the case. In addition, every check is performed individually and requires a separate access procedure, which makes mass verification of large numbers of voters extremely slow.

A model of this kind allows selected individual cases to be checked, but does not allow the UVR to be cross-checked systemically against the source records. Consequently, the Commission is increasingly able to establish where anomalies or patterns requiring checking exist, while its scope for establishing how they arose - whether they result from administrative error, outdated data, weaknesses in the system or possible abuse - and who is responsible for them, is significantly constrained.

⁸¹ CRTA Plus, "ODIHR Needs Assessment Confirms What CRTA Has Documented". <https://link.cрта.rs/z9>

A further constraint is the absence of a full IT and information-security audit of the UVR system and of the systems that supply it with data. Without such a check it is not possible to assess independently whether access controls, user activity logs, database changes and other technical mechanisms allow a reliable reconstruction of all significant changes to voter data.

For that reason, as matters stood at the beginning of September, the Commission's first report can be expected to cover a range of useful partial audits and diagnostic findings, but not a comprehensive verification of the accuracy, completeness and integrity of the UVR as a whole. A significant part of the time allotted for the audit was spent securing the basic conditions for the work, while the remaining constraints on access to the source records and to the information system are being addressed in a period in which snap elections are simultaneously expected to be called. Without a rapid improvement in the conditions for the Commission's work, the risk remains that the audit process before the elections will neither answer the substance of ODIHR's long-standing recommendations nor dispel the long-standing public distrust of the voter register.

Transparency of the voter register. The 2025 amendments to the Law brought progress in the transparency of the UVR. The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government now publishes voters' names by polling station, data on the number of changes and their legal grounds, and data on the number of voters per address, that is, per household. Data on voters by polling station have been published since February 2026, and since 15 May a service has been available for viewing the number of voters per household or address. Checking at household level nonetheless remains limited: a flat number exists for only around 2 per cent of addresses in the UVR. In most cases the service shows the total number of voters at an address rather than the number of voters in a specific flat, which makes checking particularly difficult in multi-dwelling buildings. The amendments also expanded data access for accredited domestic observers.

Indications of abuse of the law in registering voters to vote in Bosnia and Herzegovina

During the last week of August and the beginning of September 2026, indications emerged of the organised collection of the personal data of Serbian citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to register them to vote abroad, even though elections had not yet been called. On 26 August CARTA published an audio recording of a conversation in which a woman, presenting herself as a representative of the "SNS branch office" in Banja Luka, offers to have a "mobile team" come to a citizen with dual citizenship and scan his Serbian identity card in order to register him to vote.

A second case, the recording of which was published on 2 September, points to a similar

pattern in Višegrad: a woman who presents herself as "Verica from Novo Goražde" and says she works on dual citizenship matters states that she has been scanning Serbian identity cards in the field for more than a month, that more than 1,000 people have been covered in this way, that voting will take place in Višegrad, and that elections are expected at the end of October. Undocumented reports also reached observers of cases in which people presenting themselves as officials of the Diplomatic and Consular Mission of the Republic of Serbia in Banja Luka came to citizens' addresses on the same errand. The repetition of the same mechanism in different places, the involvement of people presenting themselves as party activists or officials, and the fact that they already hold contact details and information on dual citizenship, telephone numbers and other personal data, point to the possibility of a broader, coordinated voter mobilisation operation involving misuse of office and of public resources, unlawful processing of personal data and access to official records, and breaches of the procedures for registering voters to vote by place of temporary residence abroad. The significance of the case is all the greater because an application to vote abroad is submitted only after the elections have been called, through a diplomatic and consular mission, and must bear the applicant's own signature - while CARTA had already, after the 2023 elections, filed criminal complaints concerning cases in which citizens maintained that they had been registered to vote in Banja Luka without their knowledge. Those criminal complaints have to this day produced no outcome whatsoever.

The voter register as a public issue

Between March and the beginning of September 2026, 97 citizens contacted CARTA to share information about possible irregularities in the voter register. Citizens submitted 82 reports directly, while 15 cases were identified in public posts on social media. Most commonly they concerned suspicions of illegitimately registered persons and unknown voters recorded at particular addresses. Some of the reports were forwarded to the Commission for the audit of the voter register.

Over the same period, the voter register remained a visible but markedly politicised media topic. Heavier media coverage was recorded around the formation of the Commission, the holding of local elections in March, the public dispute over access to data in May, and the debate about new citizens and their residences during July and August. Continuous coverage of the audit itself, of its methodology and of its concrete results was considerably rarer.

Media narratives were strongly polarised. Media that predominantly conveyed the position of government officials emphasised the increased transparency of the UVR and claims that the Commission has full access to the data, while critical media devoted

more attention to the constraints on access, to possible irregularities and to "phantom voters".⁸²

At the same time, during the first half of 2026 the question of the voter register was observed to have lost some of its earlier priority in the public messaging of EU officials as well. At the end of 2025 the adoption of the Law on the UVR was singled out as an important step towards free and fair elections,⁸³ whereas from the end of January 2026 European assessments of Serbia were dominated by the crisis caused by the adoption of five judicial laws without a transparent and inclusive procedure. The European Commission assessed these as a serious step backwards, and during April and May the question of their revision was linked even to the possible suspension of European funding.⁸⁴ When the contested provisions were corrected in June, Commissioner Marta Kos welcomed this as "an important step in the right direction" contributing to the restoration of confidence.⁸⁵ Electoral reform then reappears among the EU's subsequent demands, but largely within the broader framework of implementing ODIHR's recommendations, rather than through particular attention to the Commission's work and to the actual progress of the UVR audit.

In July too the EU welcomed the "positive steps" concerning the voter register and repeated its call for the remaining ODIHR recommendations to be implemented.⁸⁶ A comparison of public messaging nonetheless shows that over this period the specific question of the quality and audit of the UVR became less prominent than the broader questions of the judiciary, the media and overall democratic backsliding - despite the fact that the audit of the voter register has not yet produced results on the basis of which its accuracy and integrity could be confirmed.

⁸² CRTA's qualitative analysis of publicly available online media reporting on the UVR, February-August 2026, purposive sample. The analysis covered output of the public broadcaster, national and cable television, the daily press and news portals of differing editorial orientations. Among the representative examples: RTS, 4, 11 and 19 February; Euronews Serbia, 12 February; Informer, 6 May; Nova.rs, 8 May; N1, 25 May; N1 and Nova.rs, July-August 2026.

⁸³ European Commission, Serbia Report 2025, Elections section, p. 22.

⁸⁴ Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on the 28 January 2026 Amendments to Laws Governing the Judiciary and the Prosecution, CDL-PI(2026)007, 24 April 2026.

⁸⁵ Marta Kos, statement following the revision of the judicial legislation, 26 June 2026.

⁸⁶ European Union, EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, EEAS, August 2026.

THE PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT AND THE CONDITIONS FOR POLITICAL COMPETITION

Activities of the student bloc, opposition parties and other political initiatives have made the political offer more visible to the public - this is what emerges from the observation of the activities of political and other actors carried out over four months of the election year, from May to August 2026. The government, for its part, built its advantage through extensive use of public office, public institutions and public resources, and through the announcement and promotion of economic support programmes for citizens in a period of intense speculation about elections. Pressures connected with employment and social entitlements, and incidents directed at politically engaged citizens, limited free and safe political participation.

The first half of the election year was marked by intense and comprehensive political mobilisation, in which activity on the ground increasingly took on the features of an election campaign even though no campaign had officially begun. Alongside their regular party work, the ruling parties made abundant use of the advantage that holding power affords them. Their activities were marked by cases of public institutions and resources being used for political purposes, and by conduct that raises concerns as to its lawfulness. More than 1,200 activities of public officials were recorded across Serbia during the observation period. The most active among them was President Aleksandar Vučić, and the number of his activities rose particularly during August. Direct payments and other financial benefits to citizens were also announced, with a total value reaching almost €1 billion and exceeding the combined amounts recorded ahead of the 2022 and 2023 electoral cycles. These patterns further blurred the line between the state and the ruling party. The Student Movement carried out activities across Serbia aimed at mobilising citizens and developing its own electoral infrastructure, while opposition parties also increased their presence on the ground. Political activity unfolded in an atmosphere of rising tension and frequent incidents, from restrictions on access to political events to physical clashes and police interventions.

The activities of political actors before the elections were called

The protest mobilisation of the student bloc gradually took on the character of a more serious political organisation. Between May and August, student activities were recorded in half of the municipalities and towns in Serbia - more than 80 of them - as well as in the diaspora. The intensity of activity rose continuously throughout the period, with a sharp jump in August, when more activities were recorded than in May and June combined (Graphic 4).

Students organised local gatherings,⁸⁷ conversations⁸⁸ with citizens, public discussions⁸⁹ and other public events devoted to the elections, healthcare, education, environmental protection and local issues. The most widespread was the "A Student in Every Village" campaign,⁹⁰ aimed at visiting smaller settlements and talking directly with citizens, including door-to-door canvassing. Training sessions⁹¹ were also organised for potential polling board members.

The Student Movement sought to broaden its activity by linking the students' demands⁹² to the problems of various professional and social groups and by supporting their initiatives. It supported⁹³ employees who had drawn attention to political pressure and irregularities in their workplaces, including dismissed workers of the state electricity company EPS and candidates in the elections to the Medical Chamber. At the protest of 23 May⁹⁴ in Belgrade, programme guidelines were presented⁹⁵ in the fields of healthcare, education, social policy and labour rights, which were subsequently promoted at stands. Over the summer the circle widened to farmers (a public discussion on agriculture in Novi

⁸⁷ Ozonpress (2026), Milanovčani danima bez vode, večeras izlaze na ulice, <https://link.crtar.rs/108>

⁸⁸ Glas Šumadije (2026), „Veliki studentski bazar - od Morave do Ibra" u subotu u Kragujevcu, Aranđelovcu, Lapovu, Rači, Kraljevu, <https://link.crtar.rs/10c>.

⁸⁹ 020media, mikserbalkan (2026), U okviru Mikser festivala u Kulturnom centru Novi Pazar danas je održana tribina Mikser talks- „Jedan svijet, jedna borba". <https://link.crtar.rs/zh>, 5 June

⁹⁰ studenti_ukg (2026), „Dok nas neki drugi dele mi se svakog vikenda upoznajemo ", <https://link.crtar.rs/10h>, 14 July

⁹¹ gavriloandric (2026), „Radi se punom parom!", <https://link.crtar.rs/zk>, 14 July

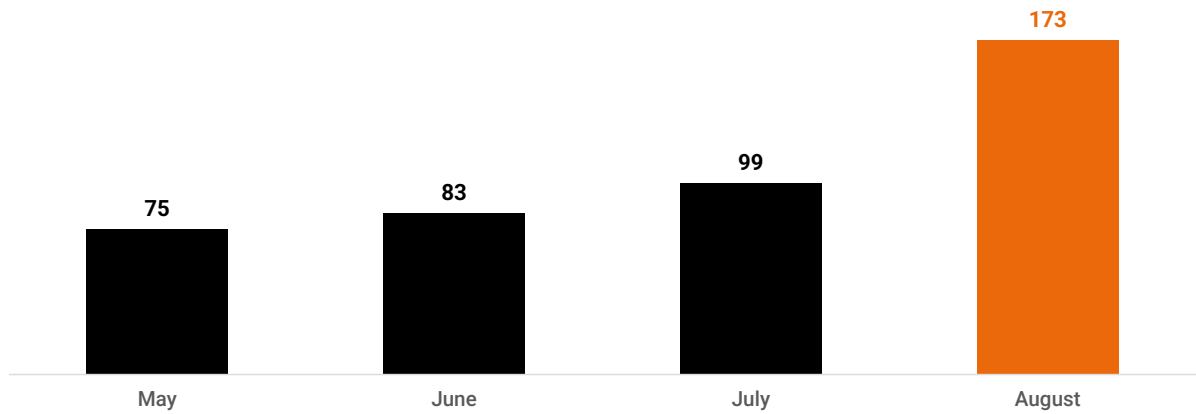
⁹² The tragedy at the railway station in Novi Sad, in which 16 people died, together with the escalation of violence against students and demonstrators, set in motion the protest movement and the university blockades. The students then formulated four demands directed at establishing responsibility, justice and institutional accountability. In May 2025, after more than five months of protests and university blockades, the students put the calling of snap parliamentary elections forward as their central demand, which remains their key demand today. None of these demands has been met to date. More on the students' demands at: <https://link.crtar.rs/10l>

⁹³ studenti_u_blokadi (2026), „Podrška Goranu Perišiću i svim pobunjenim radnicima!", <https://link.crtar.rs/zm>, 16 May

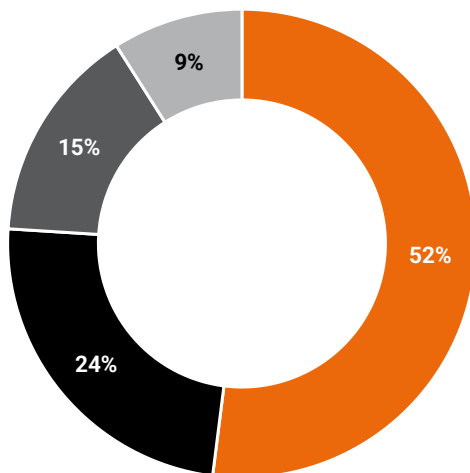
⁹⁴ Instagram staranica Studenata u blokadi, Protest na Slaviji, 23.5.2026, <https://link.crtar.rs/10k>

⁹⁵ Radio Sto Plus (2026), Studenti na Slaviji predstavili deo političkog programa, nakon skupa incidenti i hapšenja, <https://link.crtar.rs/zs>

Intensity of recorded activities by month (1 May-31 August 2026)



BREAKDOWN BY TYPE OF ACTIVITY



■ Meetings / door-to-door **52%**
■ Gatherings, protests and marches **24%** ■ Stands and bazaars **15%**
■ Public discussions **9%**

THREE DOMINANT THEMES



Graphic 4: Overview of the Student Movement's activities from May to August 2026

Sad, a campaign to help with the fruit harvest, the "Agrarian Reform" initiative), cultural workers (a call to boycott the EXPO tender) and university staff under financial pressure. The movement also continued with mobilisation and local activities, such as the Festival of Freedom⁹⁶ in Kosjerić, student bazaars, the production of materials for protests, and environmental campaigns. The attitude of student groups towards the opposition varied between local settings, as the elections of 29 March also showed: in some municipalities joint student-opposition lists were formed, while in others the students ran on their own.

⁹⁶ studenti.kosjeric (2026), „Drugi dan festivala slobode otvoren”, <https://link.cрта.rs/10i>, 6 June

Photograph 1: The student protest of 23 May 2026 (Source: Students in Blockade)⁹⁷



To the student bloc's growing visibility the SNS responded with the "Serbia Is Winning" campaign, whose name recalled the students' slogan "Students Are Winning". The similarity of names, messages and methods of promotion - banners, stickers, stands and field activities - may have made it harder for citizens to tell the two campaigns apart. Appropriating the slogan may also have had a broader polarising effect: by setting "Serbia" against "the students", the political conflict was further framed as a division between two opposing camps.

The SNS's intensive field work confirmed the already observed practice of an almost permanent campaign. Over four months, from May to the end of August, more than 2,600 SNS activities were recorded, with a sharp jump in August (close to two-fifths of all activities were recorded in August). Activities took place predominantly through stands,⁹⁸ meetings of party branches,⁹⁹ the tidying of public spaces,¹⁰⁰ door-to-door can-

⁹⁷ <https://link.crt.rs/10k>

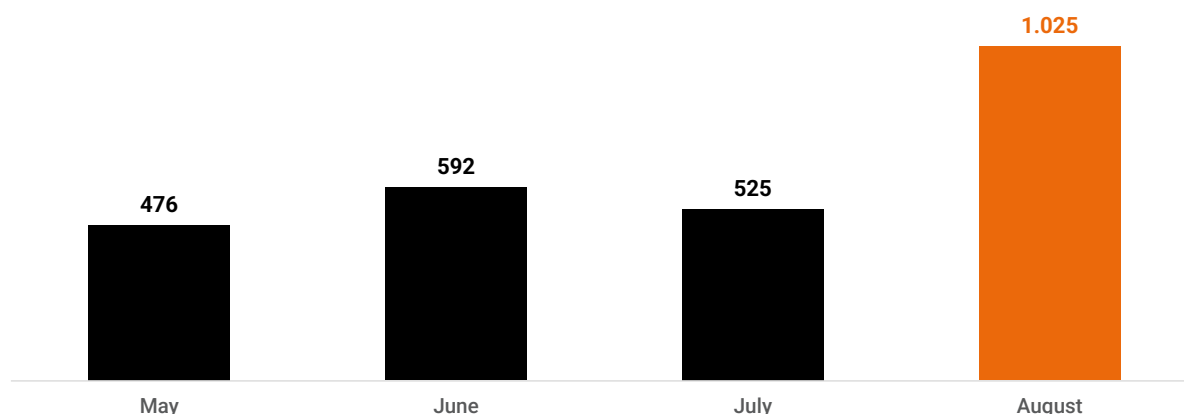
⁹⁸ sns_bajinabasta (2026), „Danas se družimo na štandu opštinskog odbora Srpske napredne stranke Bajina Bašta“, <https://link.crt.rs/10f>, 10 July

⁹⁹ sns_smed_palanka (2026), „Održan sastanak aktivista MO SNS Donji grad“, <https://link.crt.rs/zy>, 13 August

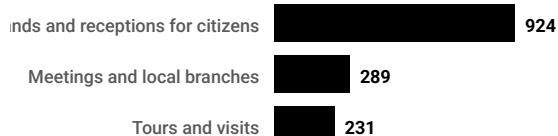
¹⁰⁰ sns_vozdovac (2026), „Ulepšavamo i popravljamo ono što nesavesna i bahata manjina uništava. Tako Srpska napredna stranka radi svakog dana i na svim nivoima. Ujedinjena Srbija je lepša i bolja i zato ćemo pobediti“, <https://link.crt.rs/10e>, 15 August

vassing,¹⁰¹ home visits¹⁰² and conversations with citizens (Graphic 5). Party activists, local officials and state officials took part in them, and public discussions,¹⁰³ rallies¹⁰⁴ and events aimed at various social groups were also organised.

Intensity of SNS activities by month (1 May-31 August 2026)



THREE MOST FREQUENT ACTIVITIES



THREE DOMINANT THEMES



Graphic 5: Overview of the SNS's activities from May to August 2026

The slogan "Serbia Is Winning",¹⁰⁵ used from the middle of May on banners, at stands and at party rallies, remained in circulation after the name of the candidate list "United

¹⁰¹ sns_kragujevac (2026), „Razgovor sa građanima od vrata do vrata najbolji deo stranačkih aktivnosti, čujete kritike, predloge ali i pohvale za ono što je urađeno“, <https://link.crtar.rs/102>, 10 May

¹⁰² snsbelapalanka (2026), „Goran Miljković obišao porodicu koja je dobila kuću kroz program Ministarstva“, <https://link.crtar.rs/10d>, 10 June

¹⁰³ sns_pozarevac (2026), post announcing an educational public discussion on women's health, „Značaj prevencije u ginekologiji“, organised by the Požarevac city branch of SNS at the Youth Centre in Kostolac, addressed by a specialist in gynaecology and obstetrics. 20 May. <https://link.crtar.rs/105>

¹⁰⁴ sns_zagubica (2026), post announcing a get-together for pensioners at the OLYMPIC restaurant in Joašanica, held by the Žagubica municipal branch of SNS together with the President of the Municipality and his assistant. 25 May. <https://link.crtar.rs/10b>

¹⁰⁵ miloševućević (2026), „Pre godinu dana, na veliki praznik Petrovdan, blokaderi su palili i rušili, i hteli da bace Srbiju na kolena. Danas, na Petrovdan, narod im poručuje - pobedili smo! I uvek ćemo pobeđivati ujedinjeni u borbi za našu Srbiju!“, <https://link.crtar.rs/10a>, 12 July

Serbia”¹⁰⁶ was presented at the SNS's rally in Belgrade on 27 June. In the activities that followed, “United Serbia” began to predominate as the ruling party's main slogan, both in promotional content and in announcements of a possible list under the name “Aleksandar Vučić - United Serbia”.

¹⁰⁶ milosvucevic (2026), „Ponosan i srećan sa našim divnim ljudima u Starim i Novim Ledincima. Dugujemo im neizmernu zahvalnost na svemu što su izdržali, što smo zajedno sačuvali i grad i državu”, <https://link.crt.rs/109>, 22 August

Photograph 2: The SNS rally, 27 June 2026 (Source: Mašina)¹⁰⁷



Party activity remained closely bound up with the work of state and local institutions, accompanied by allegations of pressure and of the misuse of public resources. Public works, infrastructure projects, social benefits and other measures financed from public funds were promoted on SNS's social media channels, often with public officials taking part. Allegations were also recorded of employees being deployed and the resources of public enterprises used to organise party events, and of pressure being put on employees.

Opposition parties were active, but without a common pattern of activity. Their activities were recorded in at least 50 municipalities, and among the more visible actors were the Party of Freedom and Justice, the People's Movement of Serbia, Serbia Centre and the Green-Left Front. These were largely decentralised activities concerning local issues, conducted through stands, meetings, statements and initiatives critical of the government's record. Differences between the parties are also becoming visible in their attitude towards the student bloc, including the question of supporting its future electoral bid. As

¹⁰⁷ <https://link.crt.rs/107>

of the closing of this report, the Green-Left Front,¹⁰⁸ the Democratic Party,¹⁰⁹ the Serbian Movement Dveri¹¹⁰ and the Social Democratic Party¹¹¹ (extra-parliamentary parties) had announced that they would support the Student List at the coming elections.

Actors that have announced they will contest the elections. On the basis of the public announcements recorded so far, a number of political actors have confirmed that they will contest the coming elections. Although the Socialist Party of Serbia initially announced that it would run "independently", separately from SNS, Ivica Dačić specified that United Serbia (Jedinstvena Srbija) and the Greens of Serbia would, as previously, also appear on that list. United Serbia subsequently confirmed its decision to contest the elections in coalition with SPS. In the meantime SPS signed a memorandum¹¹² with the Social Democratic Party of Serbia expressing readiness to cooperate in the coming electoral process, while any joint bid will be governed by a separate coalition agreement after the elections are called and after decisions by the parties' bodies. On 6 September the Serbian Radical Party announced that it would take part on the "United Serbia" list formed around SNS, while on 7 September the "We - the People's Strength" movement confirmed the People's Party's earlier announcement of a joint bid. Running independently was also announced by the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians,¹¹³ the Strength of Serbia Movement - BK,¹¹⁴ the Roma Union of Serbia¹¹⁵ and the Sandžak Democratic Party,¹¹⁶ while participation was also announced by the People's Movement of Serbia,¹¹⁷ the Democratic Union of Roma,¹¹⁸ the Movement of Socialists,¹¹⁹ War Veterans for Serbia,¹²⁰ the Party of Freedom and Justice,¹²¹ the "Dad, This Is For You" movement¹²² and the Workers' Party.¹²³ Broader coalitions have also been formed or announced: the Fraternal Alliance 381 - Together for Our State,¹²⁴ bringing together several minority parties, and the minority coalition Snaga,¹²⁵ which includes the Party of the Future and Development; the People's Party¹²⁶ announced that it would run in coalition with the We - the People's Strength movement and with citizens' groups and associations from outside Belgrade, while the NADA coalition¹²⁷ announced that it would contest the elections on a list of the "authentic right", open to like-minded partners. These announcements already contain indications that the question of the authenticity of lists will be present at the coming elections too. For example, War Veterans for Serbia is registered as a political party of the Slovak national minority. At the 2024 local elections it ran in coalition with another minority party under the name "The Voice of the People Is the Strength of the People", which gave no indication of the list's minority character and could have misled voters as to who stood behind it. Also in 2024, appeals were lodged over suspected forged signatures on the list of the "Dad, This Is For You" movement, after individuals named on the list denied

¹⁰⁸ Danas (2026), ZLF ponovio: Podržaćemo studentsku listu na izborima, <https://link.crtar.rs/106>

¹⁰⁹ Demokratska stranka (2025), Демократска странка пружа подршку студентском захтеву за изборе, <https://link.crtar.rs/104>

¹¹⁰ Danas (2026), Dveri donele odluku: Podržavaju studente, <https://link.crtar.rs/103>

¹¹¹ N1 (2026), Predsedništvo SDS potvrdilo odluku o podršci studentskoj listi na predstojećim izborima, <https://link.crtar.rs/101>

that they had signed it.

State and party: the institutional advantage of those in power

The blurring of the line between the state and the ruling party was a defining feature of the observation period: public office, public services, public benefits and public resources were used for political promotion and mobilisation. The government's political visibility was built not through formal party activity but primarily through the frequent presence of officials in institutions, companies, at construction sites and at various events, and through direct contact with citizens.

112 Nova.rs (2026), SPS i SDP potpisali Memorandum o saradnji, <https://link.crt.rs/zz>

113 021.rs (2026), Pastor: SVM na izbore izlazi samostalno, primarni cilj nam nisu ministarska mesta, <https://link.crt.rs/zx>

114 JUGpress (2026), I Bogoljub Karić u predizbornoj kampanji u Leskovcu, <https://link.crt.rs/zw>

115 Glas Zaječara (2026), Unija Roma Srbije: Samostalni izlazak na izbore, <https://link.crt.rs/zu>

116 sdpsandzak (2026), „Glavni odbor Sandžačke demokratske partije, kojim je predsedavao predsednik Samir Lekić, na sednici održanoj u subotu 15.08.2026. razmatrao je i usvojio odluke o principima i načinu učešća na predstojećim parlamentarnim izborima”, <https://link.crt.rs/zt>, 15 August

117 Narodni pokret Srbije (2026), Zbijamo redove, jačamo lokalne odbore i nastavljamo borbu za interes građana, <https://link.crt.rs/zr>

118 Fonet (2026), DUR će učestvovati na izborima, <https://link.crt.rs/zq>

119 021.rs (2026), Vulin: Pokret socijalista izlazi na izbore na listi gde EU neće moći ni da nas postavi, ni skloni, <https://link.crt.rs/zo>

120 Savez ratnih veterana Srbije (2026), Saopštenje za javnost, <https://link.crt.rs/zn>

121 Insajder (2026), Borko Stefanović: Potrebna smena vlasti uz jasno opredeljenje gde i kuda idemo, <https://link.crt.rs/zi>

122 cale_ovo_je_za_tebe_ (2026), „Zvanično saopštenje Pokreta „Čale, ovo je za tebe” povodom predstojećih parlamentarnih izbora! ”, <https://link.crt.rs/zj>, 2 August

123 Danas (2026), „Ne želimo da budemo za jednokratnu upotrebu”: Radnička partija izlazi na predstojeće izbore, <https://link.crt.rs/zi>

124 UNS Press centar (2026), Formiranje predizborne koalicije „Bratski savez 381 - Zajedno za našu državu” i predstavljanje političke platforme „Manifest 381”, <https://link.crt.rs/zg>

125 N1 (2026), Stranka budućnosti i razvoja najavila učešće na izborima kao deo manjinske koalicije SNAGA, <https://link.crt.rs/ze>

126 Danas (2026), Gajić: Sa Nestorovićem na parlamentarne izbore, saglasni o važnim temama, <https://link.crt.rs/zd>

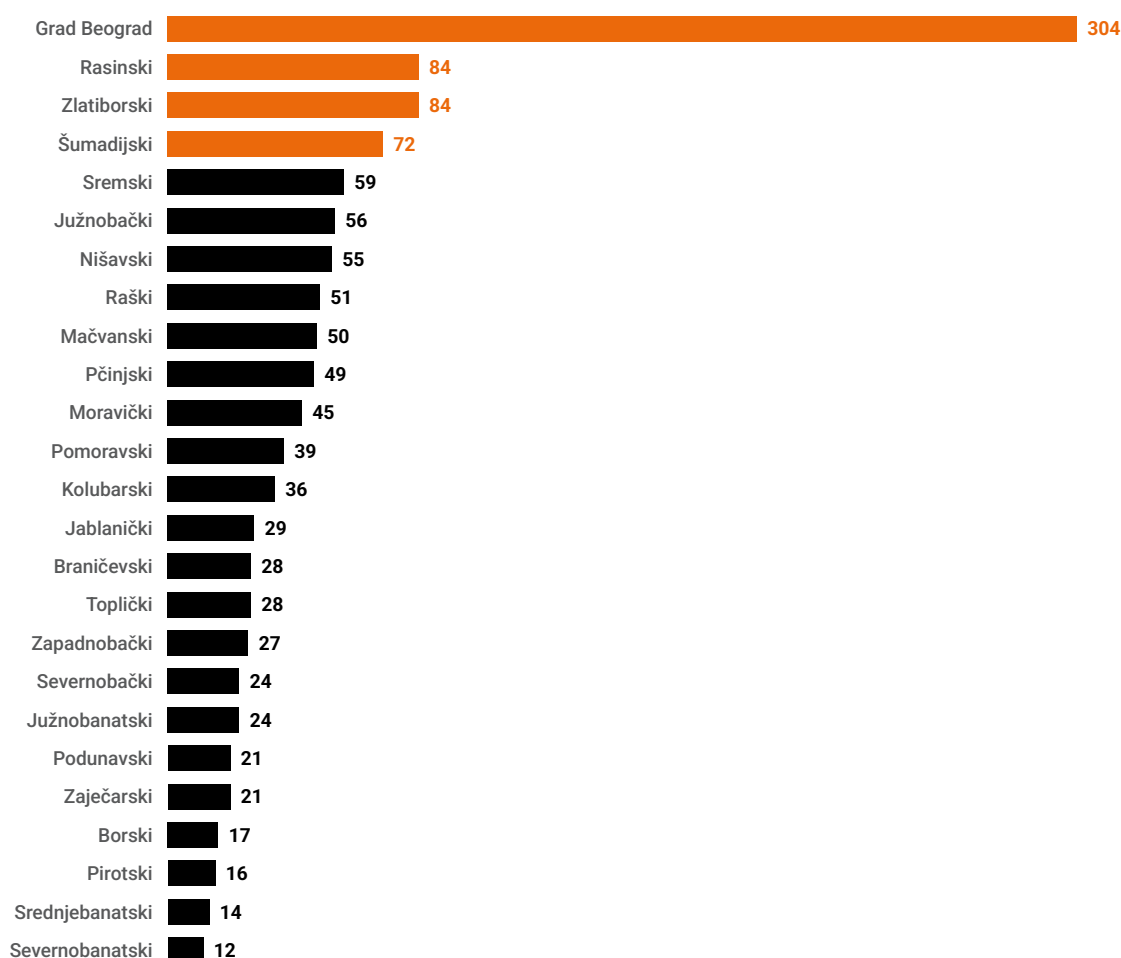
127 N1 (2026), Miloš Jovanović: Koalicija NADA na listi autentične desnice, otvoreni za srodne partnere, <https://link.crt.rs/zb>

Public office in the service of political promotion

Given the pronounced presence of state and local officials, it was difficult to tell whether the activities being carried out across Serbia were those of the party or of the institutions. By the end of August, 2,190 appearances by senior state officials had been recorded across the country, in more than 1,200 individual or group activities.

The intensity of state officials' appearances rose through the summer, peaking in August - in that month alone more than 400 activities involving them were recorded. In a single week, from 17 to 23 August, almost a third of all officials' activities for August were recorded, with 56 officials taking part. Officials' presence is markedly concentrated: every fourth activity took place in Belgrade, and the largest numbers of activities outside the capital were recorded in the Rasina, Zlatibor and Šumadija districts (Graphic 6).

Activities of senior state officials by district (1 May-31 August 2026)



Graphic 6: Regional distribution of public officials' activities over the four months of observation, May-August 2026

State officials most often visited companies and institutions (179 activities), celebrations (171), cultural, entertainment and other events (132), meetings and sessions (124), commemorations and ceremonies (108), works in progress (88), formal signings and handovers of contracts (74) and formal openings (60).

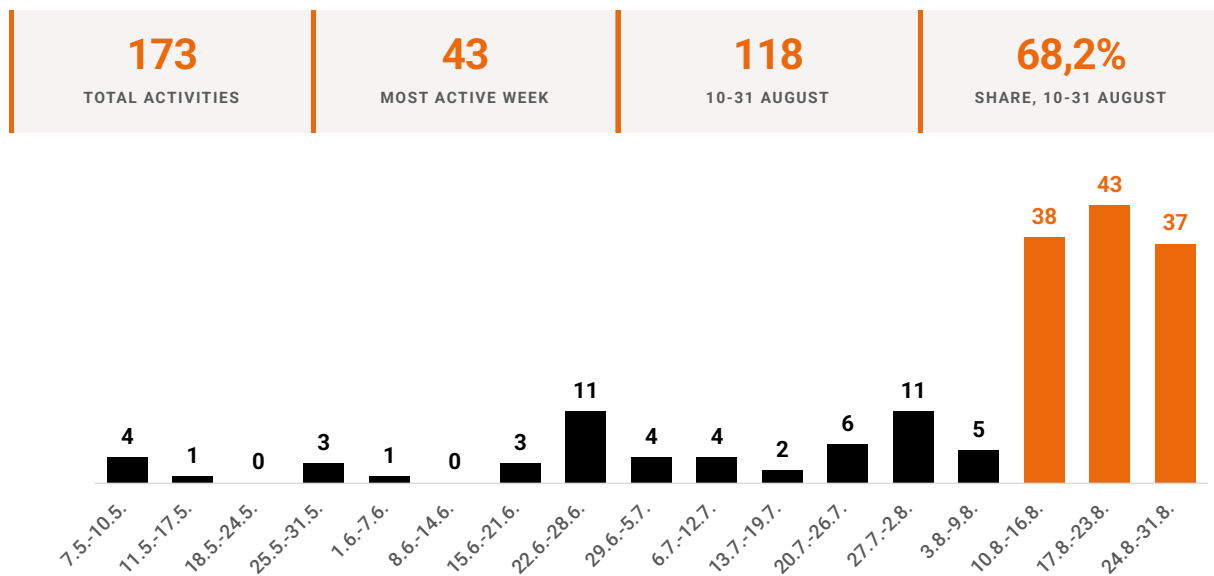
By contrast, activities that were clearly organised by the SNS or by one of the parties of the ruling coalition - rallies, stands, door-to-door canvassing - involved officials only sporadically.

The President of the Republic at the centre of continuous promotion of those in power

The President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, appeared 173 times at various events in 68 municipalities and towns in Serbia over the four-month period, and thus stood out as the most active senior state official. As many as 76 per cent of all those places he visited on a three-week tour in August. More than two-thirds of his activities were recorded after 10 August, as part of that tour. The intensification of these activities coincides in time with his announcement of 16 August that he would call the elections within 15 to 25 days (Graphic 7).

Intensity of Aleksandar Vučić's activities

Recorded activities from 7 May to 31 August 2026



Graphic 7: Timeline of recorded activities of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, in places across Serbia, May-August 2026

Geographically, the presidential tour's activities were directed towards central, western

and southern Serbia: 91 activities in Šumadija and western Serbia, 45 in southern and eastern Serbia, 24 in Belgrade and only 13 in Vojvodina.

The most intensive days were organised as multi-day regional tours. The peak was recorded on 22 August, when the President of Serbia visited eight municipalities in the Pčinja and Jablanica districts - Vranje, Leskovac, Bujanovac, Preševo, Surdulica, Vladičin Han, Vlasotince and Trgovište - and took part in 16 activities in total. The pattern was repeated: a visit to a company or institution, a tour of infrastructure works, a visit to a household, and an address to assembled citizens.

Photograph 3: The welcome¹²⁸ for the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, in Bačka Topola.¹²⁹ 4 September 2026



Thematically, infrastructure and the economy predominated, with family and tradition forming a third block. The most frequent were visits¹³⁰ to companies and institutions, tours¹³¹ of works in progress, visits to households¹³² and celebrations.¹³³

The President's visit to a local community often consisted of a series of events in which the government's achievements, local projects and public investment were linked directly to the President's personal presence.

One example recorded on 10 August in Nova Varoš stands out in particular, when a

¹²⁸ palilula_sns (2026), „”, <https://link.crtar.rs/zc>, 4 September

¹²⁹ INFOBLOK (2026), „Kažu prošao je Vučić, baš nas briga šta je obećao” Predsednik u Bačkoj Topoli dobio pohvale, a onda otkrio veliku tajnu - To je najbolja taktika!, <https://link.crtar.rs/za>

¹³⁰ buducnostsrbiyeav (2026), „Došao sam pre svega da čujem vas, jer mi je važno da znamo šta još možemo da uradimo za ljude koji ovde žive i rade”, <https://link.crtar.rs/z3>, 10 August

¹³¹ buducnostsrbiyeav (2026), „Ljudi u ovom kraju nisu imali put, a sada se radi ozbiljan put koji će im mnogo značiti”, <https://link.crtar.rs/z4>, 11 August

¹³² buducnostsrbiyeav (2026), „Nema lepšeg prizora od dečjeg osmeha i jedne lepe, brojne porodice”, <https://link.crtar.rs/z5>, 28 June

¹³³ rtvkraljevoibarskenovosti (2026), „Više od 4.000 ljudi na Narodnom veselju u Oplanićima koje je posetio predsednik Srbije Aleksandar Vučić”, <https://link.crtar.rs/10j>, 26 June

woman stated¹³⁴ in front of the President and local officials that she had been promised employment if she gathered a certain number of votes for the 2020 elections, and that the promise had not been kept. Her statement points to a clientelistic understanding of the relationship between citizens and political actors, in which party engagement and the securing of votes are expected in exchange for access to employment. It is particularly concerning that the object of such an exchange is a job, decisions about which may rest with institutions or with holders of public office.

That the recorded activities have the features of an intensive pre-election campaign conducted through the presidential office, even though the elections have not yet been called, is further indicated by the organised distribution of a letter from the President to the home addresses of pensioners and recipients of social benefits across Serbia. The Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance (the PIO Fund) and Post of Serbia were involved in producing the letter and distributing it. Content analysis of the letter shows a political, pre-election tone.¹³⁵ It was delivered to recipients through Post of Serbia. According to information obtained from employees of that public enterprise, the client commissioning the work was the PIO Fund. CRTA Election Observation Mission received information from interlocutors that postal workers, when delivering the letters, were also tasked with collecting from recipients - along with their name and surname - telephone numbers and signatures giving consent to receive further communications. Since the purpose, the manner of use and the retention period for the collected data are not clearly stated, this practice raises questions about the lawfulness and transparency of their processing, and about the possibility that the contact details may be used for further political messaging. A subsequent statement by Post of Serbia¹³⁶ confirming that these data were collected does not, however, provide a clear answer as to what purpose it is to serve, since it invokes the creation of a database for the e-Post service, which is still being set up. Yet the fact that citizens found the letters in their letterboxes with no information whatsoever about that service or any invitation to leave their contact details subsequently, and that it is not known whether the same information is collected when other post is delivered, does not suggest a systematic approach to building a database of such importance. Nor is any information publicly available as to who bore the cost of distributing the letters - the PIO Fund or Post of Serbia. In either case, the President's political promotion would have been carried out using the capacity and funds of public institutions. It is particularly problematic that the messages are directed at pensioners and socially vulnerable citizens, while personal data are collected from them without any clear explanation of what they will be used for.

¹³⁴ N1 (2026), (VIDEO) "Ako skupim određeni broj glasova, dobiću posao - a nisam": Pitanje za Vučića u Novoj Varoši, <https://link.crt.rs/10g>

¹³⁵ "I want to say to you that every person, every pensioner, every one of you has and will have the same right as every other citizen to decide to whom to give their vote. In our surroundings there are those who oppose our efforts to give you support, because they see you as a burden. In the end, the only burden are those who laid this country waste in order to fill their own pockets." This is an example of a message from the letter of the President of Serbia,

Although only two SNS rallies were formally recorded - the rally in front of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on 27 June and the "United Serbia" rally in Užice on 29 August - the appearance of the President of the Republic of Serbia, together with the placement of recognisable political and promotional content, including the announcement of the name of the future candidate list and calls on citizens to vote for it, raise suspicions that funds intended for a political party's regular operations were spent for purposes other than intended in order to run a campaign before it was called, and suspicions of misuse of public office and public resources.

CRTA submitted to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption an initiative for the active monitoring of the SNS's political activities, on the suspicion that the party is running an election campaign before elections have been called and that it has spent funds intended for regular operations for purposes other than intended. The occasion was the "United Serbia" rally held in Užice on 29 August 2026, at which, judging by material published on the party's official accounts, considerable sums were invested in the stage, sound system, video screens and security, together with organised bus transport of supporters from across Serbia, food and, according to some accounts, daily allowances paid out. The message "United Serbia Aleksandar Vučić" was displayed on the podium, on the screens and on supporters' T-shirts, while immediately before the rally Aleksandar Vučić called on voters to vote for the "United Serbia" list, and at the rally itself spoke of victory at the elections - which, under the statutory definition, constitutes an election campaign activity. Since funds for regular operations may be used for a campaign only if they are first paid into a dedicated account, which is not opened before the elections are called, CRTA is asking the Agency to gather evidence on the costs of the rally and how they were paid - including its broadcast on TV Pink and TV Informer, which constitutes either a cost or a non-monetary donation - and, once the candidate list has been confirmed, to establish whether the misdemeanour under Article 42 of the Law on Financing of Political Activities has been committed, for which the prescribed penalty is between RSD 200,000 and RSD 2,000,000, to file a request to initiate misdemeanour proceedings, and to inform the public accordingly.

After President Vučić, the most active was Minister Adrijana Mesarović, with 145 appearances in 71 towns and municipalities, the widest geographical coverage of any official. She is followed by Ministers Darko Glišić (88) and Dragan Glamočić (72), Prime Minister Đuro Macut (67) and Minister Nikola Selaković (65). Alongside SNS officials, among the

suggesting that a different electoral outcome could jeopardise their support from public funds, even though these are measures financed by the state and not by the political actor promoting them. The text of the letter can be found in citizens' posts on social networks, for example: <https://link.crt.rs/yw>

136 "In compliance with the Law on Personal Data Protection, users who give consent to electronic delivery of items through the e-Postman system are enabled to receive the bills, notifications and information they select in electronic form as well, in addition to the classic delivery of items to the user's address. For that, Pošta Srbije requires the user's consent, which is precisely stated in the form, and that is the purpose of collecting telephone numbers, with the consent of the user obtained." Statement by Pošta Srbije, <https://link.crt.rs/yw>

most active are also representatives of coalition partners: Ivica Dačić and Đorđe Milićević (SPS) and Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski (Zavetnici).



Photograph 4: The President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, addressing the citizens of Belegiš. Behind him is the recognisable party slogan United Serbia. 8 August 2026.¹³⁷



Photograph 5: The President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, talking with citizens in Novi Pazar. In the background is the party banner Serbia Is Winning. 24 August 2026.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ buducnostsrbiyeav (2026), „Najviše volim da razgovaram sa vama i da čujem šta imate da kažete. Ništa lepše od toga nema”, <https://link.crtar.rs/yt>, 8 August

¹³⁸ buducnostsrbiyeav (2026), „Mного toga važnog za Novi Pazar i ovaj kraj kreće da se radi odmah. Već za desetak dana počinjemo radove na novim putevima, uređićemo i ulaz u grad, a zatim krećemo i u izgradnju potpuno nove škole u Deževu”, <https://link.crtar.rs/yt>, 24 August



Photograph 6: The President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, visited the Bugarić family and talked with residents in the village of Vranovina, Deževa. A child in a United Serbia T-shirt can be seen in the photograph. 24 August 2026.¹³⁹

Misuse of public institutions and resources for party purposes

A particularly pronounced form of the intertwining of state and party was pressure on public sector employees to support SNS activities.

Among the 110 recorded cases with elements of pressure are allegations of employees being brought to party rallies in an organised manner, as part of which lists of employees were drawn up, quotas set, telephone calls made and "recommendations" to attend issued.

In addition, over the four-month period CRTA Election Observation Mission recorded 366 cases with elements of clientelism - exclusively among the activities of the SNS. On average, every seventh recorded SNS activity bore traces of clientelism.

CRTA observers also recorded 213 cases with elements of misuse of public office and public resources.

For the SNS rally in Belgrade on 27 June, the "Sloboda" factory in Čačak was, according to interlocutors of the CRTA Election Observation Mission, asked to provide 500 workers, with employees offered paid days off while workers engaged through contracts and agencies were threatened with the loss of their jobs. Allegations were also recorded that employees in PIO Fund branch offices were called upon to attend the same rally, and that workers at "Zastava oružja" were recommended to attend an SNS event in Lapovo. An allegation¹⁴⁰ by

¹³⁹ buducnostsrbijske (2026), „U Deževi ima dece, ima mladih i ima života, i zbog toga sam danas istinski srećan. Oko 250 đaka pohađa školu i zato ćemo napraviti potpuno novu školu za decu iz ovog i okolnih sela“, <https://link.crtars/ys>, 24 August

a citizen, during Vučić's visit to the Toplica district on 19 August, that he had lost his job because he had not gone to a rally could be heard in the live television broadcast.

Pressure was not limited to attendance at rallies.

At the public utility company JKSP "Zaječar", employees were, according to sources, telephoned and pressed to sign up as "safe votes". Employees of the Centre for Social Work in Inđija were assigned to teams that visited recipients of social assistance, women victims of domestic violence and agricultural households, gathered data on political support and recorded "capillary votes". According to the same source, undecided citizens and those who did not support President Vučić were threatened with the suspension of assistance and subsidies. At SNS premises in Zaječar, conversations were also held about the continued engagement of trainees, workers on temporary and occasional contracts, and public enterprise employees whose contracts had expired.

Among the prominent activities with elements of clientelism, one case stands out in Čačak, where the local branch of the SNS provides material assistance in a targeted way to citizens in socially vulnerable categories (elderly people living alone and families in difficult housing conditions) as part of the party campaign "Good Neighbour".¹⁴¹ The assistance as a rule consists of household appliances (refrigerators, televisions, cookers) and is presented as the personal contribution of individual members of the ruling party's municipal branch.

¹⁴⁰ CRTA (2026), „U poseti Topličkom okrugu predsednik Srbije naišao je i na građanina koji tvrdi da je dobio otkaz jer nije 'bio na mitingu'“, <https://link.crtar.rs/yr>, 19 August

¹⁴¹ sns_cacak (2026), „Danas je u Petnici, u organizaciji GrO SNS Čačak i MO Petnica - Brezovice - Rajac, član GrO Milan Bojović posetio porodicu Miladinović“, <https://link.crtar.rs/yq>, 16 August



Photograph 7: "Good Neighbour" campaign, 17 August 2026.¹⁴²



Photograph 8: The Women's Union of the Smederevo City Branch of the SNS and the Smederevo Health Centre organised preventive health checks and a conversation with citizens in Badljevica. 20 May 2026.¹⁴³

Several cases of party work intertwining with public services, particularly in healthcare, were recorded during the observation period.

The most striking examples were recorded in Čačak,¹⁴⁴ where preventive ultrasound examinations were organised on SNS premises, and in Smederevo,¹⁴⁵ where the party's city branch organised preventive health checks "in cooperation with the Health Centre" and distributed promotional party material. A similar pattern was recorded in Bela Crkva,¹⁴⁶ where medical staff of the community health centre carried out blood pressure and blood sugar measurements and cardiological examinations as part of a "Health Bazaar" announced by the local SNS branch. In Zemun¹⁴⁷ the party organised door-to-door medical examinations, visiting citizens and examining them in their homes, while in Bela Palanka¹⁴⁸ preventive examinations were organised by the community health centre and the municipality, and the campaign was promoted on the SNS's official profile.

¹⁴² sns_cacak (2026), „Акција 'Dobar komšija' bila je danas u Ostri, gde su koordinator rejona Vladan Milić, članica Glavnog odbora Biljana Jakovljević i članica Gradskog odbora Milica Dačić posetili porodicu Anđelić i, tom prilikom, uručili im skroman poklon", <https://link.crtar.rs/yp>, 17 August

¹⁴³ Srpska Napredna Stranka Smederevo (2026), <https://link.crtar.rs/yo>, 20 May

¹⁴⁴ Српска Напредна Странка Чачак (2026), Превентивни ултразвучни прегледи дојке организовани су и у просторијама странке на Љубић кеју, 30 April 2026, <https://link.crtar.rs/yn>

¹⁴⁵ sns_smederevo (2026), post stating that the Smederevo city branch of SNS, „in cooperation with the Smederevo Health Centre“, organised preventive health checks for residents of the village of Seone. 11 May. <https://link.crtar.rs/ym>

Complaints to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption in cases of the officials' campaign

Between May and the end of August 2026, CRTA submitted seven complaints to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption on the suspicion of breaches of provisions of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and the Law on Financing of Political Activities. Those complaints pointed to various forms of connection between public officials and state bodies and the activities of the ruling SNS - from the use of official communication channels, through the engagement of public officials in party activities, to the organisation of a large number of events intended to mobilise citizens politically.¹⁴⁹ As of the closing of this report the Agency had not acted on a single complaint.

On the basis of knowledge gained through long-term observation, other proceedings were also initiated on the suspicion that public and institutional resources were being used for political activities. In June 2026 CRTA submitted requests for access to information of public importance to the city Centre for Social Work and to the Savski Venac police station in connection with the case of a minor resident of the children's home in Zvečanska Street, in respect of whom there was information that he had left the institution after organising, for a cash payment, residents' attendance at an SNS rally at the Arena - as stated in a document that had appeared in public. The Centre for Social Work refused the request, after which CRTA appealed to the Commissioner, while the Savski Venac police station replied that it held no data on the case.

An illustrative example is the complaint concerning more than 60 SNS activities organised during May and June 2026 across the country - "folk festivities", "people's assemblies", "get-togethers with pensioners" and "before and after" exhibitions. The complaint sought

¹⁴⁶ sns_bela_crkva (2026), OO Српске напредне странке у Белој Цркви организовао је Базар здравља као превентивни вид подршке очувању здравља наших суграђана. <https://link.crtars/yj>, 1 July

¹⁴⁷ sns_mo_altina (2026), Брига о здрављу је најважнија инвестиција. <https://link.crtars/yk>, 25 July

¹⁴⁸ snsbelapalanka (2026), ОРГАНИЗОВАНИ ПРЕВЕНТИВНИ ЛЕКАРСКИ ПРЕГЛЕДИ У ТАМЊАНИЦИ. <https://link.crtars/yj>, 5 July

¹⁴⁹ Two complaints against the director of the Centre for Social Work in Stara Pazova, Oliver Ristić, and against the SNS, on suspicion of breaches of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and the Law on Financing of Political Activities, over his conversations with citizens, counselling and provision of assistance on SNS premises; a complaint against the SNS in Indija, on suspicion of a breach of the Law on Financing of Political Activities, in which SNS published an invitation to citizens for conversations on party premises using the official telephone number of the municipal switchboard and the official email address of the secretary to the municipal president; a complaint against the acting director of the Centre for Social Work in Čačak, Stefani Milosavljević Ostojić, on suspicion of a breach of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, in that she was reported to have spoken with citizens about their social problems in front of SNS premises; a complaint against the SNS in Savski Venac, on suspicion of a breach of the Law on Financing of Political Activities by distributing money to citizens; and a complaint against the State Secretary at the Ministry of Mining and Energy and former mayor of Zaječar, Boško Ničić, on suspicion of a breach of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, in that he received subsidies under a project co-financed by the Ministry in which he holds office and by the city of Zaječar.

a check on how they were financed, that is, a determination of the source of the funds, and drew particular attention to the linking of public bodies' achievements with SNS's political activity.

In addition, CRTA submitted a request for access to information to the Red Cross of Serbia over indications that the Red Cross organisation in Indija had taken part in a promotional SNS event in July by setting up its stand. The Red Cross of Serbia confirmed the Indija organisation's participation, stating that the event had been organised by the municipality.

These cases point to a continuous intertwining of party activities with the work of public institutions, and to the fact that such practice appears across different fields - from social protection and the work of human rights organisations to the operations of local self-government bodies.

The activities described raise suspicions of breaches of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, namely Article 40, which governs the protection of the public interest and prohibits the use of public office to obtain a benefit; Article 47, which governs restrictions on public officials advising citizens; and Article 50, which governs officials' participation in political activities and prohibits the use of meetings held in an official capacity to promote a political entity. Breaches of the Law on Financing of Political Activities are also possible, namely of Article 6, which prescribes equal conditions for the provision of public services and goods to political entities, and Article 23, which prohibits the use of public resources for political purposes during the election campaign. In addition, attention was drawn to possible breaches of Article 25 of the Law on Social Protection, which prohibits discrimination against beneficiaries on the basis of political affiliation, and of Article 4 of the Law on Political Parties, which prohibits the direct exercise of power by a political party or the subordination of public authority to it.

The state's one-off financial measures and targeted support programmes

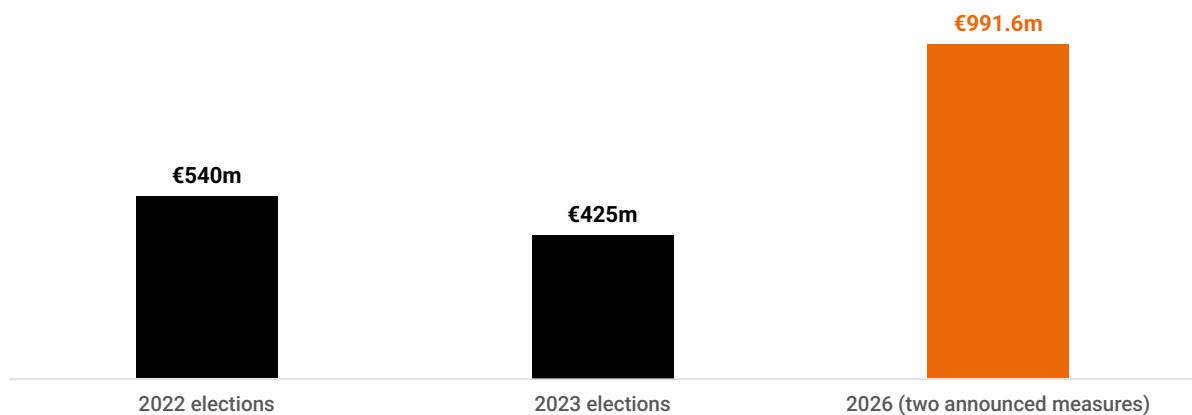
The CRTA Election Observation Mission assesses that a large-scale misuse of economic policy in Serbia is under way, which - in its exceptional character, the absence of expert debate and its implementation in the middle of the election campaign - indicates that its purpose is to create an unfair electoral advantage in favour of those in power. In the form of so-called helicopter money, almost €1 billion in cash will, as announced, be paid out to citizens in September 2026. This money will be disbursed through just two of the several announced economic measures directed at citizens over the coming months: (1) a one-off assistance package for pensioners and the socially vulnerable, and (2) payments of

almost two decades of profit on shares from the Shareholder Fund to all adult citizens.¹⁵⁰

Suspicion that this is an economic measure motivated by the coming elections is also raised by the fact that similar one-off financial packages were the practice in earlier electoral cycles as well. Even so, the two current measures stand out in that their amount exceeds the total sum paid out in cash to various groups of citizens in Serbia ahead of the 2022 and 2023 electoral cycles (Graphic 8).

The measures announced in 2026 exceed previous election cycles

Estimated amounts in millions of euros · 2026: direct payments and other financial benefits



The CRTA Election Observation Mission also recorded that state representatives, including President Vučić, announced and promoted these economic measures at the same time as they announced potential election dates.

Beyond the almost €1 billion in cash, in the period after 18 August alone, several further measures directed at a broad range of citizens and at particular social groups were announced or legislatively prepared: an increase in the minimum wage¹⁵¹ to around €600,

¹⁵⁰ Under the draft special law, which entered the parliamentary procedure on 21 August and was adopted at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly on 31 August, entitlement to a one-off payment of RSD 6,000 will also be granted to adult citizens who are not shareholders of the Shareholding Fund. They will have to apply for the payment, and the funds will be paid to them from the state budget, while existing entitlement holders will receive the money from the Fund.

¹⁵¹ Blic Biznis (2026), the Minister of Finance, Siniša Mali, said that the Government of Serbia proposes raising the minimum wage in Serbia by 9.2 per cent from 1 January next year, from €550 to €600, because no consensus was reached at the Social and Economic Council, so the Government will take the final decision at one of its forthcoming sessions. 18 August. <https://link.crtars.rs/yi>

an above-average pay rise¹⁵² for employees in social protection, an additional¹⁵³ RSD 200 million for subsidies to mothers buying a first home, and financial support¹⁵⁴ for a fifth and sixth child. Although these measures are of differing kinds, their clustering within just a few days in August means that the lowest-paid employees, social protection workers, families with children, the socially vulnerable, pensioners, veterans and practically the entire adult population were covered by new state benefits or promises precisely in the period of intense announcements that elections would be called.

Polarisation of political and social space in local communities

During the first half of the election year, political polarisation increasingly spilled over from political debate into everyday life, turning public spaces, institutions and in some cases citizens' private property into sites of political conflict and pressure. CRTA Election Observation Mission recorded 85 cases of threats, verbal clashes and physical attacks, which indicates that these are not isolated occurrences but a pattern and a trend that marked the period.

The largest number of incidents was recorded in periods when the government and the opposition, or citizens' assemblies, carried out activities on the ground in the same municipality on the same day. Of the 85 recorded incidents in total, 63 per cent occurred in such circumstances. The period from 8 to 22 May stands out in particular, when 32 incidents were recorded around the organisation of the government's stands on the one hand and blockades and marches by citizens' assemblies on the other, at the same locations.

Increasingly frequent escalations of political conflict in local communities were particularly visible. In several places supporters of the government and citizens gathered around the student campaign "Students Are Winning" found themselves in the same space, after which verbal clashes, scuffles and physical incidents occurred, often in the presence of the police. In Novi Sad¹⁵⁵ a police cordon separated two groups after an incident in

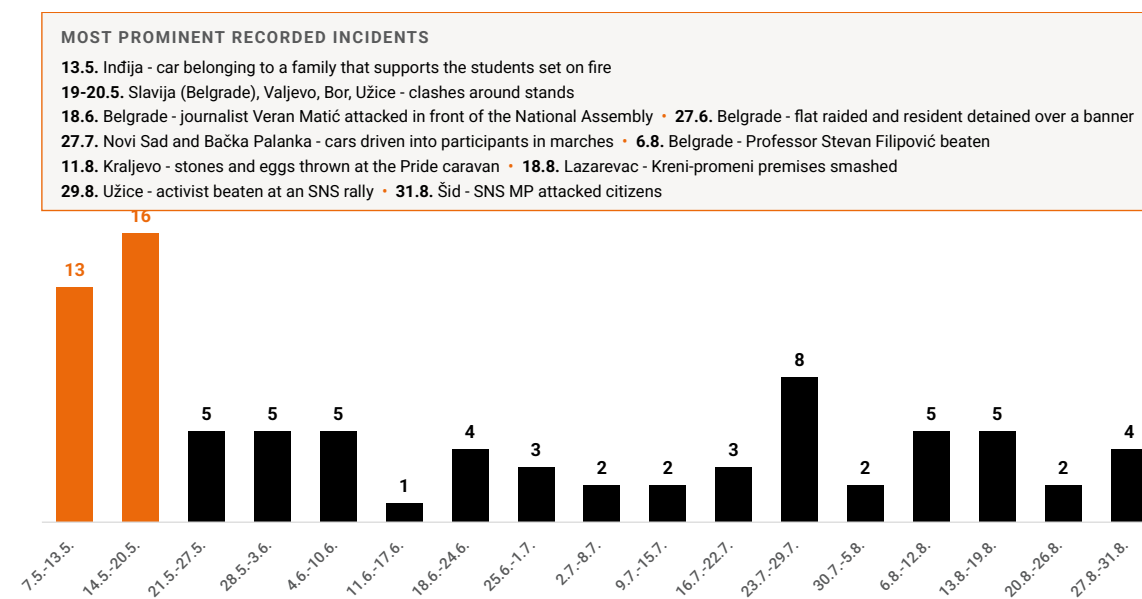
¹⁵² Blic Biznis (2026), Predsednik Srbije Aleksandar Vučić najavio je da će zaposleni u ustanovama socijalne zaštite i centrima za socijalni rad dobiti veće povećanje plata nego svi ostali zaposleni u javnom sektoru. <https://link.crtars/yh>, 4 September

¹⁵³ jecazaric (2026), Građani Srbije mogu da ocekiju dobre vesti - veća izdvajanja za meru koja postoji u Ministarstvu za brigu o porodici i demografiju. <https://link.crtars/yg>, 23 August

¹⁵⁴ sns_srbija (2026), Председник Србије Александар Вучић изјавио је данас да ће држава обезбедити финансијску подршку за пето и шесто дете. <https://link.crtars/yf>, 19 August

¹⁵⁵ Autonomija (2026), a police cordon in riot equipment positioned itself between two opposing groups near the Master Centre of the Novi Sad Fair, after supporters of the government threw plastic bottles and other objects at citizens; the police did not check anyone's identity or detain anyone. 15 May. <https://link.crtars/ye>

Verbal conflicts, threats and physical attacks by week (7 May-31 August 2026)



Graphic 9

which one man was injured, while similar tensions were recorded in Užice, Valjevo and at Slavija.

The most serious escalation was recorded on 29 August in Užice,¹⁵⁶ ahead of the "United Serbia" rally. According to statements by participants and media reports from the scene, the clash broke out when the rally's stewards attempted to move citizens out of the outdoor seating areas of cafés on Partizan Square, after which several people in black T-shirts physically attacked the assembled citizens. At least two people were injured, while the police intervened only after the clash had broken out. Recordings and reports from the event¹⁵⁷ point to a particularly serious security risk that arises when gatherings of political opponents are held in the same space and the separation of participants and the protection of citizens are not ensured in good time.

Public space became one of the objects of political conflict. Stands, banners, stickers

¹⁵⁶ Insajder (2026), the activist Branko Nikolić of the organisation „Da ne dišemo Duboko“ said that a group of around 15 people on Partizan Square in Užice, having had their identities checked by plain-clothes officers, were attacked by a group of 20 to 30 people in black T-shirts, in which two citizens were injured and one was detained and kept in hospital. 29 August. <https://link.crtars.rs/yd>

¹⁵⁷ Mašina (2026), at one point the ruling party's rally stewards attempted to close the outdoor seating areas of cafés near the stage in Užice, and when citizens refused to move several of them were physically attacked, with the police responding only after a man had been knocked to the ground and repeatedly punched and kicked. 29 August. <https://link.crtars.rs/yc>

and gathering places were the occasion for confrontations, with the dispute also turning on who may be politically present and visible. The message "Students Are Winning" was the occasion for incidents¹⁵⁸ in several places, while in Bujanovac¹⁵⁹ three activists were fined (RSD 10,000 each) for putting up stickers bearing that message. In Knjaževac¹⁶⁰ a representative of the "Knjaževac with the Students" list was attacked while filming posters being torn down.

The picture of conflict is not one-directional. Local branches of the SNS reported incidents against their members and activists to the public: an attack on activists at an info stand on Severni Bulevar in Belgrade, a third act of vandalism in a month against the party's premises in Dobanovci, and threats against the mayor of Novi Sad. However, given the contradictory and insufficient information available to CRTA observers and to the public, these events could not be confirmed.



¹⁵⁸ Nova.rs (2026), footage appeared on Instagram from Mladenovac showing two people attempting to remove a „Studenti pobeđuju“ banner from the entrance of the café „Istorija“ with an angle grinder, having first cut the power to the premises, until two students interrupted them and took away their ladder. 9 June. <https://link.crtars/yb>

¹⁵⁹ Vranjenews (2026), the municipal inspectorate in Bujanovac fined three activists of the informal group „Bujanovac uz studente“ RSD 10,000 each for putting up stickers and writing „Studenti pobeđuju“ graffiti during an action held on 29 April; the activists state that their identities were not checked and they were not detained, and that they regard the fine as a form of pressure on the student movement. 21 May. <https://link.crtars/ya>

¹⁶⁰ Mašina (2026), the head of the election campaign team of the „Knjaževac uz studente“ list, Sandra Živković, said she was attacked by a man she had tried to film while he was tearing down her list's posters during repeat elections at polling station no. 8 in Knjaževac, after which the President of the Municipality filed a complaint against her and her colleagues before they had reached the police. 30 April. <https://link.crtars/y9>



Photographs 9 and 10: The Serbia Is Winning banner, Zaječar,¹⁶¹ and the Students Are Winning banner, Valjevo¹⁶²

The recorded cases show that political conflict also reaches into the private sphere and the personal safety of politically engaged citizens. In Indija¹⁶³ the car of a family that supports the student protests, and whose son is active in them, was set on fire, while in other places pressures were recorded connected with employment, education and political engagement. It was not only political activists who were subjected to pressure and incidents: among the targets were journalists, teachers, pupils and other citizens. In Zrenjanin¹⁶⁴ a journalist was obstructed and physically attacked while reporting from SNS stands, while in Belgrade¹⁶⁵ incidents were recorded after a student protest.

Political tensions also entered local institutions. In Knjaževac¹⁶⁶ tensions arose between the President of the Municipality of Knjaževac and a representative of the student list during a session of the local assembly, while a session of the Užice City Assembly¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ <https://link.crtar.rs/y8>

¹⁶² <https://link.crtar.rs/y7>

¹⁶³ Nova.rs (2026), the student Nikola Runić from Indija said his car was set on fire the day after he took part in the „Studenti pobeđuju” action, and the police confirmed that footage showed a masked man dousing the vehicle and setting it alight; the editor of the IN medija portal states that people were brought into the town to prohibit the display of banners. 16 May. <https://link.crtar.rs/xk>

¹⁶⁴ 021.rs (2026), the Journalists' Association of Serbia condemned the attack on the editor of the portal „Volim Zrenjanin”, Aleksandar Blanuša, in front of SNS stands in Zrenjanin; he said that party activists and supporters pushed him, tripped him and tried to snatch his phone while he was attempting to get a statement from the mayor. 9 May. <https://link.crtar.rs/xl>

¹⁶⁵ BBC na srpskom (2026), at the „Slavija” protest in Belgrade, which according to the estimate of the Public Assemblies Archive drew between 180,000 and 190,000 people, a group of masked young men threw pyrotechnics at the police, who responded with tear gas; 23 people were arrested for attacking police officers. 23 May. <https://link.crtar.rs/xm>

¹⁶⁶ knjazevac_uz_studente (2026), Odbornici GG „Knjaževac uz studente - čista lista - dr Ivan Milošević” došli su na sednicu Skupštine opštine sazvanu u starom sazivu da pitaju Marka Stojanovića dokle će da se bahate. <https://link.crtar.rs/xn>, 15 May

¹⁶⁷ Glas zapadne Srbije (2026), the session of the Užice City Assembly was interrupted after tear gas was set off, immediately after the opposition councillor Vladan Sindić had been ordered to leave the session for obstructing the assembly's work; the Speaker of the Assembly, Danijela Vasiljević, said that the tear gas could not have

was interrupted after tear gas was set off.

An environment of this kind, in which political engagement increasingly carries a risk to personal safety, limits citizens' ability to take part freely in political life and has a direct effect on the conditions for political competition.

Spyware on the telephones of at least 14 students, activists and opposition officials

On 2 September 2026 the Share Foundation published the findings of a forensic analysis, conducted with Citizen Lab and Amnesty International, confirming that since the beginning of the year at least 14 people in Serbia had been targeted with commercial spyware¹⁶⁸ - participants in the Student Movement, activists of opposition parties, one member of parliament (Radomir Lazović, who links the surveillance to the coordination of the opposition during the local elections and to contacts with EU institutions) and one city councillor. Two tools were identified: Pegasus, made by the Israeli NSO Group and installed by a "zero-click" method requiring no interaction from the victim, and a redesigned version of the domestic NoviSpy, which requires physical access to the telephone. Both give access to messages, contacts and data, and allow the microphone and camera to be switched on remotely; the server infrastructure reportedly leads to the Security Information Agency (BIA). Neither tool has any legal basis for use in Serbia, and installing spyware on another person's telephone is a criminal offence. The new findings do not reveal a new problem so much as the absence of any consequence for the old one: two years after the first forensic confirmation, the practice has continued and has extended to the Student Movement and to elected representatives, without any institutional response.

come from the governing side because their councillors were sitting on the opposite side of the chamber. 22 May. <https://link.cрта.rs/xo>

¹⁶⁸ Share Fondacija (August 2026): "Studenti i opozicioni političari na meti špijunskog softvera, <https://sharefoundation.info/share-fondacija-studenti-i-opozicioni-politiciari-na-meti-spijunskog-softvera/>

MEDIA AND INFORMATION

The period preceding the campaign is marked by deep structural inequalities in the media space which afford the government a significant advantage. In August 2026 President Vučić's media dominance intensified further. At the same time, the announced change of ownership is under way in media that were regarded as independent and critical of the government, accompanied by a change of management. Should those changes be reflected in editorial policy, the already narrowed space for critical reporting could be all but erased.

The lack of pluralism is also visible in the programming of the public broadcaster, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS): in *Dnevnik 2*, the most-watched evening news programme, the ruling majority received as much as 96 per cent of the time devoted to domestic political actors, while just four per cent was left to the opposition. This stark disproportion is further deepened by the way political actors are portrayed: the government was shown predominantly positively (almost 40 per cent of the time), while opposition actors were conspicuously less present and predominantly portrayed negatively (40 per cent of the time); the students were portrayed most negatively of all (58 per cent of the time).

President Aleksandar Vučić was not only present in *Dnevnik 2* far more than any other actor of the government or the opposition; he was now also given almost four times as much time as in the pre-election period and the campaign for the 2022 presidential elections. The time in which he was reported on positively was more than eleven times longer than at the last presidential elections, while the share of positive tone rose from 18 to 51 per cent.

In the media with the widest audience and the greatest influence,¹⁶⁹ an intensification of manipulative narratives directed against the government's political opponents is recorded, including narratives about possible violence after the elections and the non-recognition of the election results.

¹⁶⁹ The monitoring sample covers: television channels available through all licensed cable operators which, according to data from the independent audience measurement agency, are among the five channels with the largest audience share (the public broadcaster RTS 1 - *Dnevnik 2*, TV Pink - *Nacionalni dnevnik*, TV Prva - *Vesti u 18h*, TV Informer - *Srpski dnevnik* and TV B92 - *Vesti u 16h*), and the front pages of all nine daily newspapers (*Informer*, *Kurir*, *Večernje novosti*, *Politika*, *Alo!*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Danas*, *Nova*).

Media concentration, the stifling of critical voices and the manipulation of public opinion are all growing ahead of the start of the official election campaign, leaving citizens with ever less opportunity to hear anything but a single voice.

The media market and editorial policy

The concentration of media ownership in Serbia accelerated during the election year through several parallel processes: the sale of the media arm of United Group's business, Telekom's further expansion in the market,¹⁷⁰ the change of leadership at RTS, and the consolidation of ownership of local media. Media ownership is becoming concentrated in the hands of a small group of actors close to the government.¹⁷¹

Asymmetric changes were also recorded in the terms on which television channels are available to audiences: while some channels were removed from packages or from distributors' revised channel line-ups, other channels were simultaneously given wider access to audiences. After Telekom Serbia took over Total TV from United Group, the critically oriented channels N1 and Nova were first moved to considerably lower positions in the channel line-up, and were then removed from that platform's offering altogether.¹⁷² Changes in the offering have also been recorded among Yettel subscribers: at the end of August 2026 an unknown number of subscribers had access to certain channels, among them N1 and Nova S, withdrawn without their prior consent. At the same time as the channels were switched off, subscribers were informed that they had been selected at random to take part in a pilot project, under which they were offered a reduction of RSD 300 in their monthly subscription in return for the revised channel line-up - and that by calling the call centre they could ask to have the channels restored, with their bill increased accordingly. Before that, in April 2026, SBB was legally merged into Yettel, ceasing to exist as a separate legal entity, with Yettel becoming its legal successor. SBB continued to exist as a brand. The company said at the time that there would be no changes in the use of its services.¹⁷³

At the same time, Telekom Serbia expanded the availability of other television chan-

¹⁷⁰ At the end of 2025 Telekom took over Mondo INC, owned by Wireless Media Group, which owns several media outlets, among them Kurir. <https://link.crtat.rs/xj>

¹⁷¹ Željko Mitrović (Pink Media Group) and Dragan Vučićević (Informer, together with the takeover of local media through a stake in the company Best Media Team) are long-standing vehicles of pro-government media campaigns; Predrag Ranković Peconi, linked to the Surčin clan, built his influence through Happy TV, while Srđan Milovanović, a businessman linked to SNS, expanded into ownership of national media after selling Kopernikus Technology to Telekom.

¹⁷² Cenzolovka (2025), Total TV izbacio N1 i Nova S iz programa: Koja su prava korisnika ove platforme?, <https://link.crtat.rs/xi>.

¹⁷³ https://sbb.rs/pravno-pripajanje-sbb-a-yettelu/?utm_source

nels¹⁷⁴ by unlocking the Arena Plus package as part of a six-month promotion, making around 30 channels freely available to citizens who receive their television signal via aerial. Among them are channels predominantly favourable to the government: Informer TV, Kurir TV, K1 and Euronews Serbia. This gave those broadcasters additional terrestrial reach, even though some of them do not hold REM licences for terrestrial broadcasting in the areas in which they thereby became available. Telekom Serbia explains the move as a business promotion and a test of subscriber interest in the service.

Of particular significance is the further expansion of Telekom Serbia, which in April 2026 alone formally took over seven local cable operators.¹⁷⁵ That company, whose majority shareholder is the Serbian state, controls the infrastructure through which content reaches viewers, and increasingly the content itself, since it also owns media such as Kurir and Euronews Serbia.

The presence of the largest media owners across platforms

	National TV	Cable TV	Online portals	Radio	Press	Infrastructure
Željko Mitrović	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Telekom Srbija		✓	✓		✓	✓
Srđan Milovanović	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Dragan Vučićević		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Alpac Capital		✓	✓		✓	
Predrag Ranković Peconi	✓	✓	✓			

● present ● not present

Graphic 10: The presence of the largest media owners across platforms

The concentration of ownership is evident at local level too. Dragan Vučićević and Saša

¹⁷⁴ <https://link.crtat.rs/xh>.

¹⁷⁵ This is part of a wider pattern of consolidation in which, between 2024 and April 2026, it took over 17 companies in total. Telekom Srbija a.d. Beograd, History (overview of acquisitions and ownership structure) <https://link.crtat.rs/xg>

Blagojević, the owners of Informer and Aloa!,¹⁷⁶ expanded their portfolio in the first months of 2026 by buying 13¹⁷⁷ local media outlets. According to the president of the board of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM),¹⁷⁸ this has created a network functioning as a system of local outposts, with the aim of intimidating the government's political opponents in local communities. Concerning patterns have been observed at several television stations in that network - the publication of personal data, the identification of people seen at gatherings, and the targeting of journalists, prosecutors, judges, lawyers and activists of non-governmental organisations.

For example, the company Zapple Media Group,¹⁷⁹ established at the end of 2025, took over and registered 14 local media outlets whose editor-in-chief is Gradimir Banković, a figure publicly linked both to the Centre for Social Stability¹⁸⁰ and to the SNS.¹⁸¹

The Portuguese investment group Alpac Capital agreed with United Group to take over Adria News Network, which comprises media perceived as critical of the government: the daily newspapers Danas and Nova, the television stations N1 Serbia and Nova S, the weekly Radar, and the portals n1info.rs and Nova.rs. Although the sale has not yet formally been completed, the new management has already taken up director positions in four companies,¹⁸² changing the management before the purchase concludes. The Commission for Protection of Competition in Serbia has in the meantime approved the concentration, while approval from the competent authority in Luxembourg is still awaited.¹⁸³ The takeover¹⁸⁴ attracted additional attention because of the new owner's political connections, including the Vargas David family's links to Viktor Orbán and the friendly relationship between his father, Mário David, and the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić.

¹⁷⁶ <https://link.crtat.rs/xf>.

¹⁷⁷ Miomedia, TV Lav plus, TV 5 Užice, TV V5 Valjevo, TV Priboj, Radio Koran Priboj, RTV Golija - Ivanjica, TV Kikinda, RTV Bačka Palanka, Lotel plus - Loznica, TV Santos, Infomačva Šabac and RTV Majdanpek.

¹⁷⁸ N1 (2026) "Cilj je zastrašivanje na lokalnu i - 'spaljena zemlja'": Kakvu ulogu imaju "ispostave-klonovi" Informera i Aloa? <https://link.crtat.rs/xs>.

¹⁷⁹ Crta (2026) Izveštaj o dugoročnom posmatranju lokalnih izbora 2026 <https://link.crtat.rs/xd>.

¹⁸⁰ The Centre for Social Stability is an association registered in Novi Sad, described by independent media as an organisation close to the government. Among the people linked to the Centre is the current Minister for European Integration, Nemanja Starović. Istinomer (2025) „Centar za društvenu stabilnost - ili stabilnost propagande”, [URL]. Over the past year the Centre has produced more than 20 short films directed against voices critical of SNS. <https://link.crtat.rs/xs>

¹⁸¹ ANEM (2026) Slučaj Zapple Media Group: Milioni na medijskim konkursima za tek osnovane portale koji već krše kodeks, <https://link.crtat.rs/xb>.

¹⁸² The four companies are: United Media Digital (the newspaper and portal Nova and the weekly Radar), Dan Graf (Danas), Adria News and Adria News Nova S.

¹⁸³ <https://link.crtat.rs/y6>

¹⁸⁴ Cenzolovka (2026) 'Politička pozadina preuzimanja nezavisnih medija u Srbiji i regionu: Duboke veze novog vlasnika sa Orbanom i Vučićem' <https://link.crtat.rs/xa>.

As of the closing of this report there were no indications of a wider change of editorial policy, but at the beginning of September the new management decided not to renew the contract for the programme *24 minuta sa Zoranom Kesićem*, which had been broadcast on TV Nova S since 2020.¹⁸⁵

A further attempt at pressure regarding future editorial policy is reflected in an open letter that the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications addressed to the owner of Alpac Capital, "recommending" that it register the media with the domestic regulator (REM). According to the letter, the media - which have until now been protected by their status as cross-border broadcasters - would thereby become directly subject to domestic regulatory oversight.¹⁸⁶

The European Commission,¹⁸⁷ however, found in its 2024 Serbia Report that the domestic regulatory body, REM, had not fully exercised its mandate and that serious concerns remained as to its independence in practice, while in 2025 the European Parliament¹⁸⁸ pointed to the critical importance of ensuring the independence of key institutions, including REM. The process of awarding the fifth national frequency, launched back in 2022, has still not been concluded years later. The European Commission found in its 2024 Serbia Report that the procedure remained unfinished and that no justification for this had been given.

In February 2026 Manja Grčić was appointed head of the public broadcaster (RTS), which opened up a series of controversies in public.¹⁸⁹ Her business connections up to 2 February include ownership and director roles in the media companies K1 and Tanjug and in the agency Majo Public,¹⁹⁰ which regularly receive contracts from state enterprises. Her appointment to her previous position at the media house B92 was followed by the closure of critical segments of its programming.¹⁹¹ Her arrival at RTS was likewise followed by significant personnel changes, including the removal of at least seven editors and journalists in a short period.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ https://n1info.rs/vesti/od-jeseni-bez-24-minuta-sa-zoranom-kesicem-na-nova-s/?utm_source

¹⁸⁶ Ministarstvo informisanja i telekomunikacija, Отворено писмо власнику фонда Алпас Capital, г. Варгасу, <https://link.crtars.rs/x9>

¹⁸⁷ <https://link.crtars.rs/y5>

¹⁸⁸ <https://link.crtars.rs/y4>

¹⁸⁹ Her appointment was contested, among other things, over a dispute about the validity of her degree, which according to the Journalists' Association of Serbia carried fewer ECTS credits than the law requires for the position, and over her long-standing closeness to the government, including the fact that she had previously served on the board of the Belgrade Philharmonic alongside President Vučić's media adviser, Suzana Vasiljević. Journalists' Association of Serbia, „Šta je diploma Manje Grčić“, [URL]. <https://link.crtars.rs/x6>

¹⁹⁰ NUNS, Manja Grčić više nije ni vlasnica firmi koje poseduju Tanjug i K1, <https://link.crtars.rs/x7>

¹⁹¹ NUNS (2014) "Utisak nedelje" skidaju sa B92? <https://link.crtars.rs/x8>

¹⁹² Those replaced were Miša Stojković, Aleksandra Madenović, Igor Obračević and Biljana Šujdović; Dejan Cukić

Pluralism at Radio Television of Serbia (RTS): the presence of political actors at RTS in the period before the campaign

The period before elections are called normally passes without the oversight that applies during the official election campaign. Even so, unlike commercial media, RTS as a public media service also has a statutory obligation to provide citizens with impartial information and to give relevant public actors equal access.

The work of the public media service is founded on the following principles: 1) truthful, impartial, complete and timely information; 2) editorial independence; 3) independence from the sources of funding; 3a) pluralism of content and pluralism of opinion; 4) the prohibition of any form of censorship and of unlawful influence on the work of the public media service, its newsroom and its journalists; 5) the application of internationally recognised norms and principles, and in particular respect for human rights and freedoms and democratic values; 6) respect for professional standards and codes; 7) cooperation with listeners, viewers and readers. Article 4 of the Law on Public Media Services

The findings show that RTS does not meet that obligation, and that this is not the result of occasional lapses but of consistent repetition in the editing of the news.

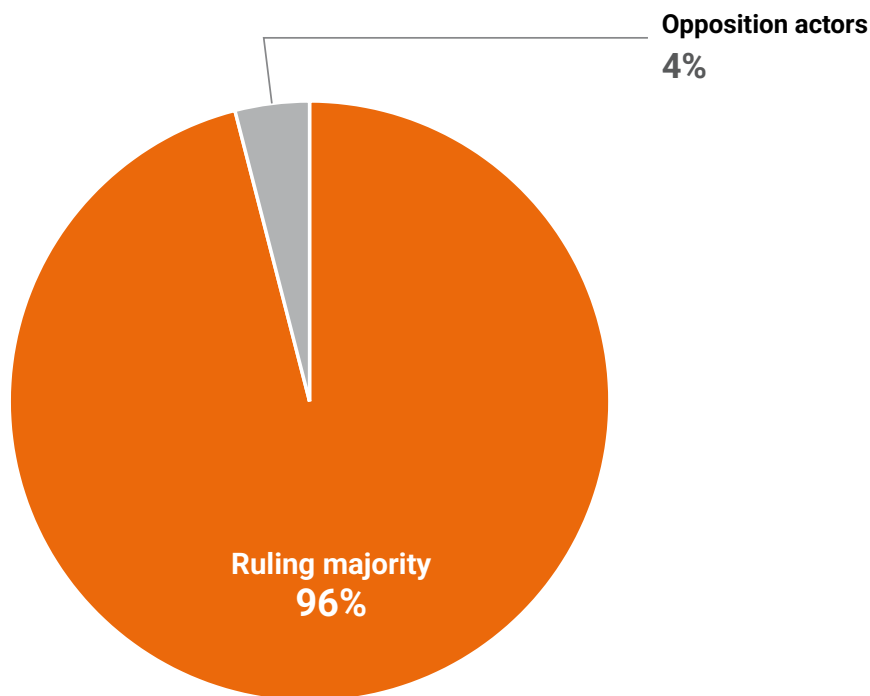
Monitoring of the main evening news programme, *Dnevnik 2*, reveals a pronounced imbalance in the presence of political options. Over the observation period (April-August 2026) the ruling majority received 96 per cent of the programme time devoted to domestic political actors, with reporting that was predominantly positive (40 per cent) or neutral (60 per cent) in tone. Just four per cent of the time was left to opposition actors.¹⁹³

President Aleksandar Vučić alone took up more than half of the time allocated to the ruling majority (58 per cent). His presence was not confined to subjects directly connected with the presidential office: President Vučić appeared as an interlocutor on a broad range of domestic and foreign policy questions, often without alternative political perspectives being represented alongside him. In addition, since the start of the year President Vučić has appeared as a guest on RTS's *Dnevnik 2* eight times, far more often than any other political actor from either the government or the opposition. It is telling that over the monitored period the President was portrayed markedly positively for slightly more than half of the time - 51 per cent to be exact - which means that every second second devoted to the President carried an affirmative tone. For the remaining 49 per cent of the time he was portrayed neutrally, while there was practically no negative reporting about him at

lost his programme on Radio 202; Vladimir Kecmanović was removed as editor of RTS's Arts and Culture programming, while Jelena Popadić Sumić, author of the programme „Važne stvari“, was dismissed as editor of RTS's Children's programming.

¹⁹³ An average of 18 seconds per bulletin.

The presence of representatives of the ruling majority and of the opposition in RTS Dnevnik 2 (April - August 2026)



Graphic 11: The presence of representatives of the ruling majority and of the opposition in RTS's Dnevnik 2 (April-August 2026)

all.¹⁹⁴

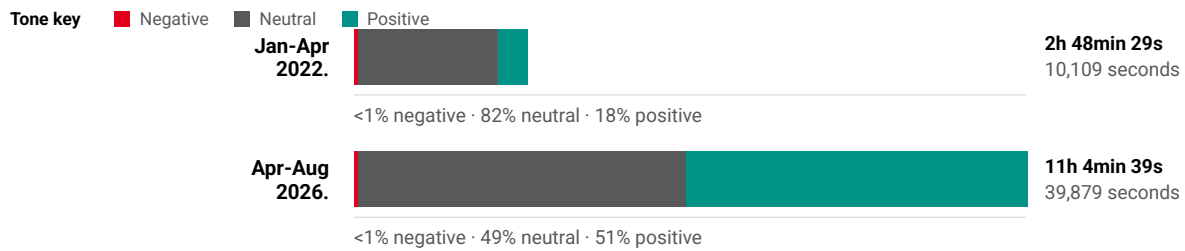
Although CRTA's media monitoring over many years has consistently pointed to the absence of genuine pluralism in RTS's news programming,¹⁹⁵ a further indication of editorial bias is the finding that between April and August 2026 Aleksandar Vučić was given almost four times as much time in *Dnevnik 2* as in the period from January to April 2022, which included the presidential campaign. At the same time, the time in which he was portrayed in a positive tone was more than eleven times longer than in 2022, while the share of positive tone rose from 18 to 51 per cent.

The inequality in the treatment of the government and the opposition is also expressed in the fact that government representatives put their views across directly considerably more often - for 59 per cent of the time they appeared as subjects. Representatives of the

¹⁹⁴ Vučić was portrayed negatively for only 0.11 per cent of the time (43 seconds out of 39,879 seconds of broadcast time in total).

¹⁹⁵ Crta, Medijski monitoring političkog pluralizma: Vlast u fokusu, opozicija gotovo nevidljiva, <https://link.cрта.rs/x5>

The presence and tone of the portrayal of Aleksandar Vučić in RTS Dnevnik 2 (2022 - August 2026)



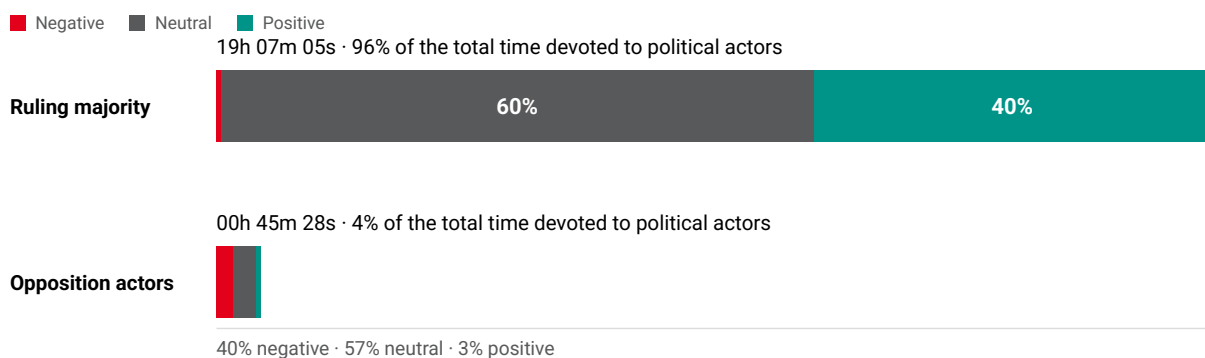
Negative coverage was below 1% in both periods; the red segments are shown as visible markers.

Graphic 12: The presence and tone of the portrayal of Aleksandar Vučić in RTS's Dnevnik 2 (2022 - August 2026)

opposition had the opportunity to appear as subjects, in person and in their own voice, for just 28 per cent of the time.

Within the four per cent of time allocated to the opposition, the tone was negative in 40 per cent, neutral in 57 per cent, and there was practically no positive note at all.¹⁹⁶ Negative tone occurred disproportionately often relative to the limited time devoted to them in the first place.¹⁹⁷

The presence and tone of the portrayal of political actors



The <1% of negative tone for the ruling majority is shown as a visible red marker.

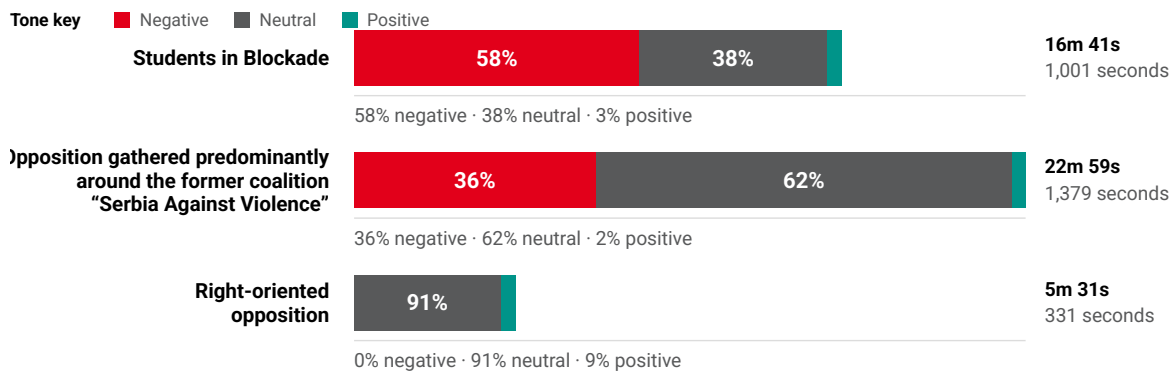
Graphic 13: The presence and tone of the portrayal of political actors

¹⁹⁶ Opposition actors were portrayed positively for 3 per cent of the time (93 seconds out of 2,728 seconds of broadcast time in total).

¹⁹⁷ See Graphic 13, The presence and tone of the portrayal of political actors.

Bias was also apparent in the differing treatment of opposition actors. The opposition gathered predominantly around the former coalition Serbia Against Violence (51 per cent)¹⁹⁸ and the students in blockade (37 per cent) received the largest share of the time allocated to the opposition, but usually in a negative light. The students in blockade were the most negatively portrayed actor, with 58 per cent negative and just three per cent positive tone. Right-oriented actors,¹⁹⁹ although given the least time, are not subjected to nearly as much negative tone and were treated almost exclusively neutrally or positively.

The presence and tone of the portrayal of different groupings of opposition actors



Graphic 14: The presence and tone of the portrayal of different groupings of opposition actors

Two rallies, two faces of RTS: reporting on SNS and on the students

Observation shows that RTS not only gives political actors unequal access to its programming, but that its editorial staff do not apply equal professional standards in reporting on different actors.

The CRTA Election Observation Mission monitored RTS's reporting on two key political gatherings during the observation period: the "Students in Blockade" rally at Slavija on 23 May and the SNS rally in front of the Assembly of Serbia on 27 June 2026. A comparison of the manner and extent of the reporting on these two events shows markedly different editorial treatment.

¹⁹⁸ Covers the opposition parties: the Democratic Party, the Ecological Uprising, the Kreni-promeni movement, the People's Movement of Serbia, the Movement of Free Citizens, Serbia Centre Srce, and the Green-Left Front.

¹⁹⁹ Opposition political actors of a conservative and nationally oriented politics: Novi DSS, POKS, Mi - glas naroda, and the People's Party.

The "Students in Blockade" rally "You and I, Slavija, Students Are Winning", 23 May 2026

Although the students presented the rally held on 23 May 2026 as a civic event, clear messages about the Student Movement's further political direction were set out at it. In *Dnevnik 2*, the report on this rally was placed third in the headline announcements, while the reporting was set within a "balancing frame": the Slavija rally was set against rallies in support of President Aleksandar Vučić in Pionirski Park in Belgrade and in Kumanovo in North Macedonia.

As to the size of the Slavija rally, viewers were informed exclusively by reference to the police estimate (around 34,300 participants). The report omitted independent estimates²⁰⁰ according to which this was one of the largest gatherings in Serbia since the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime. The live segment from the rally lasted 2 minutes and 43 seconds.

The SNS rally "Serbia One Family", 27 June 2026

The SNS rally held on 27 June in front of the National Assembly produced two politically significant announcements: the name of the candidate list "United Serbia" for the coming elections was presented, although it was not specified which elections the announcement referred to. Aleksandar Vučić's resignation from the office of President of the Republic was also announced. The extent of the coverage in *Dnevnik 2* - the first headline, the first news item and a report lasting 11 minutes and 5 seconds, almost four times as long as the coverage of the student rally at Slavija - shows the prominence given to the event in the news programming. That report also took up almost a third of the entire *Dnevnik*.

The number of participants was, for example, presented exclusively through the police estimate (207,000 gathered), likewise without any reference to independent sources, which put the figure considerably lower.²⁰¹ A similar pattern is visible in the treatment of the messages from the rally: particular emphasis on President Aleksandar Vučić's messages, with the positive frame further reinforced by a report and a live link from in front of the Assembly and by interviewees speaking predominantly positively. This approach resulted in exceptionally extensive coverage and a positive frame for the ruling party's rally, without any pronounced analytical distance.

²⁰⁰ The Archive of Public Gatherings put the number of people at the rally at between 180,000 and 190,000 (<https://link.crt.rs/x4>).

²⁰¹ The Archive of Public Gatherings put the number of people at the rally at approximately 32,500 (<https://link.crt.rs/x3>).

President Vučić's live television addresses: setting a record

The significant impairment of pluralism in the media space can be seen further through the frequency of the President of the Republic's direct addresses on live programming. In the first eight months of 2026 the President made 371 live addresses. By way of comparison, the Prime Minister of Serbia, Đuro Macut, had given just nine interviews and television appearances by the day the proposal to dissolve the National Assembly was submitted, on 7 September.

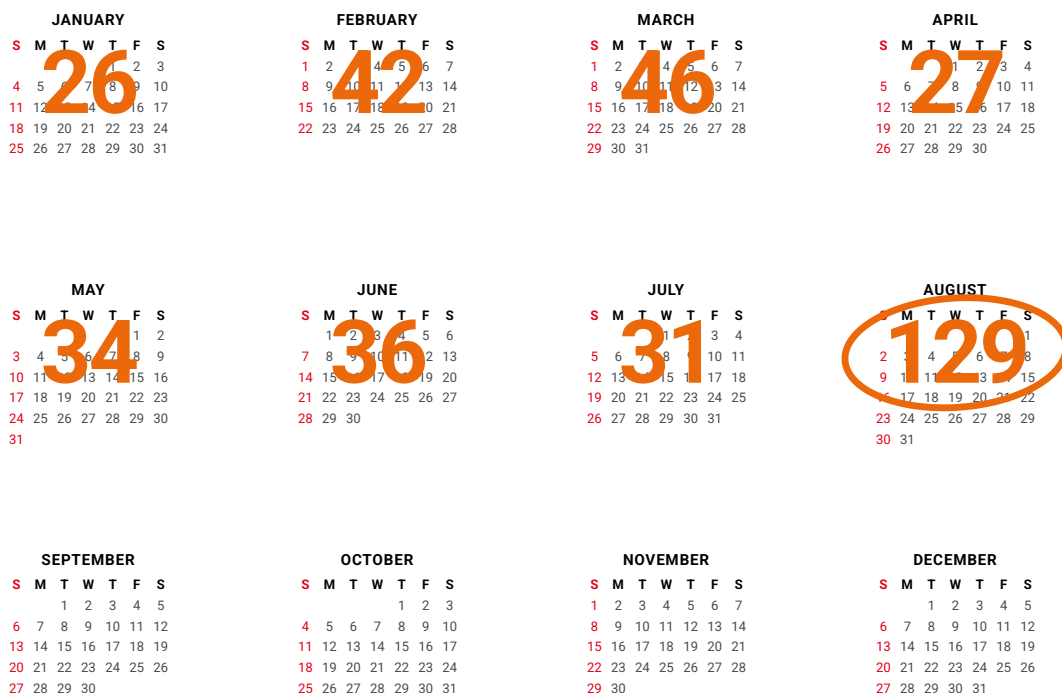
Except where it was explicitly indicated that an address was an official one from the Presidency or from the Palace of Serbia, it was in practice impossible to distinguish in which capacity - as head of state or as a party figure - President Vučić was speaking, and so all his addresses in the media space acquire, in effect, the same weight.

Between March and July the President averaged 35 addresses a month, before exceeding the average of the preceding months three and a half times over in August, with 129 live addresses broadcast on at least 45 national, cable and local television stations.

When one looks at the subjects with which the President of the Republic most often opened his addresses, foreign policy and infrastructure projects and investment stand out, which indicates that the country's political life is presented predominantly through questions of a statehood and development character. The connection is not accidental: subjects such as foreign policy and infrastructure projects also feed into the narrative that glorifies the state's decisions.

The number of President Vučić's live appearances on television programmes

2026.



**Total number of live appearances
by President Aleksandar Vučić on
television programmes**



Graphic 15: The number of President Vučić's live appearances on television programmes

Narratives and manipulation in the media

Manipulative narratives: discrediting, targeting and the cult of personality

In the first eight months of 2026, more than 1,300 manipulative headlines were published on front pages and in the headline sequences of main news programmes alone - an average of almost 40 a week. The most prevalent were narratives aimed at discrediting political dissenters (47 per cent) and portraying countries of the region negatively (31 per cent). Between March and August,²⁰² CRTA Election Observation Mission²⁰³ recorded a continuous intensification of manipulative narratives. The number of cases rose over that period, with occasional fluctuations, and culminated in August, when 262 cases of manipulative reporting were recorded - the highest figure since the start of the year.

In July and August the cult of personality around President Vučić appears as the third most prevalent narrative. This broadens the function of manipulative content: alongside discrediting the government's political dissenters and portraying them as a threat, an affirmative, almost glorifying portrayal of the President takes on an increasingly pronounced role. Two opposing images are thus built simultaneously - opponents as a source of threat and destabilisation on the one hand, and the President as the guarantor of stability and protection on the other.

The media frequently interwove the discrediting of the government's political dissenters with a negative portrayal of countries of the region, linking them to the so-called "blokaderi" and claiming that their governments provide logistical support to the Student Movement and are thereby working to destabilise Serbia.

The government's political dissenters, opposition actors and the students in particular were portrayed as "blokaderi" who lie and spread fabrications and conspiracy theories, while individuals connected with the Student List were accused of hatred, xenophobia and announcing a "reckoning" with the President and his family. At the same time, the cult of personality around Aleksandar Vučić was built by presenting the President as an exceptional statesman who "delivers political lessons", achieves historic diplomatic successes, forgives his opponents and calls for unity despite the attacks to which he is subjected.

²⁰² The monitoring sample covers: television channels available through all licensed cable operators which, according to data from the independent audience measurement agency, are among the five channels with the largest audience share, and the front pages of all nine daily newspapers.

²⁰³ CRTA.Plus (2026) Manipulacije na naslovnim stranama <https://link.crtars/x2>



Photograph 11: *Politika*, 19 August: a headline about "training camps for Serbian blockaders in five countries"



Photograph 12: *Informer*, 25 May: a headline about "violence as the essence of the blockaders"

Within the same narrative frame, the media continuously portrayed opposition actors as a source of destabilisation and violence, and the government as the guarantor of peace, stability and progress, constructing an image of "two Serbias" - one that destroys and another that protects the state.

That pattern has not remained directed at the Student Movement as a whole, but is transferred to individuals connected with it. In that respect one example stands out: Vladan Đokić, Rector of the University of Belgrade, publicly recognised as one of the more prominent individuals associated with the Student Movement. Pressure on the Rector intensified further at the end of March, when *Informer* television covered live the arrival of officers of the Criminal Police Directorate at the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade and broadcast footage of their entry into the building and their encounter with Đokić.²⁰⁴

Content analysis of media portals and social media identified six dominant narratives aimed at discrediting Đokić: 1) that he was "installed" by the SNS; 2) that he is under the influence of foreign services and embassies; 3) that he bears responsibility in the case of the death of a female student;²⁰⁵ 4) that he is using the student revolt to advance his own political ambitions; 5) that he belongs to a wealthy elite; and 6) that he embodies irresponsibility, corruption and incompetence.

Since April CRTA Election Observation Mission has recorded at least 70 items on media

²⁰⁴ Danas (2026) 'Ulazak pripadnika UKP u Rektorat uživo prenošen u programu Informera (VIDEO)' <https://link.crtars/x1>

²⁰⁵ The body of a student of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade was found on 17 March 2025 near the „4. april“ student hall of residence, after she had been reported missing.

portals repeating claims that the other side will not recognise the election results, that it is preparing violence or an attempt to destabilise the state, with the largest number of such pieces published in August. Responsibility for possible post-election violence and destabilisation is attributed in advance to the government's political opponents and to other critical actors. Thus the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, claimed that if the election result were close "the blockaders will create violence in the streets", and later that they were "preparing an alibi for not recognising electoral defeat", while President Aleksandar Vučić and SNS President Miloš Vučević stated that the government would recognise the results whatever they were, adding that they had not heard the same readiness "from the other side". The narrative of possible post-election violence and destabilisation was further amplified in August by a statement from the Russian ambassador to Serbia, Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko, who warned of the risk that, whatever the election results, a "colour revolution" scenario would be set in motion after the vote.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ 021 (2026) 'Bocan-Harčenko: EU hoće novog lidera na čelu Srbije - moguća obojena revolucija posle izbora' <https://link.cрта.rs/x0>

Блокаторска логика

Брнабићева: Блокатори припремају алиби да не признају изборни пораз

Уочи избора 2008. додељено скоро 107.000 држављанстава



Ана Брнабић - ФОТО (Танјуг/Амир Хамзагић)

Уторак,
04.08.2026.
у 14:24
Политика

Председница Народне скупштине Србије Ана Брнабић оценила је да писање појединих опозиционих медија о наводној изборној превари

Photograph 13: The narrative of not recognising electoral defeat, Politika, 4 August 2026

POLITIKA 3

12.08.2026. | 8:14

Blokaderi spremaju haos na ulicama Srbije nakon poraza na izborima: "Spremni smo na sve opcije" VIDEO

Blokader je, gostujući na televiziji N1, priznao da blokaderi spremaju haos posle izbora, prenose mediji.

Izvor: Mediji

Postavi b92.net kao omiljeni Google izvor



Photograph 14: The narrative of violence announced after the elections, B92, 12 August 2026

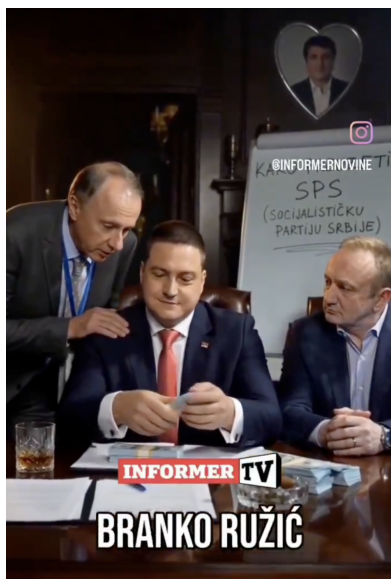
Artificial intelligence: a new tool of media manipulation

The use of artificial intelligence²⁰⁷ in media content has begun to spread in various ways, which is all the more concerning at a moment when REM is non-operational and is not performing its regulatory function. Since June 2026 Happy television has introduced AI presenters into its news programming, which were labelled as products of artificial intelligence only subsequently, after criticism from media and journalists' associations.²⁰⁸ Since May, at least six pieces of video content created using artificial intelligence have been recorded on Informer's various platforms, some of which were used to discredit those who hold different views, but also members of the ruling coalition who were at that moment expressing dissonant views in public. The absence of a clear label within the video content itself increases the risk that audiences will read AI-generated material as authentic, particularly when it is shared on beyond the context of the original post.

²⁰⁷ Deepfake technology was first misused as early as 2023, in the months before the parliamentary elections, when TV Pink broadcast fake audio and video content about the opposition. In 2024 the Higher Court in Belgrade prohibited its further broadcast.

²⁰⁸ 021.rs (2026) 'TV Hepi označila AI voditelje u vestima posle kritika UNS-a' <https://link.crt.rs/y3>

Photograph 15: An AI video on Informer insinuating a secret agreement among opposition actors.



OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY AND THE POSITION OF OBSERVERS

Observation methodology in an election year

CRTA Election Observation Mission is not an activity confined to election day; it is a permanent, independent civic infrastructure that brings together long-term observation of the pre-election period, statistically based observation of election day, observation of every step up to the closing of the final election results, legal analysis and support, robust and secure systems for collecting and processing data, and regular public reporting.

A comprehensive approach of this kind is not an option but a necessity: as oversight of election day itself becomes more developed, actors with an interest in shaping the electoral outcome irregularly increasingly direct their activity at the period preceding the official calling of elections. Manipulation of the voter register, influence over the media, the misuse of public resources and public office, the erosion of the line between the state and a political party contrary to the OSCE's 1990 Copenhagen Document, and restrictions on political competition or on various human and civil rights can all undermine the equality of political contest and the right of citizens to choose freely well before voting begins. Credible observation therefore cannot begin only at the moment elections are called; it must also cover the practices and institutional changes that shape electoral conditions months, and even years, in advance.

The working methodology of CRTA Election Observation Mission rests on internationally recognised standards for non-partisan and impartial election observation: the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations and the accompanying Code of Conduct for Non-partisan Citizen Election Observers and Monitors, adopted at the United Nations in 2012, and the complementary Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers. These standards are recognised and supported by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and other international bodies.

In line with this approach, in ordinary circumstances CARTA begins long-term observation at the start of the election year²⁰⁹ and widens its scope further once elections are officially called. This report covers precisely that period of long-term observation before elections are called - in this case snap elections - from March to the end of August, and in some cases from the beginning of 2026. CARTA Election Observation Mission followed: the quality of political and media pluralism and reporting; the quality of the legislative and institutional framework for elections; the conduct of holders of public office, of political parties and of other actors in the field; the conditions for equal political contest; respect for human and civil rights; and the integrity of the voter register.

Observation of the legal and institutional framework

The legal team of CARTA Election Observation Mission followed and analysed the amendments to five electoral laws and to the Law on Prevention of Corruption and the Law on Financing of Political Activities adopted over the summer of 2026, assessing their alignment with ODIHR's recommendations and with international standards. CARTA also analysed the readiness of the competent institutions - the Republic Electoral Commission, the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, the judiciary and the Ministry of the Interior - to apply the laws effectively. The mission also followed the work of the Commission for the Audit, Verification and Control of the Accuracy and Updating of the Voter Register, including the information and complaints concerning the voter register that 97 citizens submitted to CARTA between March and the beginning of September 2026.

On the basis of the irregularities established, the legal team of CARTA Election Observation Mission submitted seven complaints to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption during the observation period, as well as an initiative and requests for access to information addressed to other bodies, which are reported on in more detail in the relevant chapters of this report.

Methodology for observing actors' activities in the field

CARTA Election Observation Mission began long-term observation in the field on 7 May 2026. This report is based on some 8,000 observations by observers and more than 100 conversations with relevant political actors and citizens.

The observation covers the daily monitoring of 318 online sources - the websites and accounts of public institutions, officials, political parties and other political actors, as well as regional and local portals. The fieldwork covers the direct monitoring of events

²⁰⁹ Carries over from the Serbian document.

across Serbia and conversations with citizens and relevant actors, in order to gather testimony, document cases and verify allegations.

The data collected are analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, with a focus on the activities of public authorities and political actors and on phenomena capable of undermining the principles of free elections. Cases of particular significance are examined further through document analysis, fieldwork and consultation with experts, with sources cross-checked.

Methodology for observing pluralism in the media

A distinct part of the long-term observation concerned monitoring political pluralism in the programming of Radio Television of Serbia. The observation covered the main news programme *Dnevnik 2* on RTS 1, broadcast at 19:30, between 1 April and 31 August 2026. The unit of analysis was the time political actors were presented in the programme, expressed in seconds, and the total size of the sample analysed was 80,377 seconds of programming.

For every appearance of a political actor in the programme, the role in which they appeared was also recorded, in two categories: an active role, where the political actor addresses the audience directly in the first person, whether through a statement, an address or a studio appearance; and a passive role, where the political actor is only mentioned by another political actor or by a journalist in an item, without addressing the audience directly. This distinction allowed CARTA Election Observation Mission to assess not only the total presence of individual actors and political options but also the quality of that presence - that is, whether political actors shape their own media narrative or are reported on indirectly, through the statements of other actors or of journalists.

Methodology for tracking media narratives

Alongside the quantitative monitoring of pluralism, between 1 January and 31 August 2026 CARTA Election Observation Mission also carried out systematic tracking of dominant narratives and of manipulative content in the media. The monitoring covered the front pages of nine daily newspapers - *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Večernje novosti*, *Politika*, *Alo!*, *Srpski telegraf*, *Danas*, *Nova* and *Blic* - and the opening segments of the main news programmes of five television stations: RTS 1, Pink, Prva, *Informer TV* and B92. The unit of analysis was the individual headline, or the opening segment in a main news programme, identified as manipulative, with every appearance recorded separately, including repetitions of the same or similar content.

Every manipulative headline was processed from the perspective of three independent

dimensions. The first is the subject, coded at two levels - a broader category (for example domestic politics, the rule of law and the judiciary, media and information, Kosovo, foreign policy and international relations) and a more specific subject within it (for example the election campaign, the misuse of public powers and resources, the law on foreign agents, disinformation and information integrity). CRTA developed 24 categories and 99 specific subjects in total.

The second dimension is the narrative, also coded at two levels - through 18 principal narrative frames (such as discrediting those who hold different political views; glorifying the current government and President Aleksandar Vučić; criticising and discrediting the government and President Aleksandar Vučić; self-victimisation; and discrediting or glorifying the European Union, the United States, Russia, China and the neighbours of Serbia) and the specific subjects that make up each frame.

The third dimension is the source of the content, coded through the origin of the information (state institution, branch of government, independent institution, political party or movement, civil society organisation, expert or analyst, citizen, media outlet, anonymous source and other) and the channel through which the information was conveyed, that is the specific outlet or agency carrying the content, whether domestic, regional or international.

This multidimensional approach enabled CRTA Election Observation Mission to track not only the frequency and intensity of manipulative content but also its distribution across subjects, the dominant narrative patterns and their sources, providing a precise and verifiable basis for assessing the integrity of the information space in an election year.

The next phases of election observation

Once snap parliamentary elections are called, CRTA's observation methodology will widen its scope in line with established standards. Long-term observation will continue until the final results are declared, with additional monitoring of the work of the Republic Electoral Commission and of the local electoral commissions, of the candidacies of candidate lists, and of the protection of electoral rights.

Election-day observation will be carried out on a scientifically determined, random and representative sample of around 500 polling stations, where statistically based observation of the course of voting will be accompanied by a parallel vote tabulation (quick count) in order to verify the officially announced results independently. At each polling station in the sample, up to four observers are to be deployed in two shifts, morning and afternoon, ensuring continuous monitoring of the entire course of voting, quality control of the data and greater safety for observers. After election day, observation continues

through electoral forensics and legal monitoring of proceedings for the protection of electoral rights, up to the declaration of the final election results.

CRTA secures the independence and impartiality of its observation through non-partisan recruitment and conflict-of-interest screening of observers, mandatory training and a code of conduct, independent statistical design of the sample, multi-stage verification of the data collected, a clear separation of observation findings from political interpretation, a transparent methodology and public reporting, and diversified and transparent funding.

The position of observers under the law

Election observation by domestic observation missions in Serbia has been carried out since the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1997 and has been recognised ever since as one element of the electoral process and as an indicator of how democratic it is. Even so, the position of observers was only grounded in the electoral laws in 2022, after 16 electoral cycles. Until then the scope of observers' powers, and the timeliness with which accreditation was issued, depended entirely on secondary legislation and on the willingness of the election administration to apply democratic standards in its work, which made it harder for observers to access particular stages of the electoral process and the electoral documentation.

Accredited observers must be adult citizens of Serbia and may not be members of the bodies administering the elections, nor candidates. Observers have the right to follow the work of polling boards, local electoral commissions and the Republic Electoral Commission, and to be present at the printing, counting and packing of ballot papers. The status of domestic observer may be granted to representatives of associations registered in Serbia whose objectives are pursued in the field of elections, while the status of foreign observer is granted to representatives of foreign states and of international and foreign organisations and associations. The most recent local elections, held in 2025 and 2026, were marked by a multiplication of domestic and foreign observation missions connected with the government, but also with the opposition, which led CRTA Election Observation Mission to warn of the increasingly frequent misuse of the institution of independent observation.

The treatment of observers and of independent observation by the government and political actors

Despite the position of election observers being grounded in law, it has been seriously undermined across several electoral cycles. The most recent such case was recorded

in March 2026 at the local elections in Bor, where observers of CARTA's mission were physically attacked; numerous serious physical incidents against citizens and journalists were recorded in Bor and in other towns on the same day. Similarly, at the local elections in Mionica in November 2025, CARTA's observers faced a serious breach of their safety after being surrounded in their vehicle. In neither of these two cases have the competent authorities imposed any formal measure against the perpetrators to date.

The attack on CARTA's observers in Odžaci, committed on the day of the parliamentary elections in December 2023, has not been adequately prosecuted. The observers were physically attacked in the yard of a police station, immediately after they had attempted to report an observed case of circular voting. The competent prosecution office subsequently classified the attack as the criminal offence of violent conduct. Almost three years later, in May 2026, CARTA was informed that the Basic Public Prosecution Office in Sombor had dismissed the criminal complaint filed over the attack "on the grounds that there is no basis for suspicion that a criminal offence prosecuted ex officio has been committed". Such an outcome - after almost three years of waiting and without a single conviction or even an indictment - further confirms the pattern of ineffective institutional protection of observers.

Beyond physical violence, the position of domestic observers is further undermined by the multiplication of missions whose observation is reasonably suspected of being inauthentic, something CARTA has pointed to in earlier reports as well. In previous cycles, newly formed observation organisations close to the government and with no prior experience of election observation were engaged - such as the Centre for European Values and the Institute for European Freedoms. Members of these organisations actively interfered in the work of polling boards, contrary to the rules of election observation, and at the same time worked very closely with polling board members drawn from the parties in power - at as many as 70 per cent of polling stations in Kosjerić and 40 per cent in Zaječar.²¹⁰ At the most recent elections this phenomenon multiplied further: the number of such observation missions rose to six. This trend indicates that the institution of independent election observation is increasingly exposed to instrumentalisation, in which the form of observation is used as a screen for legitimising the electoral process instead of serving its original purpose - the impartial verification of compliance with electoral rules.

To this is added the discrediting of independent observation by senior state representatives, but also by actors from the opposition. CARTA Election Observation Mission has been subjected to speculation that it will not declare an accurate projection of the election results in order to support one side or the other. The most senior government offi-

²¹⁰ CARTA (2025), Finalni izveštaj o posmatranju lokalnih izbora u Kosjeriću i Zaječaru, July 2025, available at: https://cрта.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CRTA_Finalni-izvestaj_Lokalni-izbori-Kosjeric-i-Zajecar.pdf

cials go a step further, accusing CRTA of standing behind alleged plans to provoke chaos and violence on election day, that is to carry out a "colour revolution". It is worth recalling that after the 2023 elections CRTA Election Observation Mission was publicly accused for the first time by the then Prime Minister, Ana Brnabić, of "directly destabilising Serbia and attempting to overthrow the constitutional order".

In addition, the current campaign against civil society in Serbia - "NGO Hydra" - advocates the adoption of a law on foreign agents, and in the course of it frequently claims falsely that independent election observation and CRTA Election Observation Mission work against the interests of Serbia and that they will "cause bloodshed" on election day. This campaign and its author have received public institutional support and access to the most influential media. On two occasions in August 2026, the person behind this campaign met the Speaker of the National Assembly on Assembly premises.

An environment of this kind runs counter to the international standards Serbia has taken on as an OSCE participating State: the Copenhagen Document obliges States to invite and enable election observation, while the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice requires that domestic and foreign observers have the widest possible opportunity to take part in the electoral process, without being exposed to security risk. Unimpeded and safe election observation is not a privilege the government grants at its own discretion; it is a legal right and an international obligation of the State.