

Serbia's June 2020 Elections

Summary

The National Assembly of Serbia has 250 members elected for a four-year term. Members are elected in a single district for the whole country on a closed party list. Seats are divided proportionally according to the widely used D'hondt method¹. Serbia has a multi-party system, often leading to coalition governments.

Serbia's parliamentary and local elections took place on June 21, 2020. The elections were boycotted by part of the opposition parties protesting government manipulation, both alleged and evidenced, of the election process, particularly with regard to the media and abuse of government resources for campaign purposes. Attempts by Serbian civil society and the international community to broker opposition-government dialogue on electoral reform were not substantial enough to convince the opposition to disregard its boycott.

The initial date of the elections, set for April 26, 2020, was postponed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing state of emergency. By May, the situation in Serbia improved with regard to the number of COVID-19 cases, and the government lifted the state of emergency, paving the way for campaigns and other large-scale gatherings. Notably, the pandemic affected the dynamic of the campaign and means by which electoral candidates could communicate with voters, as the ruling party officials had access to the media to communicate about the health crisis. NDI's pre-election public opinion research revealed high public confidence in the government restrictions to contain the virus².

At the national level, the incumbent Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its coalition partners garnered a strong majority of 188 (out of 250) seats in the National Assembly - or a 70 percent majority – based on receiving 60.7 percent of cast ballots. This represents a seven percent increase in votes for SNS, but a 44 percent increase in SNS members of parliament (MPs) compared to the 2016 parliamentary elections results. This result has bolstered the power of its SNS leader, Aleksandar Vucic, who is also the President of the country. At the local level, SNS has secured an absolute majority in the provincial parliament of Vojvodina, and a majority in at least 161³ out of 168 local parliaments governments throughout Serbiathe country. In addition to SNS, only two other national parties and four minority parties passed the threshold, making the new convocation the least diverse since 2000.

Voter turnout was 48.9 percent (3.2 million voters), the lowest total number since 2000. NDI opinion research and statistical analysis suggest that the lower turnout was likely due to dissatisfaction with political options on the ballot, the opposition boycott, inclement weather on election day, concerns about COVID-19, and emigration from the country. The lower turnout,

¹ *Understanding the d'Hondt method: Allocation of parliamentary seats and leadership positions* - Think Tank: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2019\)637966](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2019)637966)

² [NDI Serbia Public Opinion Research: March - May 2020](#)

³ The final number of municipalities/cities led by SNS will be known after repeated elections in the municipality of Sabac and after establishment of ruling coalitions in seven localities where independent leaders or SPS won the majority of votes.

combined with approximately 10 percent of cast ballots going to parties that did not pass the electoral threshold, implies that approximately 60 percent of registered voters will not be represented in the new parliament - the lowest level of representation over the past 20 years.

The Belgrade-based Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA), in observing the election process, found legal violations and procedural irregularities in approximately 10 percent of polling stations- a rate higher than in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Irregularities did not reveal a systematic pattern across polling stations, suggesting that there was no coordinated effort. Prior to election day, CRTA noted disproportionate representation of the governing coalition in mainstream media, unclear distinctions between public officials performing governance duties and campaigning for their parties, and significant changes to electoral regulations fewer than three months prior to the original election date, such as lowering the election threshold from five percent, raising the gender quota from 30 to 40 percent, and introducing a 1.35 multiplication factor for minority lists. These changes should be deliberated with political actors at least a year in advance of the elections, so these actors can adopt their campaigns accordingly, and with society as a whole, to ensure proper equity of participation and representation across the electorate.

Parliamentary Election Results

The SNS parliamentary majority will allow it to adopt constitutional changes without the votes of other political groups. President Vucic has suggested that officials representing parties that did not enter parliament could join the new government as ministers or other non-elected positions.

Table 1: Parliamentary Election Results

| List | CRTA Projection (based on PVT) | CeSID/IPSOS Projection (based on PVT) | Republic Electoral Commission (RIK) ⁴ | Seats |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------|
| Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) - Aleksandar Vucic | 60.4 percent | 62.6 percent | 60.6 percent | 188 |
| Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) - Ivica Dacic | 10.3 percent | 10.9 percent | 10.4 percent | 32 |
| Serbian Patriotic Alliance (SPAS) - Aleksandar Sagic | 3.9 percent | 4.2 percent | 3.8 percent | 11 |
| Renewal of the Kingdom of Serbia (POKS) | 2.6 percent | 2.7 percent | 2.7 percent | 0 |
| Sovereignists (DJB) coalition | 2.3 percent | 2.6 percent | 2.3 percent | 0 |
| Metla 2020 (DSS) coalition | 2.4 percent | 2.4 percent | 2.2 percent | 0 |
| Serbian Radical Party (SRS) - Vojislav Seselj | 2.2 percent | 2.0 percent | 2.0 percent | 0 |
| Alliance of Free Citizens (PSG) | 1.7 percent | 1.8 percent | 1.6 percent | 0 |
| Serbian Party Oathkeepers | 1.5 percent | 1.6 percent | 1.4 percent | 0 |
| United Democratic Serbia (UDS) coalition | 1.0 percent | 1.0 percent | 0.9 percent | 0 |
| <i>Minority list: Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM)</i> | 2.0 percent | 2.3 percent | 2.2 percent | 9 |
| <i>Minority list: Muamer Zukorlic (Bosniaks)</i> | 0.9 percent | 1.0 percent | 1.0 percent | 4 |
| <i>Minority list: Albanian Democratic Alternative</i> | 0.8 percent | 0.9 percent | 0.8 percent | 3 |
| <i>Minority list: Party of Democratic Action (SDA)</i> | 0.6 percent | 0.7 percent | 0.8 percent | 3 |
| Others | | | 4.1 percent | 0 |
| <i>Invalid Ballots</i> | <i>3.8 percent</i> | <i>4 percent</i> | <i>3.7 percent</i> | |

⁴ Based on the final election results presented by RIK, July 05, 2020

SNS' coalition partner, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), received 10.4 percent and will have 32 MPs. This represents a 19 percent decrease in votes, but a 10 percent increase of seats. At this moment, it remains unclear whether SPS will be once again part of the new governing coalition.

The third party in parliament is a new competitor, the Serbian Patriotic Alliance (SPAS), with 3.8 percent, or 11 seats. It is led by former water polo player and current president of New Belgrade, a municipality in the capital, Aleksander Sapic. Prior to the 2020 campaign, the party was a local movement. The party received most of its votes from Belgrade, including outside of New Belgrade, in neighborhoods that tend to support opposition parties. It also did well across Serbia, despite the fact that the party's predominant ideology, platform, and goals remain unclear. For instance, several former members of the far-right nationalist *Dveri* movement ran as SPAS candidates. Its electoral success will increase its national visibility and ensure additional access to resources that is awarded to parties proportionally from the state budget, according to the number of seats they have in the National Assembly.

Two pro-European opposition parties, United Democrats of Serbia (UDS) and Free Citizens Movement (PSG), hoped to unite voters opposed to the government and unhappy with the opposition election boycott organized by an umbrella opposition coalition, the Alliance for Serbia (SzS). PSG and UDS decided to compete within two months of the elections, fearing negative attacks from SzS and other personalities with clout among their core supporters. This tardy decision limited their chance to present themselves to the electorate as a viable alternative. In the case of PSG, voters might have been confused about its campaign, as PSG had originally decided to boycott the elections but changed its approach during the COVID-19 state of emergency. UDS was formed in early 2020 and simply did not have sufficient time to establish itself among voters. Those challenges, combined with the fact that each party had limited resources and access to mainstream media, resulted in UDS taking 0.95 percent of the vote and PSG - 1.58 percent.

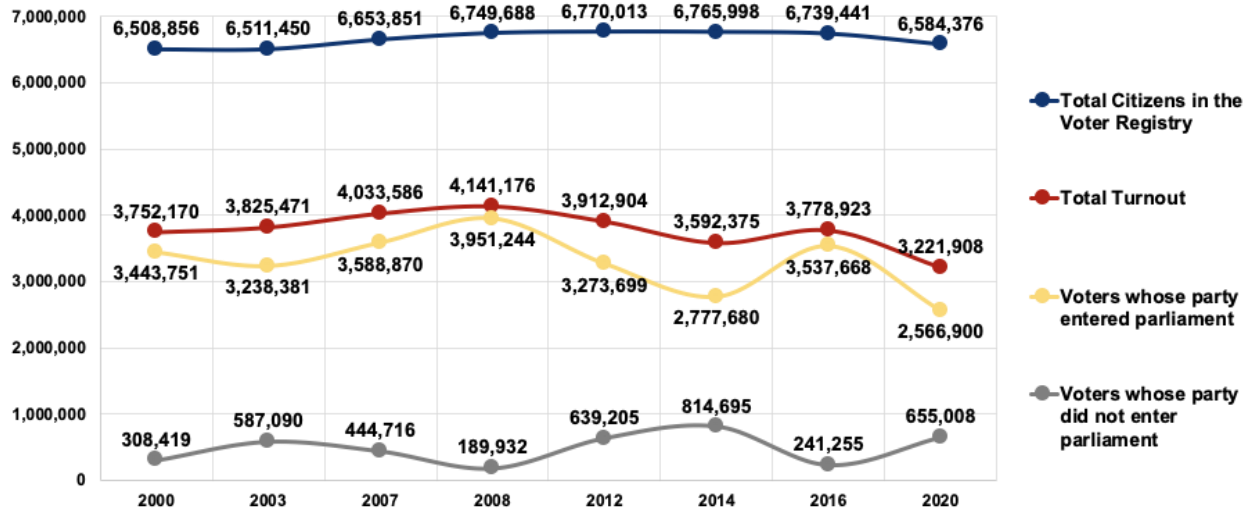
Notably, minority parties did well in the 2020 elections. Minority communities in Serbia comprise 13.31 percent of the total population and minority parties are not subject to the national threshold of three percent. In addition, the parliament also altered the weight of each minority list vote to be worth 1.35 votes. This contradicts the spirit of equal suffrage as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Serbian electoral law, and international standards⁵. The Justice and Reconciliation Party and the Party of Democratic Action, representing the Bosniak community, received 1 and 0.7 percent, respectively, earning them nine and four seats in the National Assembly. The Alliance of Vojvodina's Hungarians received 2.3 percent of the votes and will send nine members to parliament. Three Albanian parties from South Serbia ran as a coalition, earning a record three seats. With approximately the same number of votes as they garnered in 2016, national minority lists will have twice as many MPs in parliament – 19, as compared to just nine in 2016.

⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Serbia: www.propisi.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/article.php?pid=800&id=23848 (Article 52, Paragraph 2).

Parliamentary Election Analysis

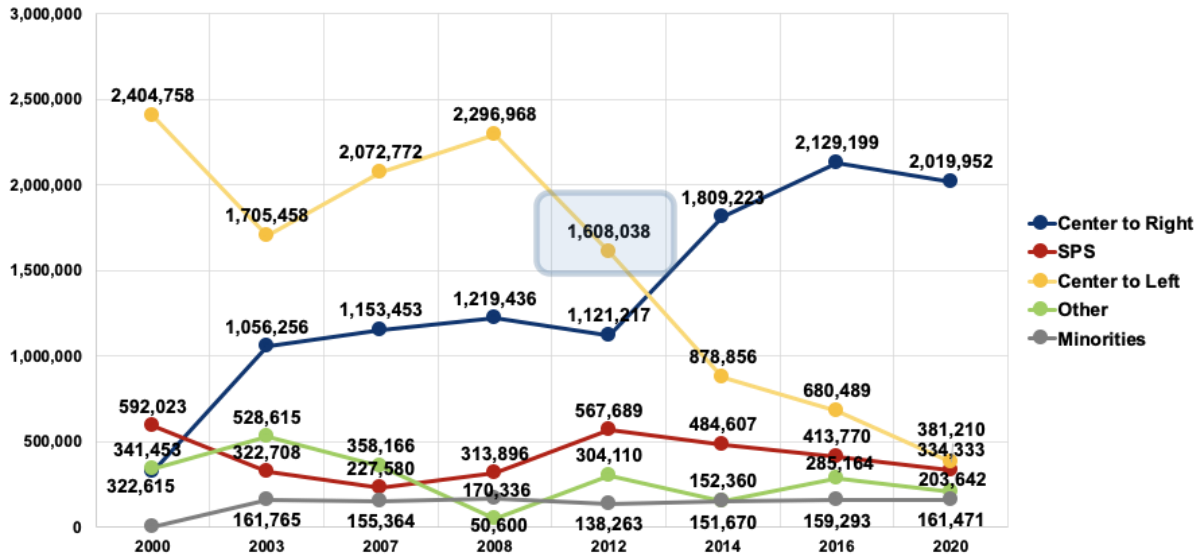
Boycott and Turnout

Voter turnout was higher in the relatively rural south and east and remarkably low in Belgrade, 10 percent lower than the national rate of 49 percent. Based on the low national turnout and much lower turnout in the traditional opposition stronghold of Belgrade, the SzS-led opposition declared the boycott a success and the newly elected parliament “illegitimate”.



Turnout and number of voters represented in parliament since 2000. Source: Republic Electoral Commission

The lower turnout is in line with the steady decline since 2012, evidenced primarily by continuous emigration from the country, estimated at approximately 50,000 people a year. In NDI post-election research, non-voters cited several reasons for abstaining: “no party to vote for” (38 percent of abstainers, or 10 percent of the entire electorate); “I have no confidence that any party will fulfill its promises” (25 percent of abstainers, or seven percent of the electorate); support for the boycott (17 percent of abstainers, or five percent of the electorate); and COVID-19 concerns. The number of void ballots was 118,155 or 3.67 percent of cast ballots - higher than recent years (3.15 percent in 2016). Ballot invalidation is a recognized voter practice in Serbia to register dissatisfaction with political party options and the political system.



Distribution of votes since 2000 per political block. Source: Republic Electoral Commission

NDI analyzed parliamentary election results since 2000 to examine historic trendlines. Because the political landscape has seen consistent shifts during the past 20 years, NDI designates different parties into blocks to make deeper analysis possible. The two main blocks are the “center-left” block that is based on the Democratic Party and other parties with a similar profile, and the “center-right” block that consist of SNS and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS).

“Center-Left” Block

One of the major trends since 2000 is the heavy decline of the “center-left” block, including the Democratic Party DS, PSG, UDS, United Regions of Serbia (URS), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Nova, Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), G17, Samostalna Srbija, Pokret Moja Srbija, Social Democratic Party of Serbia (SDS), Enough is Enough (DJB), Levica Srbije, 1 out of 5 Million, and SPAS. This decline began in 2012 with a loss of 30 percent of its vote share (more than 688,000 votes). This strong loss of votes led to a change in political alliances (with some members of that block and with SPS) and brought SNS to power. The center-left block has been hemorrhaging voters since.

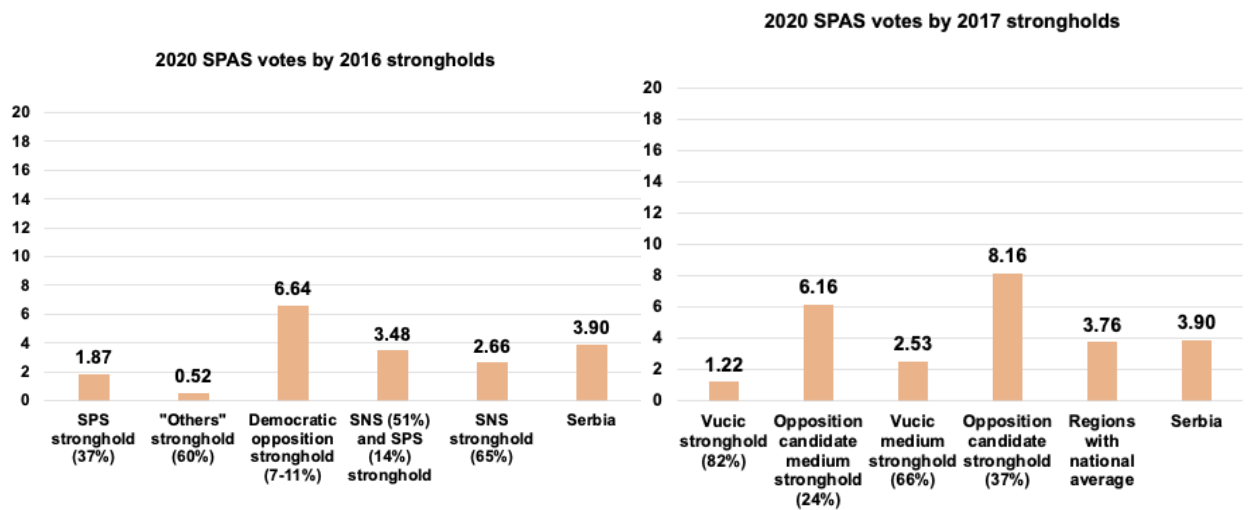
The decline in votes does not necessarily translate into a decline in seats. The block lost about 200,000 votes between 2014 and 2016, but gained eight seats in parliament due to the D’Hondt seat calculation system⁶ Serbia uses. Combining this with the lower threshold and the calculated support for the boycott of about 200,000 votes, NDI estimates that participating in the elections with a center-left list would have garnered strong support, certainly passing the threshold could have led to more members of parliament for that block. Given the voter profile of the center-left block, it is likely that the presence of the far-right party in the Alliance for Serbia would have had a negative impact on that potential result.

In 2012 the center-left block (123 seats) lost power, not because they were outperformed by the “center-right” block (73 seats), but because the center-right made a post-election coalition with

⁶ [Understanding the d’Hondt Method](#)

SPS (44 seats) and other smaller parties. This shows that a change of power can happen, even if the incumbent ruling party remains the largest in parliament. The center-left block could have won more seats than they received in 2016, which could have been a basis to start thinking about changing power in 2024. However, they missed this opportunity by boycotting elections.

NDI’s analysis of 2017 and 2020 election results at the polling station level suggests that opposition-leaning voters sought an alternative to boycotting parties. These opposition-leaning voters found that voting preference applied in SPAS, and to a lesser extent in PSG. SPAS overperformed in New Belgrade, proving the popularity of Sagic. But deeper analysis suggests that SPAS managed to attract votes from those areas of the country that voted for Sasa Jankovic (then of PSG) over Vucic in the 2017 presidential elections, or who voted for opposition parties in the 2016 elections. This indicates that voters were looking for an alternative to the traditional opposition and believed that SPAS was that alternative; therefore, the party attracts voters oriented towards center-left political ideology without promoting that ideology.



Vote distribution for SPAS in the 2020 elections, based on political support in 2016 and 2017. Source: Republic Electoral Commission

Vote distribution for PSG follows a similar pattern: in 2020 it performed better in opposition-leaning neighborhoods in Belgrade, but it had a more equal distribution across the country than SPAS, showing its growth potential. PSG was constrained by its late decision to participate in the elections and COVID-19 restrictions on campaigning.

UDS was not able to garner opposition support outside of Vojvodina, its primary source of votes, where it is linked to a regional party, the League of Social-Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV), which enjoys high historic support in the region.

The center-left downward trend is more the result of strategic decisions, like the splintering of political parties and the 2020 boycott, than of a lack of support in society for pro-democratic, pro-European politics. NDI’s public opinion research shows that a majority of citizens believe developing a fully-functional democracy is key in Serbia (82 percent) and that Serbia should join

the European Union (50.2 percent would vote in favor of the EU membership)⁷. The challenge for these parties is in conveying that they can bring about that change.

This will require a shift in political discourse and attitude to match people's concerns, which, according to NDI public opinion research, is economic in nature. The center-left opposition's focus has been on democracy issues, such as ensuring fair election processes, and equal access to state media. It will require a change in party discourse to be more driven by policy and oriented on the economy to garner citizen interest and voter support.

“Center-Right” Block

In the past 20 years, the support for the center-right block, composed of SNS and the SRS, has grown. Although the block as a whole lost about 100,000 votes in 2020, as compared to 2016, this is due to the poor result of the SRS. The party lost more than 240,000 votes and is no longer represented in parliament. It is likely that SNS absorbed some of these votes. Nevertheless, NDI estimates that at least 110,000 voters abandoned the center-right block for reasons similar to the electoral travails of center-left parties – public disaffection from politics, a lack of political competition, and emigration. As a result of the boycott, the loss of those votes translates in a gain of 55 seats.

Local Election Analysis

Local election results affirmed SNS dominance across the country. In the Assembly of the Province of Vojvodina, SNS won 76 of 120 mandates, 10 more than previously. Of the 153 local self-governing units (municipalities and cities) in which local elections were held, there is only a handful of municipalities that SNS did not win: Beocin, Cajetina, Razanj, Surdulica, Svilajnac, Topola, New Belgrade, and locations where national minorities (Albanian, Bosniak, and Hungarian communities) are predominant. SPS won in Beocin and Surdulica, and SNS is a likely coalition partner in many of the above municipalities. In Paracin, SNS beat ex-DS mayor Sasa Paunovic. SNS may gain a majority in Sabac following repeat elections, given the wide margin of votes the party received on June 21. The City Electoral Commission of Sabac has annulled the elections at the polling station Sevarice in Sabac due to a higher number of ballots in the ballot box than the number of voters who cast a vote.

Where SNS did not see success, local governments have long been held by strong leaders from smaller parties or citizens' groups. These include Milan Stamatovic and his Zdrava Srbija (Healthy Serbia) in Cajetina and Dragan Jovanovic from Bolja Serbia (Better Serbia) in Topola.

Mixed messages from major opposition parties likely hindered their local results. Boycotting parties were divided as to whether or not they would run at the local level, and as a result, competing messages were delivered to voters about whether and how to turn out if they supported the boycott, or the nationally-boycotting parties. Local civic movements often aligned with SzS and boycotted local elections. Nationalist and far-right groups stepped into the void, including in the mixed-ethnic city of Vranje, where Serbian Right, known for hate speech against minorities, came in second behind SNS.

⁷ [NDI Public Opinion Research November 2018](#)

Electoral Conditions

Pre-election Challenges

Compared to prior election cycles, the pre-election period was challenged by three overarching issues: the opposition boycott; late-stage changes to major electoral legislation; and the COVID-19 pandemic.

SzS declared a boycott of the 2020 parliamentary elections in mid-summer 2019 on the basis of poor electoral conditions, particularly regarding media bias, where Serbian media tends to report on the ruling parties far more than opposition parties. Negotiations between the government and the opposition led to some improvements to the election administration, including:

- Clarifying the role and responsibility of the Republic Electoral Commission in the election process;
- Improving legal definitions of abuse of state resources and abuse of office;
- Improving air time for all electoral contestants on the state-owned broadcast services during the campaign; and
- Ensuring shorter response times for complaints received by the independent institutions on campaign and electoral oversight, like the Anti-Corruption Agency.

However, in the eyes of parts of the opposition these negotiations did not resolve the larger challenges to the media environment or address any of the opposition's key demands, including: changing the composition of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), promoting media freedom and equal participation of representatives of opposition on public services during campaign, ensuring criminal liability of the minister in charge of the voter list if the voter list is misused by an unauthorized person, and strictly prohibiting misusing public funds in the campaign.

An unanticipated factor was the COVID-19 pandemic, which effectively split the campaign into two parts with a 50-day gap during the government-imposed state of emergency. Following the declaration of the state of emergency on March 16, the elections were postponed and the election campaign, which had been active for 11 days, was suspended. SNS used its government visibility in fighting Covid-19 to publish promotional videos. This break substantively changed the dynamics of the campaign, disrupting many parties' ability to collect signatures to qualify to compete in the elections. When the campaign formally resumed on May 11, parties immediately turned their focus to collecting signatures and filing their candidate lists.

Pre-Election Public Opinion Research

NDI conducted a face-to-face public opinion poll in March 2020 and a combined telephone and internet poll in May 2020.⁸ The research assessed citizens' opinions on the electoral process to identify their views on important issues, their level of satisfaction with institutions and political figures, their attitudes towards the upcoming parliamentary elections, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁸ Serbia: Spring 2020 Public Opinion Research: www.ndi.org/publications/serbia-spring-2020-public-opinion-research

Research revealed that citizens supported the government's measures to fight the pandemic by a large margin, including the strict curfew rules that included a four-day stay-at-home order during Easter. Citizens were convinced that the country and its healthcare system were ready to fight the novel coronavirus. Parliament's sudden closure was less appreciated by the population. Russia and China received a noticeable, if perhaps temporary, favorability 'bump', according to the findings, which coincided with widespread media coverage of their COVID-19 assistance, vis-a-vis that of the EU, which saw a relative decline in favorability. Nearly half of the respondents (46 percent) were hopeful that Serbia would overcome the consequences of the pandemic in the next six to twelve months.

More people than in previous NDI-conducted research believed the country was heading in the right direction (61 percent in May), although this was higher at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis (70 percent in March). Citizens remain concerned about the economy and their purchasing power, especially after immediate concerns related to COVID-19 declined during April and May.

Public perceptions of the quality of the electoral processes is divided. These perceptions are correlated with media consumption patterns and political preferences. Thirty (30) percent believed there would be no electoral irregularities. Thirty (30) percent anticipated some irregularities that would not impact election results. Twenty-four (24) percent feared irregularities that would have an impact on results. The last two groups tend to consume and trust the outlet N1, and showed intent to either vote for the SzS, PSG, 1 out of 5 million, similar parties, or said they would not vote. Nevertheless, the number of citizens who admitted that they witnessed electoral violations during the 2016 parliamentary campaign, as a point of reference, was low (four percent experienced pressure, five percent were approached to sell their vote). According to respondents' reports, this did not change their behavior, nor does it seem to have impacted the election results.

A strong majority (83 percent) disapproved of political hate speech. Except for President Vucic, Prime Minister Brnabic, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Dacic, all politicians in Serbia received negative ratings. This hinders the potential growth of the opposition, which sees particularly high negative ratings of its representatives. These results indicate that support of political figures does not necessarily yield trust. On the other hand, the relatively lower negative numbers of younger or newer opposition figures like Marko Durisic and Dobrica Veselinovic could indicate that new faces in Serbian politics may have opportunities to gain further support.

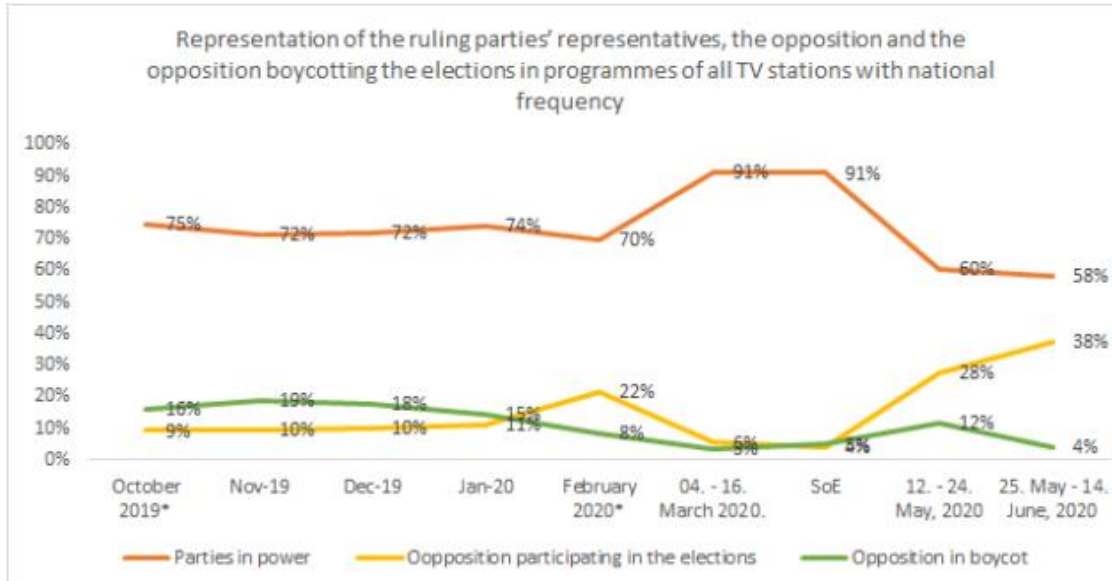
Media

NDI supported media monitoring and analysis conducted by CRTA identified an uneven media playing field.

NDI public opinion research has repeatedly found that citizens' perceptions of politicians, foreign actors, and electoral processes are directly linked to the media narratives they consume and trust. Television remains the most influential opinion maker. During the COVID-19 peak, from March through May, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) was the most consumed and trusted source of information.

Imbalance in the media started earlier than the start of the official electoral campaign. Media analysis revealed quantitatively disproportional coverage of the ruling coalition in the media and

qualitative bias in positive to neutral reporting on governing parties, and neutral coverage of opposition parties. As the official electoral campaign began, coverage of opposition politicians participating in the elections increased in the mainstream media. On average, opposition politicians received 12 percent of media space before the election campaign, and around 38 percent by June 14, one week before election-day. The share of representatives of the ruling parties in the total media coverage was more than 70 percent before the elections, and 58 percent by June 14.



Share of presence of political blocks in national media. Source: CRTA Media monitoring

CRTA’s social media monitoring showed more activity among opposition actors than those in the governing coalition on Facebook and Twitter. In April, Twitter announced it had removed 8,558 accounts in late 2019. Twitter reported that these accounts were removed in connection with a coordinated action to promote the ruling party.⁹

The Campaign

Most parties ran on platforms centered around their leaders. Although these were parliamentary elections, President Vucic was the dominant figure during the campaign, while SNS and its candidates were not prominently featured. Even the ballot featured the president’s name, rather than the name of the party. In addition to Vucic, Prime Minister Brnabic and select ministers led the election campaign for SNS, despite the fact that many of them were not candidates. SPS’ campaign focused on party leader and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivaca Dacic.

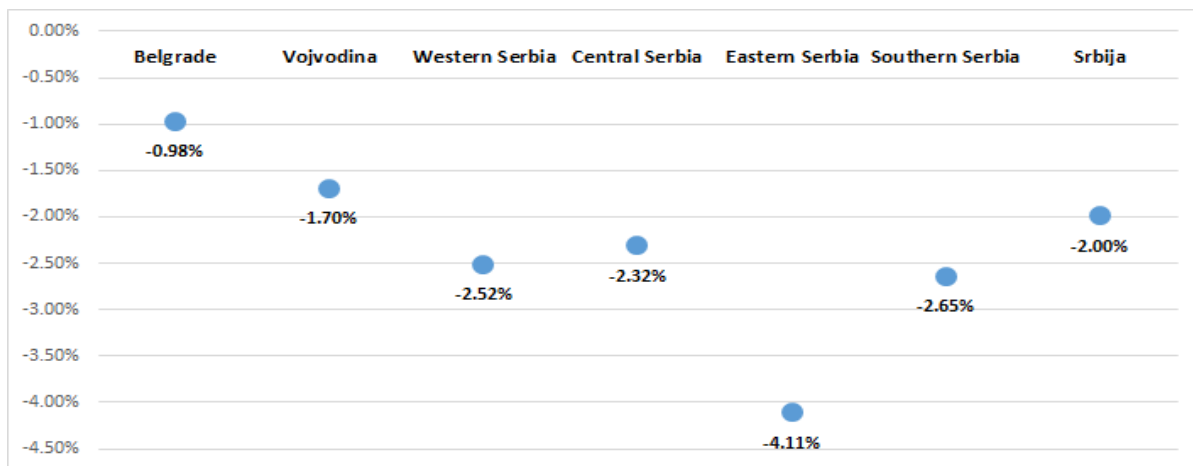
The campaign was dominated by clashes between the ruling coalition and pro-boycott opposition over the handling of the COVID-19 crisis and debates on whether elections should be delayed a second time, beyond June 21. In addition to opposition-governing coalition disputes, the pro-boycott opposition sought to undermine opposition parties such as PSG and UDS that competed in the elections.

⁹ Removal notice: <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety/status/1245682441865646080?s=20>

NDI’s post-election public opinion research showed that the majority of voters (52 percent) do not remember any significant campaign promise. Those who did remember campaign promises, referred mostly to economic issues like unemployment (12 percent), increase in salaries (12 percent), or investing in infrastructure (eight percent).

Voter Registry

NDI and CRTA conducted a preliminary analysis of voter registry data, using freedom of information requests that CRTA filed for 157 out of 165 municipalities, as well as the Republic Electoral Commission’s public data on voting trends across Serbia. The preliminary analysis of changes to the register does not indicate manipulation. NDI and CRTA’s preliminary analysis did not find first-stage indicators of government-manipulated changes to the registry based on voting behaviors. The governing coalition (SNS and SPS) strongholds, identified based on the 2016 parliamentary election results, saw above average decreases in voter registration. Polling stations that leaned toward opposition support in 2016 saw relatively less change than the national average. An independent audit of the voter registry utilizing list-to-voter and voter-to-list comparisons would be needed to ascertain the degree of real-time accuracy.



Distribution of changes in the Voters' Registry by regions.

NDI and CRTA observed a two percent deviation from the national average, based on the size of polling stations. Polling stations with more than 1,500 voters saw a decrease of more than five percent in registration. Emigration and internal migration typically affect Serbia’s smaller communities first, so neither are likely to explain this shift at first glance. It could be that citizens are moving from city centers to suburbs, but additional analysis through an audit of the voter registry would be required.

Election Day

CRTA’s election monitoring mission included more than 1,700 trained observers deployed to a random and representative sample of 500 polling stations.

CRTA observation encompassed assessment of the conditions within polling stations, in front of polling stations, as well as the at-home voting conditions. In general, observers registered

violations like breaches of voting secrecy, parallel voter records violations, pressure on voters, vote buying, and undocumented voting. CRTA observers reported physical incidents at two polling stations. In some isolated cases, citizens were not able to vote because they were not in the voter registry.

CRTA determined that eight to ten percent of the polling stations saw irregularities that increased the total turnout figures. This was two times more than the level of violations CRTA reported in 2016 and 2017. Without the combined effect of all these irregularities, the turnout would likely be closer to 45 percent. CRTA does not believe that these irregularities had an impact on the final election results, as vote share by electoral contestants do not change when looking at the polling stations without the violations only.¹⁰

Fifty six (56) percent of polling stations were not accessible to people with disabilities. This data indicates that since the 2017 presidential elections, when the same percentage was recorded, there has been no improvement to the accessibility of voting infrastructure, as reported by CRTA's Preliminary Report on the Election Day.

Serbia After the Election

Serbia's continued EU-integration negotiations will soon put complex topics on the table, like the normalization of relations with Kosovo, the rule of law, and the freedom of the media. Given that the ruling party received nearly every second vote cast by voters residing in Serbia, the new government will have full legitimacy to represent the country during these negotiations. In the same vein, given the extent of the support, the new government will not have any excuses not to deliver on these difficult negotiations. Also, improving quality of life, particularly regarding the economy, remains the top priority for the citizens. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the impending global recession, a key question is how will the new government be able to sustain a healthy economy - and how will their possible failure to do so affect public sentiment.

According to NDI research, public opinion on the National Assembly was not favorable. A priority for the ruling party should be to improve the image and functioning of the parliament. However, given the limited political pluralism in the new convocation of the National Assembly, this could prove to be a substantial challenge. Any potential gains the new government may achieve to this end would be marred by the lack of political diversity.

Serbia saw some improvement in opportunities for electoral contestants to present their political programs in the media during the campaign. This trend should continue beyond the purview of a campaign period. Yet, the poor electoral conditions, such as abuse of state resources and voter coercion, together with the lack of pluralistic political representation, signal that these challenges will remain. Improving electoral conditions would require dedicated and constructive political dialogue across the political spectrum, as well as input from civil society and international partners.

Political diversity in the National Assembly can only be achieved when the opposition is able to present a credible alternative to the ruling party. Opposition parties should look for ideological

¹⁰ Further information from CRTA can be found at: <https://crt.rs/en/elections-2020-preliminary-report-on-the-election-day-june-21st-2020>

similarities and concrete plans and programs if they seek to become sustainable beyond serving as protest movements. In order for Serbia to regain political balance, the opposition needs to present coherent and cohesive policy alternatives that address key issues of concern and lead to improved quality of life. Importantly, opposition parties must act quickly, as voters determine their electoral choices well before the start of the official campaign period, according to the Institute's research.

Overall, Serbia's political leaders must reduce inflammatory rhetoric and focus on preventing further polarization of Serbian society. Failure to do so may negatively affect all political options. Citizens' expectations are clear - they want constructive cross-party dialogue that can offer tangible solutions to the problems that affect their quality of life. Serbian political leaders would do well to base their efforts on this simple, but critically important, concept.