
THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



Civic
Initiatives

freedom of expression

freedom of assembly

freedom of association

Three Freedoms Under the Magnifying Glass Violations of Basic Human Rights in Serbia

July 25 - August 7, 2025

Freedom of Expression

Pressures and intimidation for supporting the protests

Attempts by government representatives to suppress student and civic protests through intimidation and repression continue, with the aim of discouraging further large-scale public gatherings across the country. Recently, vice-rectors at the University of Belgrade were summoned for questioning. These hearings followed criminal complaints filed by the GONGO organization “Council for Monitoring, Human Rights and Anti-Corruption – Transparency”. Complaints were lodged against the rector and the rector’s board of the University of Belgrade, as well as three vice-rectors, accused of abuse of office and negligence. In reality, this represents continuing pressure on the academic community in Serbia. Well-known director Goran Marković was dismissed from the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. He learned about the dismissal from students, because no one from the faculty leadership officially informed him of the sudden termination. He believes the reason is his open support for the student protests. A professor at the Academy of Educational-Medical Vocational Studies in Čuprija was also fired for supporting the student protests. The education inspectorate visited the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in response to a general knowledge question on the entrance exam for first-year students. The visit, triggered by a question related to student demands, was an attempt at censorship and preventing social-political topics from being the subject of critical discussion within educational institutions—topics which are nonetheless part of general civic awareness for future academic citizens. This is a direct effort by the executive branch to shape politically compliant educational content. The former professor of the Faculty of Theology found himself before the church court for publicly criticizing the Serbian Orthodox Church. A private business owner in Valjevo was also subject to pressure. A group of masked men broke the restaurant’s window, and the owner suspects it’s because of his open support for the students. He is not the first private entrepreneur facing repercussions and attacks. We remind you that the private transport operator Jaćimović attempted suicide due to ongoing pressure from the government and state institutions aimed at destroying his company, which had been transporting protestors across the country. The repression encouraged and initiated by authority representatives—smear campaigns, dismissals, and workplace pressures—aims to stifle civic protests. These are systematic violations of fundamental freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and laws.

Attacks and pressures on journalists

During the breaking of the highway blockade by the police, one of the gendarmes pushed a journalist and a cameraman of the N1 television. The police also used pepper spray against the gathered citizens. Citizens protested over the dismissal of a "Kolubara" employee, and 15 people were detained during an attempt to block the highway. During the citizens' protest in front of the premises of SNS in New Belgrade, one of the participants of the counter rally rushed towards the journalist Darko Simić who was filming and punched him in the face. The fact that the present police inspector refused to react and remove the thug who was in the group of SNS supporters who organized the counter-rally is particularly worrying. The SafeJournalists network pointed to the worrying "frequency of attacks on journalists and media workers during coverage of events, and without consequences for the attackers." Attacks on journalists intensified during 2024 and especially in 2025, and according to the data of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM), in the first half of this year, based on criminal reports, 44 cases were filed in which 46 journalists and media workers were harmed. Almost half of the attacks took place in the digital environment, and in 70% of the cases the targets were women. It is indicative that "the largest number of reported attacks on journalists is related to the gatherings of the Serbian Progressive Party", which speaks of the political support and encouragement that the attackers receive from representatives of the ruling party. Media workers also face other obstacles in their work. The Nova and N1 teams were not allowed to enter the constitutive session of the Kosjerić Municipal Assembly by private security, because they allegedly did not accredit themselves the night before the session, on Sunday evening. It is the obstruction of journalists in performing their work and informing the public. The editor-in-chief of the YouTube channel "Slavija info" Ljubomir Stefanović was detained by the police for post on the social network X, but was released after his lawyer's appeal. Stojanović has been exposed to pressure from the security services before. The attacks and repression to which journalists in Serbia are exposed is an indicator of the continuous deterioration of media freedom in the country, which is carried out by the top authorities with the aim of suppressing all critical voices in the public space.

Freedom of Assembly

Activist detained at tenant protest

Activist Aleksandar Salapura was detained, and released during the day, at a citizen's protest over works on the Sava Embankment in New Belgrade. Citizens point to a potentially dangerous embankment breach, all because of the introduction of electricity for illegal rafts on the Sava Quay. During the protest, members of the "Beli", the city's municipal police force, forcibly detained the activist and led him into an unmarked vehicle. The practice of arresting and detaining activists and citizens without identifying officials and taking them away in unmarked vehicles intensified with the beginning of student protests, and the goal of such illegal behavior is to instill fear among protest participants.

Incidents in Novi Pazar

In the early morning hours of July 29, a group of about twenty masked men broke into the State University in Novi Pazar and began violently attacking and throwing out the students who were in the faculty building. Several faculty employees barged in along with the masked men. It later turned out that the men were members of private security from other cities, who were hired by the rector of the Novi Pazar University. The police who later came in front of the faculty did not react and did not expel the masked men from the building. This was followed by the reaction of students and citizens who gathered in front of the university and organized a protest. At the protest, 10 people were detained for clashing with the police, and 9 have been released so far. Unlike the masked men, the police quickly arrested the gathered citizens who peacefully protested, but did not react to the violent men who broke into the university in Novi Pazar. In the following days, citizens organized blockades in Novi Pazar demanding the release of all those arrested. At one of the roadblocks, there was an attempt to break through the blockade with a car. The man was arrested, but was released after 48 hours of detention. The tensions in Novi Pazar also served as a reason for the spread of religious intolerance and hatred in the pro-government media, but the student solidarity and support that arrived for Novi Pazar from different cities showed that the war-mongering policy of the regime, which used the same tactics during the 90s, did not succeed and will not disunite the civil protests.

Tensions and conflicts at protests in front of the SNS premises

After the security from Kraljevo participated in the expulsion of students of the State University in Novi Pazar, the citizens of Kraljevo organized a protest march to the SNS premises in that city. The persons who happened to be in the premises of the ruling party at that moment threw eggs at the gathered citizens. At one point, a cannon shot was heard and the police did not react or protect the citizens from the attackers. SNS supporters attacked protesters in New Belgrade as well. Namely, citizens protested in front of the premises of the ruling party after President Vučić's decision to pardon a woman who hit and seriously injured a student with a car during a protest in January this year. Sympathizers and members of SNS organized a counter-meeting, and on that occasion they threw eggs and other objects at citizens, and the police, who stood between the two groups, did not react. Dušan Kostić, a man who was also among the attackers of FDU students in November 2024, was seen among those who insulted the gathered citizens. Supporters of SNS who attack citizens were encouraged by President Vučić's decision to pardon M.S., who in January hit and seriously injured a female student in Belgrade with a car.

Freedom of Association

The civic space continues to deteriorate

In their latest report, Serbia was listed once again on CIVICUS Monitor list of countries where civil liberties have deteriorated sharply. The international alliance of organizations CIVICUS, which monitors the state of basic freedoms in countries around the world, states that repression against civil activists has intensified and that violence against protesters has been legitimized and encouraged by the authorities. "In addition to open repression, the authorities continue to intimidate protest supporters. Many have faced smear campaigns, job dismissals, and threats", according to CIVICUS. In addition to CIVICUS, human rights experts at the United Nations expressed deep concern about the intensification of repression against students, professors, human rights defenders, civil society actors and citizens. The UN experts called on the Government of Serbia to immediately stop all forms of retaliation and intimidation, to ensure the safety and rights of all citizens and to engage in a meaningful dialogue with academic institutions.

arrest and/or detention*

IN THE OBSERVED PERIOD

-  VALJEVO: 4
-  LAZAREVAC: 15
-  SUBOTICA: 3
-  NOVI PAZAR: 10
-  BEOGRAD: 1

IN TOTAL  33 DETENTIONS

*This part of the report refers to citizens and activists who were arrested or detained at public gatherings or because of posts on social networks in which they express their critical views.