



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

March 27 - April 9, 2026

Freedom of Expression

Attacks on journalists during election day

The local elections held in ten municipalities in Serbia on March 29 were marked not only by irregularities at polls and physical attacks on activists, citizens, and students, but also by attacks on journalists reporting throughout election day.

Journalists from the Revolt portal were present in the village of Šarbanovac, in a hamlet along the Timok River, to report on the atmosphere and events at polling stations. While visiting one polling station located in a local school, three masked individuals exited a white car with Bor license plates, approached the journalists, and physically attacked them. The masked men first snatched a phone from photojournalist Zorica Popović and broke it, after which they physically assaulted her and kicked her in the stomach. At the same time, environmental activist and journalist Aleksandar Kulić was also attacked. Ivan Bjelić, an activist and journalist with the Revolt portal, was likewise attacked during the same incident, and there was an attempt to seize his journalistic equipment. The group of assailants was then joined by five more masked men, who continued to physically attack Bjelić, and axes were taken out of the car.

According to photojournalist Popović, the attackers chased Lazar Dinić, a student at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, as well as a journalist and activist, caught up with him near the Timok River, and physically abused him there. They beat him, filmed him, and forced him to shout: “Aca (Aleksandar Vučić) is my president.” The police did not react when the attackers’ car passed by them again. Dinić sustained serious injuries, including fractures of the sinus and cheekbone.

Darko Gligorijević, a journalist with Zoomer, was attacked in Bajina Bašta by unknown individuals who obstructed him while he was reporting on local elections in that town and attempted to take his mobile phone. Gligorijević was struck in the head and then sprayed with pepper spray, even though he was shouting that he was a journalist during the attack. At the time, he was following developments in a parking lot where there were reports of men dressed in black, suspected of guarding a call center of the Serbian Progressive Party. Reporters from Mašina, Blokade Info, and Politički Globus Srbije were also exposed to incidents in Bajina Bašta. Ivana Marsenić, a freelance journalist with credentials from the Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia, had her camera taken while reporting, and the tires of the Insider team’s vehicle were punctured.

Pressures due to support for students

The practice of dismissals in educational institutions due to support for students continued during this reporting period. After months of pressure for supporting student blockades, a teacher from Silbaš was dismissed in the middle of the school year. In a conversation with the school principal, she was informed that a vacancy for her position would be announced and that the outcome was already predetermined.

A concert by opera singer Katarina Jovanović and pianist Vanja Šćepanović from Belgrade was canceled and banned by the Presidency of Matica srpska on the very day it was scheduled to take place. The stated reason was that opera singer Katarina Jovanović had performed at a protest in front of the Rectorate in Belgrade on March 31. The statement noted that Matica did not wish to be associated with irresponsible and unacceptable forms of behavior. Katarina Jovanović is an associate professor at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade and a recipient of several international awards, including the title of Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters awarded by the French government, while pianist Vanja Šćepanović was referred to in the feminine grammatical form.

Shutdown and blocking of local media accounts

Social media accounts of the Novi Pazar-based radio station Sto plus were blocked on April 6 at around 3 p.m., as the outlet informed the public. According to the editorial team, the blocking was carried out by the company Meta, without providing any explanation for the decision. The director of the radio station, Ishak Slezović, stated that in the days leading up to the block there had been issues with content sharing, initially interpreted as technical problems, but that they now believe it to be a coordinated hacking attack against the outlet. At the same time, accounts of the Razglas portal were also blocked, further reinforcing suspicions that this was not an isolated case. These are not isolated incidents of shutdowns and various forms of hacking attacks targeting independent local editorial offices and portals, but rather part of an ongoing trend.

Freedom of Assembly

Incidents during election day

On election day, March 29, 2026, when local elections were held in 10 municipalities in Serbia, numerous physical attacks were recorded against election observers from the CRTA observation mission and the Kreni Promeni association, as well as against citizens, activists, and students. In the municipality of Crvenka (Kula), the polling station was physically surrounded by individuals wearing balaclavas and hoods and using vehicles without license plates. Near the local stadium, armed men clashed with citizens, attacking them with metal bars and batons and lighting flares. One young man suffered a head injury, while another person sustained an arm injury. The police did not act against the attackers but instead intervened by physically separating the two groups. The police also secured certain hospitality venues where vote buying was suspected. In Kula, the premises of the observation mission were searched, as the police suspected corrupt activities were taking place there.

In Bajina Bašta, on the evening before election day, the tires of vehicles belonging to members of observation missions were punctured. During election day itself, a physical clash occurred, and the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, shared a video of the incident on her social media, commenting that this was how democracy was defended from “blockaders.” During the clash, a man exiting a car was seen carrying a pistol.

In Bor, a fight was recorded in front of the premises of the Serbian Progressive Party, as well as the beating of a student in front of a polling station. Another gathering point of supporters where unlawful activities were suspected was identified as a facility of the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund. Later that day, attackers of citizens who supported the student list and CRTA observers entered the same premises. CRTA’s program director, Raša Nedeljkov, addressed the public from the site of an attack on a CRTA observer and stated that a police officer had threatened with a weapon to calm tensions. Among those who attacked the mobile team, officials such as Dejan Kesar, the Secretary for General Affairs of the City of Belgrade, and Stojan Jovanović, a councilor of the Voždovac Municipal Assembly, were recognized. In Bor, individuals were also seen chasing students who were filming a car suspected of containing a parallel voter list. In Slatina, during an attempt to photograph a vehicle with a duplicate list, around fifteen supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party began attacking citizens. One citizen was knocked to the ground and kicked. When other citizens approached the polling station, they were surrounded, and the attackers began threatening them with death while holding sticks and glass bottles. In addition to the previously mentioned officials, Milan Janus, a member of the Bačka Topola Municipal Council responsible for education, was also seen participating in the clashes.

In Knjaževac, premises at a bus station under reconstruction for years were suspected of serving as a headquarters of the Serbian Progressive Party. People were entering and leaving with papers, while police vehicles monitored the area. Member of Parliament Branislav Josifović was also seen in the bus station premises. Citizens gathered there remained even after polling stations closed. Near a polling station in Gornji Zunič, a physical altercation occurred in which students were attacked, followed by an attack on Professor Mikica Sibinović of the Faculty of Geography, who had come to assist them.

In Arandelovac, a member of a mobile team was attacked at the bus station. She was chased by individuals wearing balaclavas who identified themselves as police officers.

Police raid on the Rectorate building of the University of Belgrade

Members of the Criminal Police Directorate entered the Rectorate building of the University of Belgrade on March 31. Acting on the order of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, officers entered the building of the Faculty of Philosophy as part of a broader investigation into the death of a 25-year-old student of the Faculty, as well as into potential irregularities in the work of the Rectorate. Throughout the day, the police conducted an unlawful search of the Rectorate building without authorization, that is, without a warrant issued by a competent court. Students who attempted to enter the building were asked to present identification documents, and police officers photographed their ID cards. Students in blockade stated that officers first entered premises used for plenary activities, where students attending classes were present. Professors were allowed to leave, while students were kept inside the building. Footage from inside the building was simultaneously broadcast live on the pro-government television channel Informer. That is, the police filmed from inside and transmitted the footage live to the program of Informer. The arrival of multiple police vehicles with sirens in front of the Rectorate building was recorded by pro-government television crews, which had evidently been informed in advance and were waiting for the police in Vasina Street.

In front of the building, citizens gathered during the search at the invitation of the academic community and students in blockade to support employees of the Rectorate, students, and Rector Vladan Đokić, who was also effectively confined by police officers and not allowed to leave his office until the evening. During the peaceful gathering, incidents occurred and the police intervened. During the protest in front of the Rectorate, one biker was arrested. In the days following the protest, several students were detained, and in some cases police officers came to their home addresses. According to students from the Faculty of Architecture in blockade, one student was beaten on the head after detention when he stated that he wanted to contact a lawyer, after which he was held for up to 48 hours.

The conduct of the Criminal Police Directorate indicates serious deviations from legal guarantees governing searches of premises, restrictions of movement, and treatment of citizens. Entry into the Rectorate without a court order, along with the detention of students and identity checks, raises questions about the legality of the entire operation and the potential misuse of collected evidence. At the same time, such conduct represents interference with the autonomy of the university as a constitutionally and legally protected principle intended to safeguard academic freedom from external influence. Additionally, the presence of media and the broadcasting of footage from inside the building and the Rector's office during the operation on national frequencies and pro-government media point to serious violations of the right to privacy and the impartiality of proceedings.

That students are being targeted by the authorities was further suggested by the Minister of Information and Telecommunications, Boris Bratina, who stated on Student Day, during an appearance on Tanjug television, that students are not aware that the police have the right to beat and kill them. Students in blockade filed criminal complaints on April 14 against Minister Bratina for this statement, as well as against the Minister for Public Investment, Darko Glišić, who recently called on parents in the media not to enroll their children in "blockader" faculties, stating that they would "come back in coffins."

Fines imposed on citizens for protests

By April 8, the Novi Pazar police had issued a total of 48 fines and an equal number of misdemeanor charges against citizens who participated in protests against mining explorations and the potential opening of a mine on Mount Rogozna. The protests were organized near the location of Brđani, on the Novi Pazar–Rogozna road, and according to organizers, some participants received fines several days after the event. According to the citizens' assembly "Rogozna," some individuals received up to three misdemeanor charges, indicating intensive and repeated prosecution of the same protest participants. In response, the assembly organized fundraising to cover the fines and to provide free legal assistance to citizens before the Misdemeanor Court in Novi Pazar.

Freedom of Association

Searches of apartments and premises of Novi Sad citizens' assemblies

On April 6, police carried out multiple actions targeting members of the Novi Sad citizens' assemblies, including searches of several activists' apartments and searches of premises used by these associations. According to members of the assemblies, searches were conducted at the homes of several members, and several individuals were detained, two of whom were held for up to 48 hours. The following day, criminal police searched premises used by the Novi Sad citizens' assemblies, which also serve as working space for observation missions that monitored local elections in Kula on March 29. During these events, lawyer Srđan Kovačević was also detained while attending a search of one apartment as a legal representative. He stated that after the search he was stopped on the street and accused of allegedly taking a phone, which he described as an abuse of police powers. The citizens' assemblies stated that this represents a continuation of repression and that intimidation measures are being applied against their members, including the initiation of proceedings and searches following their engagement in election observation missions.