

ELECTIONS

UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



days
until the
elections

Civic Initiatives will continuously monitor and record cases of violations of freedom of expression, assembly and association during the pre-election campaign. We will point out all omissions and illegal actions during the election campaign, including cases of abuse of: public resources and public office for campaigning. We will report on all these issues on a weekly basis to the interested public.

Introduction

Children, Young People and Parliamentary Elections

The principal of the 9th Belgrade Grammar School organized an initiative in which she asked teachers to collect completed applications and scanned ID cards of employees and adult students who would be on a school trip to Rome on October 25, for the purpose of organizing their registration to vote abroad. The Parents' Council warned her that this was not in accordance with the law. Kristina Obrenović, a researcher at the Partners Serbia, commented on the developments, emphasizing that schools, principals, and teachers are not authorized to collect personal data for the purposes of organizing elections. The school principal subsequently abandoned the initiative and suspended the collection of students' personal data.

A sporting event in Zaječar, attended by children and numerous guests on September 20, raised concerns among parents after SNS President Miloš Vučević used footage from the event to create a campaign video in which children are seen in some shots. According to the parents, they signed consent forms for the filming and photographing of their children after being told that the photographs and footage would be used to promote sports. The media Nova.rs sent questions to the Sports Association and the SNS asking whether the parents had been informed in advance about Vučević's presence and the actual intended use of the footage and photographs, which were, according to the report, clearly used for political purposes. No response was received. The use of children in an election campaign is unacceptable and contrary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Scope for Electoral Irregularities

Ognjen Rašuo, a member of the Electoral Roll Review Commission representing the Green-Left Front, stated that in 42 municipalities in Serbia, the number of registered voters exceeds the number of residents. He said that this is mainly due to people from Republika Srpska registering fictitious places of residence in Serbia in order to obtain official documents. He identified municipalities from which a large number of people work abroad as another major issue. Rašuo also shared data showing that, during this year, the number of registered changes of residence increased on a weekly basis. On September 21, 2026, a total of 6.192 changes of residence were recorded. He stressed that Serbia's current concept of registered residence is outdated and needs to be changed.

The Kreni-Promeni movement reported receiving multiple complaints from Serbian citizens living abroad who intend to vote in the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 25. Serbian citizens abroad reported that they had either received no response from diplomatic and consular missions or had been provided with incomplete and unclear information. In a statement, Kreni-Promeni said that it had received such complaints from Germany, Slovenia, the United States, Canada, and other countries.

Freedom of Expression

(Un)Safety of Journalists in Pre-Election Serbia

Former President of the National Assembly of Serbia Ana Brnabić posted a maliciously edited video on her X account, presenting the words of FoNet journalist Miloš Milić in a misleading and tendentious manner and thereby misleading the public. Stating that such conduct is unacceptable, the Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) described it as a dangerous attempt to discredit journalist Miloš Milić as part of Ana Brnabić's campaign on X. The UNS stressed that it considers such misuse of publicly available media content, as well as the misleading of the public through edited video content intended to damage the reputation of professional journalists, to be dangerous.

Insults and accusations were directed at Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) in a statement issued by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which claimed that the live broadcast featuring President Vučić had been deliberately cut off. The Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) condemned these accusations and called on the SNS not to make such claims without evidence.

The Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) condemned the practice of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its supporters of preventing citizens from receiving objective and timely information during the election campaign, while journalists are physically attacked, removed from rallies and events, insulted, and intimidated. A journalist from Glas Zaječara was barred from reporting on an SNS rally in Veliki Izvor, near Zaječar, which was attended by local officials and at which party leaders Ana Brnabić and Miloš Vučević were expected to appear. In Kraljevo, while Nenad Simović, editor of the Likvidno news portal, was attempting to obtain statements from SNS supporters who had gathered at a rally, an unidentified man approached him and grabbed his right arm forcefully, telling him to leave the officially registered rally because he did not have accreditation, despite the fact that his accreditation was clearly visible around his neck.

Aleksandar Blanuša, editor of the Volim Zrenjanin news portal, was physically attacked while reporting on the promotion of the EXPO exhibition in Zrenjanin. Threats, insults, and attempts to obstruct journalists from the Kovin info and Bečejski mozaik portals were also reported while they were covering the pre-election activities of political actors. A smear campaign was also launched against Zdravko Stojković, a journalist for the entertainment portal Showbizzer.rs. The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) condemned all of these attacks and targeting of journalists, warning about the increasing frequency of attacks, threats, and attempts to remove journalists from pre-election rallies. Of particular concern is the fact that local media journalists are once again being targeted. These journalists work in smaller communities, often without adequate institutional protection and in direct contact with the individuals and institutions they cover.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) warned that journalists in Serbia face a growing threat of violence ahead of the parliamentary elections. Attila Mong, CPJ's representative for Europe, described the situation facing journalists in Serbia as "alarming," citing incidents of violence in the streets, threats, and persistent efforts to discredit their work, which, he said, often originate from senior government officials.

Electoral Lists in the Media

Since the elections were called, the SNS has been running a campaign aimed at instilling fear among the public about what would happen if it were to lose. Psychology professor Vladimir Mihić believes that such a narrative may influence voters who have access only to media outlets under strict government control. While experts question the effects of negative campaigning, the authorities appear to spare neither the means nor the language used to disparage their opponents.

The Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI) warned that, in the main news programmes of national broadcasters, promotional spots for electoral lists are being aired within segments designated as election coverage, representing a serious departure from the legal obligations and professional standards governing election campaign reporting. BIRODI stressed that, instead of journalistic content such as reports, candidate statements, and news features that would enable citizens to learn about the programmes of the electoral lists, these segments consist almost exclusively of promotional spots produced by the electoral lists. In its statement, BIRODI said that this practice effectively turns election coverage into a block of political advertising, depriving voters of substantive, critical, and comparable information about the electoral choices available to them. BIRODI also highlighted as particularly concerning the fact that, in addition to broadcasting promotional spots, Pink and Prva television stations have aired reports targeting the Students' List, without giving the Students' List an opportunity to respond to the claims made in those reports. According to BIRODI, this violates the professional principle of presenting the other side and the principles of objective and comprehensive reporting.

Narrative Manipulation

During the election campaign, attacks, insults, and public targeting have become increasingly frequent, particularly against women involved in public life. President Vučić commented on attacks against an RTS journalist who interviewed him on a morning programme. In addition to the President, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and Minister Macura also spoke out, stating that political disagreement cannot be used as a justification for insulting or targeting a journalist or calling her professional work into question. Milan Antonijević, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, said that attacks against and the targeting of journalists in the public sphere are not democracy. Despite the fact that journalists experience attacks, targeting, and insults almost daily, the President, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, and the Minister have expressed concern and condemnation only now, during the pre-election campaign, following the attacks against the RTS journalist. Every female journalist has the right to protection from insults and threats, as such protection must be applied consistently. Such selective responses by the authorities, particularly during the pre-election campaign, risk becoming a campaign tool by presenting the authorities as protectors, while leaving the question of their own responsibility outside the picture.

People on the Students' List have been subjected to insults and accusations for days in pro-government media, and the SNS is now accusing the Students' List of doing the same - specifically, of dehumanizing Aleksandar Vučić. Following the release of a video produced by students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU), Ana Brnabić called a press conference and interpreted the video as a call for revenge, including an alleged promise that all those who disagree with them would be raped. Political analyst Boban Stojanović claims that, for the first time, the SNS has no substantive campaign issue of its own, with its campaign instead focusing on an anti-campaign targeting the students' campaign. Judging by the available indications, the students are refusing to participate in this dynamic, as demonstrated by the fact that neither the authors of the FDU video nor those on the Students' List have chosen to comment on Ana Brnabić's accusations.

Pressure on Employees of Public Enterprises

As the elections draw closer, pressure on citizens is increasing, particularly on those employed by public enterprises. Lists are being compiled for attendance at SNS rallies, door-to-door campaigning, and even for collecting signatures to submit the electoral list. Reports of such pressure come in cycles, corresponding to the announcement of a particular SNS activity. The pressure is not limited to attending rallies, but also extends to participating in campaign activities and even includes instructions for election day.

An employee of Poštanska štedionica bank contacted the CRTA organization, claiming that employees at the bank had been required to provide signatures of support for the Serbian Progressive Party's electoral list. She said that employees are afraid, but that she does not believe anyone can be dismissed as long as they perform their work conscientiously and without errors.

Freedom of Association

Student Aleksa Španjević said that attempts to discredit the representatives of the "Students' List - Students Are Winning" are the only weapon available to those who, after 14 years, have nothing left to offer citizens, adding that such attacks say more about those making them than about the students. Commenting on attempts to discredit the list's representative, mentioning Ilija Srdanović, whose image was used in manipulated photographs, Španjević said that this was the only weapon left to them.



Jovana Jemović, a candidate on the Students' List who was targeted by Kraljevo Mayor Predrag Terzić in a video posted on Facebook, said that the video had neither discredited nor humiliated her, nor did it hurt her. She added, however, that she was concerned about the safety and well-being of her family and minor child. Women's organizations stated that the publication of an AI-generated video that sexualizes and humiliates Students' List candidate Jovana Jemović represents another example of the abuse of women in political campaigning.

Feda Dimović, a parliamentary candidate on the "Students Are Winning" electoral list, said that he had received dozens of death threats over the past year and that, two days earlier, his family had also been attacked at their apartment in Zvezdara. According to Dimović, unidentified individuals threw eggs at the apartment where his family lives, hitting the windows of the children's room. He said that, because of the threats, he had filed four criminal complaints with the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime since January of last year, but that none of them had been resolved. He added that he was concerned about the safety of his family.