

Parliamentary and Local Elections in Serbia 2023

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Abstract

The December 2023 Serbian parliamentary and local elections unfolded against the tragic backdrop of two mass shootings in May, triggering a public outcry and widespread protests that demanded increased security measures. Serbia's political landscape, characterized by a democratic façade but inherently unfair conditions for inter-party competition, defined the elections' outcome. The ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), led by President Vučić, was drawing on its incumbent advantage to realize its predominance in media representation, misuse public funds, and manipulate voter registers. The SNS secured an absolute majority with 46% of the votes. However, allegations of electoral irregularities marred the elections. Instead of resolving societal conflicts, the elections deepened existing tensions. Addressing these allegations transparently and accountably will be crucial for restoring confidence and fostering political stability in Serbia.

Keywords: Serbia; electoral authoritarianism; hybrid regimes; state capture; elections.

Introduction: The context of the 17 December 2023 elections

The parliamentary and local elections on 17 December 2023 in Serbia occurred just a year and a half after the April 2022 elections. Since 2012, Serbia has experienced a pattern of frequent snap parliamentary elections, averaging one election per 2.5 years. Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) have consistently emerged as the dominant force, often securing landslide victories and gaining total control in the Serbian Assembly.

The immediate backdrop of the most recent elections was marked by two tragic mass shootings that occurred on 3 and 4 May 2023 in a Belgrade school and the city of Mladenovic, resulting in the loss of 16 lives, primarily elementary school children. These horrifying events were catalysts for widespread public outcry and mass protests. The protests, initially concentrated in Belgrade, eventually spread to other cities, drawing as many as 100,000

people. The protestors demanded that the Serbian government implement measures aimed at reducing the level of societal violence and increasing security measures in schools.

A significant portion of the protestors attributed the rise in violence to the influence of certain TV reality shows, which, in their view, implicitly propagated violent behavior. They criticized the role of TV broadcasters such as TV Pink and TV Happy for airing reality shows with explicit scenes of violent physical and verbal behavior, and sexual intercourse. The two channels, along with channels such as B92, TV Prva, and RTS, were also criticized for their limited coverage of opposition activities, including the street protests that followed the May shootings.

These broadcasters, notably under the influence of Aleksandar Vučić, held national broadcasting licenses issued by the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM). REM itself became a subject of public criticism due to its perceived failure in effectively regulating broadcast content and enforcing media laws, thus hindering the achievement of a more balanced representation between the incumbent and the opposition. This regulatory body has played a pivotal role in maintaining Aleksandar Vučić's dominance and electoral supremacy since 2012, as it is tasked with granting national broadcasting licenses to broadcasters who adhere to specific media standards defined by the law. However, under the leadership of Olivera Zekić, REM not only issued licenses to broadcasters that frequently violated these standards, but also denied licenses to broadcasters such as N1 and Nova.rs, which consistently complied with these regulations. Such selective behavior is typical for electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes, as I will discuss in the following section.

Despite the steady decline of protests, the persistent public dissent caused a fervent political situation, prompting Aleksandar Vučić to propose parliamentary snap elections in December. The decision on early elections was a strategic response to a complex interplay of public grief, outrage, and the demand for a safer, more accountable societal environment.

Elections in competitive authoritarian regimes

Serbia, in the post-communist era, has often been characterized as a hybrid regime, especially under the leaderships of Slobodan Milošević from 1990 to 2000, and Aleksandar Vučić since 2014.¹ Hybrid regimes usually maintain a democratic facade processes while fundamentally lacking fairness and genuine political freedom. The presence of competitive elections in these regimes is a key feature, while they are conducted in a manner that is ostensibly free but fundamentally unfair.² This is a central characteristic of Serbia's political environment, especially during election periods.³

These regimes exercise control over several critical areas: parliament, media freedoms, the judiciary, and public funds. As explained in the previous section, the media in Serbia, particularly under the *Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska napredna stranka, SNS)* but also

¹ Pavlović, Dušan and Slobodan Antičić. 2007. *Konsolidacija demokratskih ustanova u Srbiji posle 2000. godine*. [Consolidation of Democratic Institutions in Serbia After 2000]. Beograd: Službeni glasnik; Pavlović, Dušan. 2020. The political economy behind the gradual demise of democratic institutions in Serbia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 20(1), 19-39; Bursać, Dejan and Dušan Vučićević. 2021. Election boycott in a hybrid regime: The case of 2020 parliamentary elections in Serbia. *New Perspectives* 29(2), 187-196; Vladislavljević, Nebojša. 2016. Competitive authoritarianism and popular protest: Evidence from Serbia under Milošević. *International Political Science Review* 37(1), 36-50; Vladislavljević, Nebojša. 2019. *Uspon i pad demokratije posle petog oktobra*. [The Rise and Fall of Democracy After the Fifth of October]. Beograd: Arhipelag.

² Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2002. The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2), 51-66; Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Schedler, Andreas. 2002. Elections without democracy: The menu of manipulation. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2), 36-50.

³ Bursać and Vučićević, *Election boycott*.

under the *Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije, SPS)* led by Slobodan Milošević in 1990-2000, has experienced significant constraints, limiting its role as an unbiased and independent entity.⁴ The judiciary has not been spared from the influences of the incumbent, raising questions about the fairness and independence of legal processes.⁵

Recent research on hybrid regimes has focused on the government's control over both the economy and public finances which plays a pivotal role in shaping electoral dynamics.⁶ A recurrent issue in these regimes is the misallocation of the national budget. This misappropriation is not limited to redirecting resources toward policies that benefit the incumbent. It also encompasses corrupt activities, such as the diversion of public funds for personal or political gain, leading to a significantly imbalanced competitive landscape. However, the implications of this manipulation are far-reaching, extending beyond simple financial mismanagement. They permeate the essence of the public administration and governance, thus eroding public administration's structure and public policy capacity.⁷

Due to their financial advantage, hybrid regimes consistently lean towards 'hyper-incumbency'.⁸ While democratic systems inherently provide some advantage to incumbents, 'hyper-incumbency' takes it a step further, representing a substantial misuse of public resources and positions to support the current officeholder. Consequently, incumbents in hybrid regimes consistently enjoy a significant electoral head start compared to the opposition, who face a steep uphill battle.

Serbia's economy in 2023

The 2023 elections in Serbia were influenced by the country's economic conditions, marked by a moderate recovery. The year 2021 witnessed a growth rate of 7.55 per cent, a significant rebound from the pandemic-stricken year of 2020. Following a modest 2.25 per cent growth in 2022, Serbia's economy exhibited a steady resurgence in 2023, anticipated to reach a 2 per cent increase in GDP. This economic revival was driven by robust domestic demand, growing exports, and increased investments. A key economic indicator, the unemployment rate, saw a significant drop to 9.5 per cent in the third quarter of 2023. This marked a considerable improvement from 2012, when the rate had exceeded 20 per cent.

Serbia grappled with high inflation in 2022 and 2023. By November 2023, the annual inflation rate reached 8 per cent, consistently ranking among the highest in Europe for most of the year. Despite inflation decreasing from a peak of 13.9 percent in September 2022, it remained a significant concern. However, it did not significantly influence voter opinion, given the backdrop of perceived economic stability. In fact, the Vučić-led administration

⁴ Krstić, Aleksandra / Aiello, Giorgia and Nebojša Vladislavljević. 2020. Visual metaphor and authoritarianism in Serbian political cartoons. *Media, War & Conflict*, 13(1), 27-49; Krstić, Aleksandra. 2023. Digital transformation of journalism and media in Serbia: What has gone wrong? *Journalism*; Milutinović Irina. 2023. *Hibridni mediji i hibridni režimi. [Hybrid Media and Hybrid Regimes]*. Beograd: IES and Arhipelag.

⁵ Rakić-Vodinelić, Vesna / Knežević-Bojović, Ana and Mario Reljanović. 2012. *Reforma pravosuđa u Srbiji 2008-2012. [Judicial reform in Serbia 2008-2012]*. Beograd: Pravni fakultet Union and Službeni glasnik.

⁶ Greene, Kenneth. 2007. *Why dominant parties lose*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Greene, Kenneth. The political economy of authoritarian single-party dominance. *Comparative Political Studies* 43(7), 807-834; Magaloni, Beatrice. 2006. *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Seeberg, Meret B. 2014. State capacity and the paradox of authoritarian elections. *Democratization* 21(7), 1265-1285; Seeberg, Meret. B. 2018. Electoral authoritarianism and economic control. *International Political Science Review* 39(1), 33-48.

⁷ Hale, Henry E. 2015. *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Pavlović, Dušan. 2022. *The moneywasting machine: Five months inside Serbia's Ministry of Economy*. Budapest: CEU Press; Pavlović, Dušan. 2023. How to approach state capture in post-communist Europe: A new research agenda. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 31(3), 960-978.

⁸ Greene, *Why dominant parties lose*.

decided to leverage high inflation as an advantage by implementing more distributive public policies in 2022 and 2023.

Serbia, as well as the entire Western Balkans, witnessed a discernible trend of nominal revenue growth in 2023. This trend has persisted despite economic deceleration and the challenges posed by global shifts in demand and inflationary pressures. Notably, Serbia exhibited a robust revenue performance that exceeded expectations.⁹ This growth rate can be attributed to increases in corporate income tax, social contributions, and domestic value-added tax (VAT). A significant driver of revenue growth, particularly in the backdrop of elevated inflation levels witnessed in Serbia, is inflation itself, which has the capacity to inflate the nominal values of taxes such as VAT.

The Serbian government utilized these increased revenues to distribute funds to pensioners, public sector employees, and the youth, which garnered considerable attention and scrutiny from economists and the Fiscal Council. This scrutiny intensified after the government revised its 2023 budget, involving a 10 percent increase in expenditure. Nonetheless, in 2023, Serbia's debt-to-GDP ratio remained relatively stable, hovering at approximately 56 percent of GDP, which falls below the critical threshold of 60 percent.

Despite high inflation and excessive public spending in 2023, the moderate economic recovery played a significant role in shaping the election's outcome. While the opposition highlighted the inflation issue and predicted a bleaker economic future, their arguments seemingly failed to provide compelling reasons for voters to shift away from President Vučić and the SNS, which garnered a higher vote percentage in 2023 than in 2022. Apparently, Vučić's economic logic was to use more fiscal revenue due to the higher inflation and distributed it to the targeted populations (pensioners, public sector employees and the youth). Decreased unemployment (mentioned earlier), coupled with lavish budget spending and increased public investment, appeared to bolster perceptions of economic stability under the Vučić-led government.

The incumbent's advantage: Media domination and resource inequality

The campaign for the 2023 parliamentary elections in Serbia was marked by three main features: the incumbent's media dominance, the incumbent's abuse of public funds, and the manipulations of voter registers.

A key hallmark of this electoral campaign (but also of many previous ones) was the pervasive media bias favoring the SNS. This manifested in both traditional and online media outlets, effectively shaping the information landscape. National television channels displayed a pronounced inclination toward the government, granting it significantly more airtime and beneficial news coverage. Opposition voices, when granted access, often encountered limitations in terms of time constraints and editorial framing, leaving their messages less amplified and potentially misinterpreted.

Research conducted by the Bureau for Social Research (*Biro za društvena istraživanja*, BIRODI) and the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), two prominent domestic monitoring NGOs, revealed that President Aleksandar Vučić benefited from a substantial advantage in media coverage during 2023. This advantage was evident

⁹ World Bank. 2023. *Western Balkans Regular Economic Report. Toward Sustainable Growth. No. 23/2023*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

not only in the sheer volume of coverage but also in its quality. The media's portrayal of Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) was predominantly positive or neutral. In contrast, the coverage of opposition parties and civil society groups tended to be negative or critical. A striking example of this disparity was observed in the evening news broadcasts of RTS, Serbia's public broadcaster funded by tax revenue. Here, President Vučić's appearances outnumbered those of the entire opposition by a factor of 14 throughout the year 2023.¹⁰

Freedom House's 'Freedom on the Net 2023 Report' confirmed that the online media landscape in Serbia in 2022 and 2023 was largely controlled by the government and its supporters, who used various methods to influence the content and editorial policies of independent outlets, such as legal pressure, economic incentives, cyberattacks, and smear campaigns. Freedom House also reported that online disinformation and propaganda were widespread during the election campaign, mainly targeting the opposition, civil society, and independent journalists. The report also highlighted the lack of transparency and accountability of online advertising and social media platforms, which enabled the SNS to amplify its messages and reach a large audience without proper oversight.¹¹

In addition to media dominance, concerns were raised regarding the incumbent's deployment of public funds for campaign purposes, potentially constituting misuse of state resources for partisan benefit. Notably, the budget revision in September 2023, which occurred shortly before the election was announced, involved substantial increases in expenditures. These included heightened spending on social programs, public sector wages, pensions, and one-off financial support for individuals aged up to 29 years. Furthermore, significant allocations were made to large-scale infrastructure projects such as EXPO 27 and national stadiums. These budgetary decisions aligned closely with the campaign promises of the ruling party.¹²

The SNS also used public funds to finance campaign activities, such as rallies, billboards, and promotional materials, often featuring the president's image and slogans. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCED/ODIHR) observed that the SNS and its coalition partners extensively used public venues and vehicles for their campaign events, and that public officials, including the president, often combined their official duties with campaign appearances. The OSCE/ODIHR also noted that the SNS and its allies enjoyed preferential access to state subsidies and loans, while the opposition and civil society faced obstacles and delays in obtaining public funding.¹³

The interplay of media dominance and alleged misappropriation of public funds by the ruling party in Serbia's 2023 elections poses significant concerns regarding the fairness and integrity of the electoral process. However, the most blatant malpractice seemed to occur in the voter registration for the Belgrade local elections.

Prior to election day, many Belgrade residents discovered separate invitations to vote, which includes persons who never resided in their buildings. Furthermore, rundown houses, empty

¹⁰ Danas. 2023. [Vučić više od 14 puta zastupljeniji od opozicije u Dnevniku 2 RTS-a u poslednjih 10 meseci](#). [Over the past 10 months, Vučić has been featured in Dnevnik 2 on RTS more than 14 times as often as the opposition]. *Danas*, 25 October 2023.

¹¹ Freedom House. [Freedom on the net 2023: Serbia](#) (accessed: 28 December 2023).

¹² Pavlović, Dušan. 2023. [Serbia's revised budget hints at early elections](#). *BIRN Insight*, 12 September 2023.

¹³ OSCE. [International election observation mission. Republic of Serbia: Early parliamentary elections](#) (accessed: 8 January 2024).

buildings, deserted plots of lands, and public companies were found to have been a home of tens of people. These people were later called phantom voters.¹⁴

On election day, observer missions, non-governmental organizations and opposition activists witnessed a substantial influx of individuals from Republika Srpska, a predominantly ethnic Serbian region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were being transported to central Belgrade to participate in the local elections. Prominent Republika Srpska officials, including President Dodik and minister Nenad Nešić, openly participated in voting in Belgrade and Novi Sad, fueling suspicions of an illicit expansion of the electoral roll to include non-residents, ostensibly to artificially bolster the support for the SNS.

These suspicions were corroborated by OSCE and European parliamentary observers, both of which monitored the elections. The only exception was Vladimir Bilčik, member of European Parliament, who claimed that “observer delegation noted no serious irregularities on election day”.¹⁵ The OSCE’s report highlighted that voters without a current address were included in the electoral roll based on their last registered address. However, the international observers were unable to confirm the effective implementation of this policy due to restricted access to voter registration data.¹⁶

The CRTA observation mission identified significant irregularities at approximately 14 percent of polling stations across Belgrade during the 2023 elections. These anomalies could have substantially influenced the election outcomes.¹⁷

Both the SNS and President Vučić dismissed these allegations. Prime Minister Brnabić called the representatives of the observing missions liars, referring to them as untruthful. This dismissal precipitated another wave of extensive street protests post-December 17, culminating in a violent confrontation with police on 24 December 2023 in front of the Belgrade City Hall.

Electoral groups and election results

Backed by the systemic advantages discussed in the sections above, the ultimate winner of the parliamentary election was the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), led by President Vučić. The SNS secured 46 percent, obtaining an absolute majority in the Assembly with 129 out of 250 seats (Table 1).

¹⁴ Savić, Danilo. (2024). [Mapa fantomskih birača otkriva gde su prijavljivani ljudi u Beogradu koji su iskorišćeni za pljačku izbora](#). [Map of phantom voters reveals where registered individuals in Belgrade were used for election fraud.] *Nova.rs*. (accessed 18. January 2024)

¹⁵ N1 News. 2023. [Bilcik covering up criticism of the Serbian authorities](#). *N1 News*, 10 December 2023.

¹⁶ OSCE, *International election observation*.

¹⁷ CRTA. [Preliminarni nalazi Crte o organizovanoj migraciji birača uoči izbora u Srbiji 17. decembra 2023](#). [Preliminary findings of CRTA on organized voter migration before the elections in Serbia on 17 December 2023] (accessed: 26 December 2023).

Table 1: The Serbian parliament: Electoral performance comparison 2022-2023

Electoral list	2022	2023
SNS	44.2	46.7
SPS	13	6.5
Democratic Opposition	19	23.6
NADA (DSS+POKS)	5.5	5
Dveri/Zavetnici	8	2.8
Nestorović	0	4.7

Votes are in percentages of popular ballot. The electoral formula will transform it in several percentages point more of parliamentary seats. The SNS will have over 50 per cent of the seats.

The SNS's long-standing coalition partner, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), experienced a significant decline in support, plummeting from 13 to 6.5 percent. While the support of the SPS was often essential for the SNS to form a cabinet, it is not required this time (Table 1).

The opposition participated in these elections divided into several blocks. The first one was the so-called liberal-democratic opposition, involving 15 political parties, coalitions, movements, and one trade union. This bloc was primarily composed of individuals who previously held offices from 2000 to 2012, mainly as members of the Democratic Party, led by the late Premier Zoran Đinđić, and later by President Boris Tadić (who himself, as a part of another coalition, failed to clear the threshold in 2023). This electoral list openly supported the street protests of May 2023, thus, dubbing its list "Serbia Against Violence." This list secured 24 percent, marking an increase compared to the 2022 electoral results when many of these coalition partners participated individually in the elections (see Figure 1).

The right-wing political parties' main electoral platform revolved around opposing the so-called German-French plan for Kosovo, which is still formally considered part of Serbia under the 1244 UN Resolution adopted in 1999. This proposal was put forth by two advisers of German Chancellor Scholz and French President Macron to resolve the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo regarding Kosovo's status. The proposal suggested that in 2023, a new agreement on the normalization of relations should have been signed, with Serbia recognizing Kosovo as an independent state.¹⁸

Split among several parties and coalitions, the collective strength of the right-wing block decreased by one-third compared to the 2022 parliamentary elections (Figure 2). The only right-wing electoral list that surpassed the 3 per cent threshold was the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), which received 5 per cent. Other right-wing parties fell below the threshold.

A completely new political player emerged in these elections: the "WE, the voice of the people" movement, led by Dr. Branimir Nestorović, a pulmonologist and retired professor of the Belgrade Faculty of Medicine, which secured 5 percent of the vote.

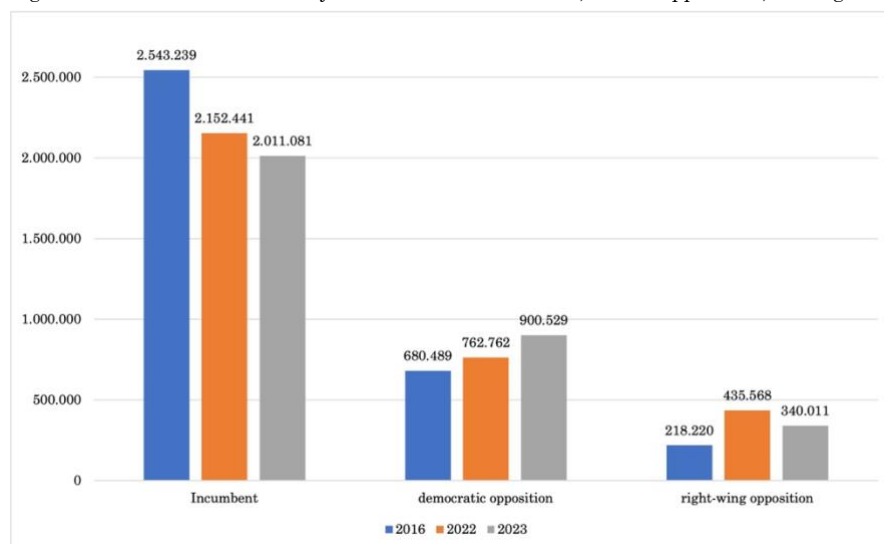
The 2023 election results: An analysis

The outcome of the parliamentary elections largely mirrored the results of the 2022 parliamentary elections. There were minor adjustments, notably the SNS garnering more votes than the previous year, enabling them to independently form the cabinet. The assistance of the SPS, which experienced a one-third decrease in votes, will not be required in the upcoming term.

¹⁸ Isufi, Perparim and Sasa Dragojlo. 2022. [Belgrade, Pristina confirm German-French proposal for Kosovo deal](#). *Balkan Insight*, 10 October 2023.

Yet, as Figure 1 displays, the SNS and its supporting parties (the SPS and the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS), which did not clear the threshold) taken as an electoral block, continued to gradually lose electoral strength, receiving some half a million votes less than in 2016.¹⁹

Figure 1: Serbian Parliamentary Election: The incumbent, liberal opposition, and right-wing opposition, 2016-2023



The democratic and pro-European opposition, comprised mainly of new agents and former Democratic Party affiliates, received around 300,000 more votes than compared to both 2016 and 2022. This could likely be attributed to the synergy effect, where the combined efforts of cooperating parties or candidates yield results greater than the sum of their individual endeavors (Figure 1).

The right-wing parties lost nearly 100,000 votes (Figure 1). Even more significant is that the majority of right-wing parties failed to surpass the 3 per cent threshold and will not be represented in the Assembly. The sole right-wing party to enter parliament was the Hope coalition (Nada). Dveri, Zavetnici, 'It has been enough' (*Dosta je bilo*), and the Serbian People's Party found themselves excluded from the Assembly.

The right-wing parties paid a significant price for their inability to cooperate during these elections. Specifically, there was an attempt to establish a larger right-wing coalition among these parties to collectively oppose the German-French plan. However, this initiative faltered due to the leaders' failure to reach an agreement on leadership and seat distribution. Allegedly, some of their votes were redirected to Branimir Nestorović and his "MI, the voice of the people" movement. Nestorović received 178,000 votes, likely drawing support from both incumbent and the right-wing camps.

Nestorović's campaign was built on an identical policy platform against the EU and NATO, intertwined with conspiracy theories (claiming a missing 1,000 years of history, asserting the existence of a hidden cure for cancer), fantastical narratives (involving dwarfs, giants, and dinosaurs throwing fire, allegations of Hitler's recent demise, the belief that white people originated from Mars 9,000 years ago), and science fiction tales (such as time travel and the

¹⁹ The 2020 parliamentary elections were omitted because a significant portion of the opposition parties boycotted them.

idea that blue- and green-eyed individuals are born to women who had extraterrestrial encounters).

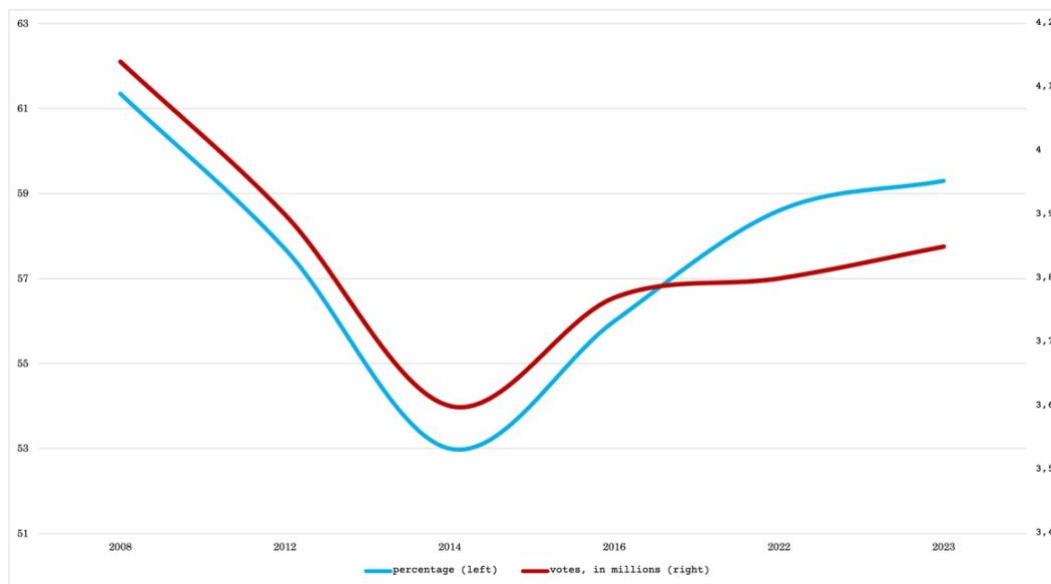
Table 2. The Belgrade Assembly. Electoral performance comparison 2022-2023.

Electoral list	2022	2023
SNS	38	39
SPS	7	5
Democratic Opposition	32	34
NADA (DSS+POKS)	6.3	6
Nestorović	0	5.4

Percentages of the popular ballot: The electoral formula will transform it in several percentages point more of parliamentary seats.

The largest change was expected to take place in the city of Belgrade, given the mass shootings in May. In the 2022 Belgrade Assembly, the SNS and SPS coalition secured a narrow electoral victory. However, in the recent election, the democratic and right-wing opposition appeared poised to surpass the SNS-SPS coalition. According to the official results the SNS and SPS garnered 44 per cent of the popular vote, while “Serbia Against Violence” and the NADA coalition received 40 per cent (Table 2). Translated into seats, no-one will have majority in the Belgrade Assembly, meaning that the future of Belgrade’s government may depend on Nestorović’s movement “MI, Voice of the People” that secured 5.4 per cent of the popular ballot. Nevertheless, widespread allegations of electoral fraud, including reports of the SNS busing people from Bosnia and other parts of Serbia to vote in Belgrade, have cast doubt on the election results in the capital. As a response, the opposition, as well as Belgrade university students and the civic movement ProGlas organized street protests, demanding the nullification of the Belgrade electoral results and the scheduling of a new round of elections.

Figure 2: Turnout of parliamentary elections 2008-2022



These elections underscored a pronounced reliance on voter turnout. Since the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) assumed office in 2012, voter turnout has consistently declined, as exemplified in Figure 2. This decline has demonstrated an inverse correlation with the increasing electoral strength of the incumbent’s support bloc (comprising the SNS, the

Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS)). Simultaneously, supporters of the democratic and right-wing opposition have manifested diminished political engagement since 2012, while voters aligned with the incumbent bloc have maintained a consistent level of participation. Since 2016, gradual shifts within the two opposition blocs can be observed, characterized by a slower rebound in voter turnout. It becomes evident that, for the incumbent's electoral support to fall below the psychological threshold of 40 per cent and for the support of democratic forces and the right-wing opposition to reach parity, a stronger increase in voter turnout is imperative, an occurrence that has thus far failed to materialize.

The parliamentary elections of 2023 in Serbia, marred by extensive accusations of electoral irregularities, regrettably failed to resolve the underlying societal conflicts. Instead, these allegations have further exacerbated existing tensions, presenting a significant challenge to the future of democracy in the country. It is imperative that the Serbian government addresses these allegations with transparency and accountability to restore confidence and promote a more stable political landscape in the coming years.

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Dušan Pavlović, a political economist, is a member at the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade. His academic focus encompasses political institutions, public administration, and state capture in post-communist Europe. He has published in numerous international journals, including *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Postcommunist Economies*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, *East European Politics*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, and *The NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*. In 2022, he authored the book *Moneywasting Machine*, published by CEU Press.

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