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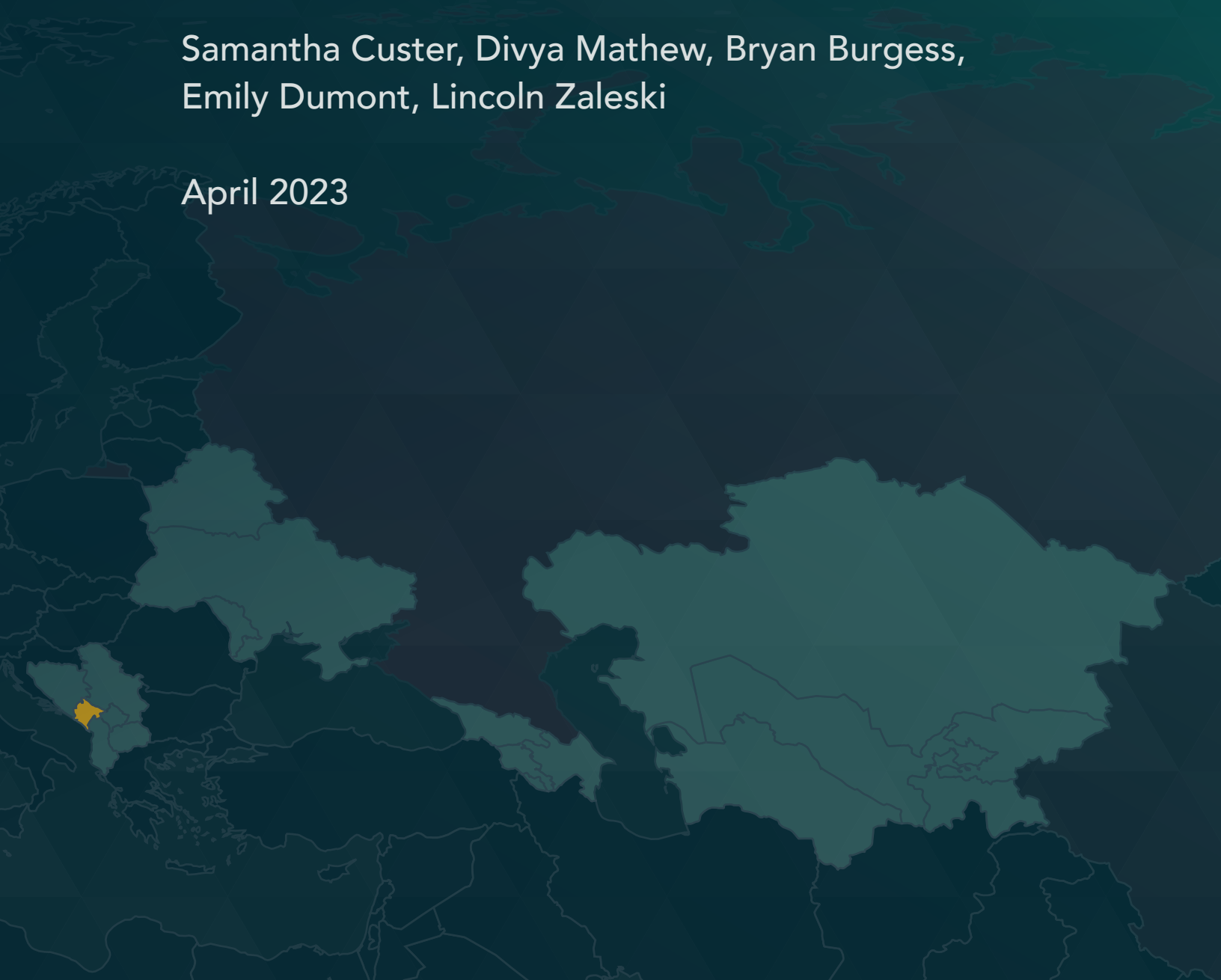
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

# Montenegro: Measuring civic space risk, resilience, and Russian influence

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Montenegro's civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors. Although more muted than in other countries in the region, the Kremlin's influence operations were still observable in Montenegro and sought to co-opt support and deter resistance to its regional ambitions.

The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Montenegro, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Montenegrin civic space actors were the targets of 42 restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021. Sixty-nine percent of these restrictions involved harassment or violence, followed by newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (19 percent), and state-backed legal cases (12 percent). Forty percent of these restrictions were recorded in 2020, coinciding with mass protests related to a contentious Law on Freedom of Religion and COVID-related restrictions. Journalists were most frequently targeted, and the Montenegrin government was the primary initiator. There were no identified restrictions involving foreign governments; however, fake news stories tied to 2020 protests appeared to originate from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Russia.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Only 39 percent of Montenegrins expressed interest in politics in 2019 but they were more politically active

than regional peers in discussing political issues with friends (35 percent), signing petitions (41 percent), and their willingness to join boycotts (52 percent). Yet, low levels of membership in voluntary organizations (4 percent) may stem from a crisis of confidence in the state of Montenegro's institutions. Only religious institutions and the military enjoyed the confidence of a majority of Montenegrins, with a high degree of concern expressed about corruption in other institutions. Nevertheless, Montenegrins found alternative avenues to offer practical support to their fellow citizens. In 2020, 52 percent of Montenegrins reported helping a stranger and nearly 40 percent donated to charity. Volunteerism was the weakest performing metric (11 percent).

- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** In contrast to the Kremlin's extensive efforts elsewhere in the region, there were no identified instances of direct projectized support to Montenegrin civic space actors between January 2015 and August 2021. Although there is an active branch of Rossotrudnichestvo in Podgorica, it relies on language programming and statements of support for the Orthodox Church issued from Moscow, rather than establishing partnerships with Montenegrin civic organizations.
- **Russian State-run Media:** Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Montenegrin civic actors 285 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Political parties were the most frequently mentioned domestic actors followed by formal civil society groups. The overall tone of mentions was largely neutral (87 percent). Positive mentions were oriented towards Eurosceptic right-wing political parties, pro-Russian news media, and non-sectarian Orthodox churches. Negative coverage promoted anti-NATO narratives in an effort to influence the country's decision on ascension.

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## A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms

should not be construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are de facto authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the government in the capital. Or, when we analyze the de facto authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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# 1. Introduction

How strong or weak is the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Montenegro? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Montenegro to advance its broader regional ambitions? Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).<sup>1</sup> In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Montenegro from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.<sup>3</sup> Here we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org) which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Montenegrin civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> The 17 countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

<sup>3</sup> This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.

Although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Montenegro and the broader E&E region for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three respects.



By taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin’s patient investment in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action. Second, the comparative nature of these indicators lends itself to assessing similarities and differences in how the Kremlin operates across countries in the region. Third, by examining domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides a holistic view of how to support resilient societies in the face of autocratizing forces at home and malign influence from abroad.

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors (January 2017–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors</li> <li>● Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution</li> <li>● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism</li> </ul>
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (2010–2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions</li> </ul>
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space (January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country</li> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country</li> </ul>

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Russian state media  
mentions of civic space  
actors  
(January 2015–March  
2021)

- Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Montenegro by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Montenegro by Russian state-owned media
- Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms "democracy" and "West," in Montenegro by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms "democracy" and "West," in Montenegro by Russian state-owned media

*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Montenegro's domestic civic space and vulnerability to Kremlin influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered by the data in the subsequent analysis.*

## 2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Montenegro

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (de jure) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (de facto). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in Montenegro over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Montenegrins engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

### 2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Montenegro: Targets, Initiators, and Trends Over Time

Montenegrin civic space actors experienced 42 known restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (69 percent). There were fewer instances of newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (19 percent) and state-backed legal cases (12 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly available

information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 5).<sup>4</sup>

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Montenegrin Civic Space Actors

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	4	5	4	14	2	29
Restrictive Legislation	4	1	2	1	0	8
State-backed Legal Cases	1	1	0	2	1	5
Total	9	7	6	17	3	42

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Montenegro, disaggregated by type (i.e., harassment/violence, restrictive legislation or state-backed legal cases) and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Instances of restrictions of Montenegrin civic space actors were unevenly distributed across the period (Figure 1). Forty percent of cases were recorded in 2020 alone, coinciding with mass protests related to the highly contentious Law on Freedom of Religion<sup>5</sup> and unrest in the wake of COVID-related restrictions. Comparatively, the fewest restrictions in a year with complete data was in 2019,<sup>6</sup> despite protests that year against government corruption following leaked videos showing officials receiving bribes.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the protests were peaceful and there were no indications that the authorities' response restricted the voice, assembly or actions of citizens in agitating for change.

<sup>4</sup> Much like with other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of restrictions.

<sup>5</sup> The law placed the onus on religious bodies to prove property ownership prior to 1918, failing which the state would take over the properties. Critics saw this as an attempt to promote the small Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which is not recognized by other major churches, at the expense of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The latter is the dominant religious group in the country, and they feared the confiscation of their churches. Leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church supported the coalition of opposition parties in the lead up to Parliamentary elections in August 2020, who ultimately won.

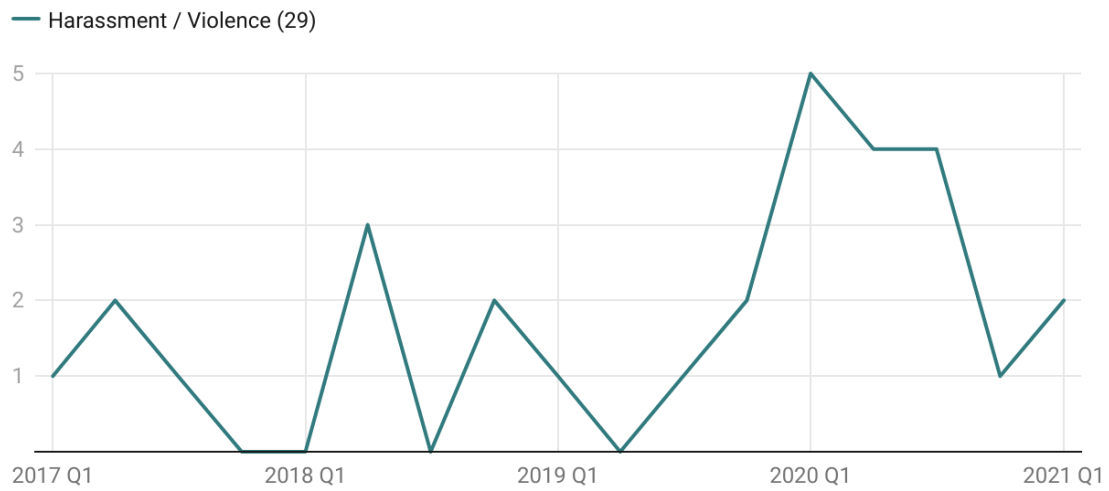
<sup>6</sup> Technically, the fewest restrictions occurred in 2021(7 percent); however, this number only accounts for the first three months of the year.

<sup>7</sup> The so-called "Envelope Affair" leaked videos showing the mayor of Podgorica and high-ranked DPS member, [Slavoljub Stijepovic](#), receiving an envelope that allegedly contained \$97,000. The rallying cry of the protesters was "Odupri se! – 97000" (Resist! – 97000).

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Montenegro

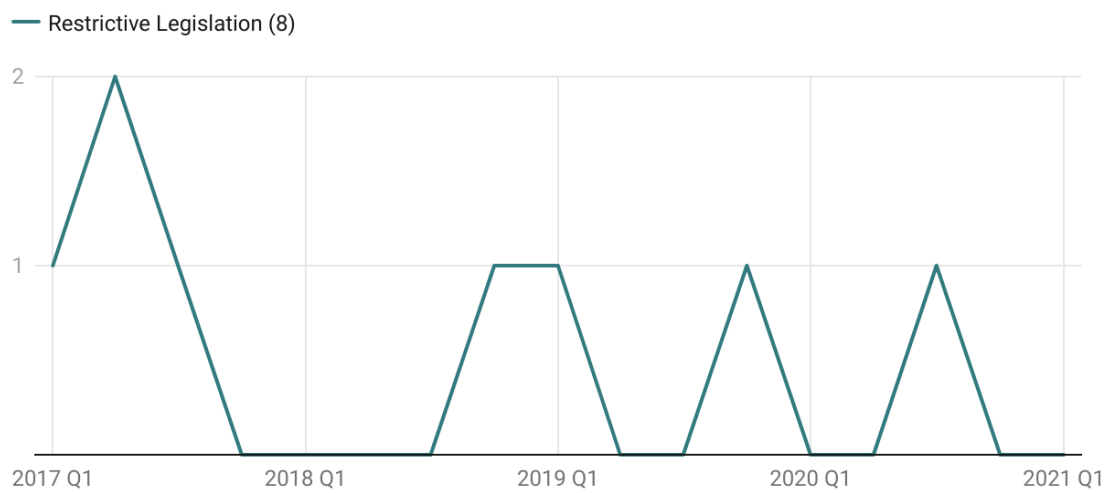
Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment/Violence*



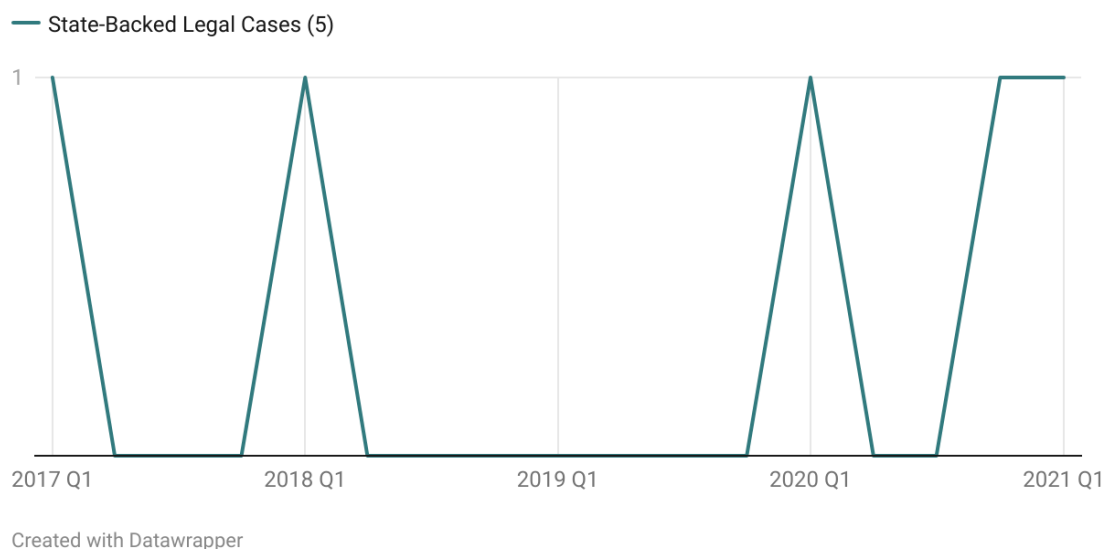
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*Restrictive Legislation*



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## State-backed Legal Cases



## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Montenegro

February 2017	Two senior opposition politicians are among 20 accused in the foiled October 2016 coup, allegedly orchestrated by Russian and Serbian nationalists
June 2017	Montenegro joins NATO, which upsets Russia, one of its traditional allies
April 2018	Former Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic, leader of the ruling DPS, is elected President of Montenegro
October 2018	Authorities ban a number of ceremonies across the country, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the unification of Montenegro and Serbia
February 2019	Thousands join weekly protests under the slogan "Odupri se (Resist!) – 97.000" following the "Envelope Affair," demanding the government's resignation
July 2019	Leaders of the EU reassure Montenegro and 5 other Balkan states of eventual membership at 2-day summit held in Poland
January 2020	Controversial Law on Freedom of Religion comes into force obliging religious communities to prove property ownership before 1918, failing which, ownership transfers to the state
August 2020	Coalition of opposition parties wins 41 of the 81 seats in the Parliament, ending the thirty-year regime of the Democratic Party of Socialists
March 2021	In bid to join the EU, Montenegro ends its Citizenship-for-Investment program

*Notes: The figure visualizes instances of civic space restrictions in Montenegro, categorized as: harassment/violence, restrictive legislation, or state-backed legal cases. Instances are disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of Montenegro from January 2017 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Journalists were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, accounting for 40 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2), followed by those working with other community groups. The Montenegrin government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 19 recorded mentions. The instances of restriction included verbal abuse, and police actions to disperse and detain protestors (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 7 restrictions and there were some incidents involving unidentified assailants (3 mentions). By virtue of the way that the indicator was defined, the initiators of state-backed legal cases are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official).

Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Montenegro  
Number of Recorded Instances, January 2017–March 2021

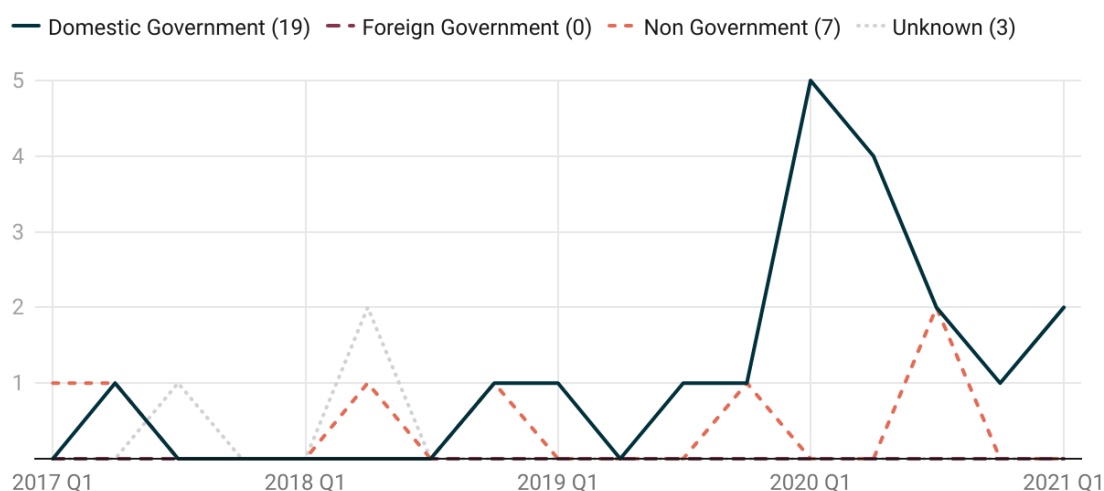


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*Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Montenegro, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Figure 3. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Montenegro by Initiator

Number of Instances Recorded



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*Notes: The figure visualizes the number of recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in Montenegro, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

From 2017 to early 2021, there were no identified instances of direct foreign government involvement in restrictions of civic actors in Montenegro. However, there were reports of disinformation and media manipulation on reporting related to the Law on Freedom of Religion, with some fake news stories appearing to originate from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Russia.

Figure 4 breaks down the targets of restrictions by political ideology or affiliation in the following categories: pro-democracy, pro-Western, and anti-Kremlin.<sup>8</sup> Pro-democracy organizations and activists were mentioned 5 times as targets of

<sup>8</sup> These tags are deliberately defined narrowly such that they likely understate, rather than overstate, selective targeting of individuals or organizations by virtue of their ideology. Exclusion of an individual or organization from these classifications should not be taken to mean that they hold views that are counter to these positions (i.e., anti-democracy, anti-Western, pro-Kremlin).



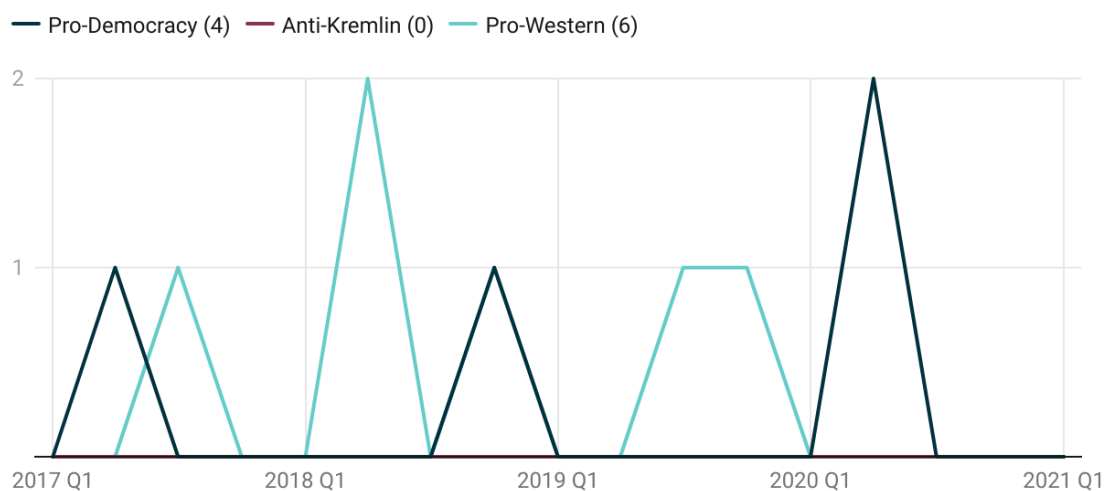
restrictions.<sup>9</sup> Pro-Western organizations and activists were mentioned 6 times as targets of restrictions.<sup>10</sup> There were no instances where we identified the target organizations or individuals to be explicitly anti-Kremlin in their public views.<sup>11</sup>

It should be noted that this classification does not imply that these groups were targeted because of their political ideology or affiliation, merely that they met certain predefined characteristics. In fact, these tags were deliberately defined narrowly such that they focus on only a limited set of attributes about the organizations and individuals in question.

Figure 4. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Montenegro by Political or Ideological Affiliation

Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment / Violence*



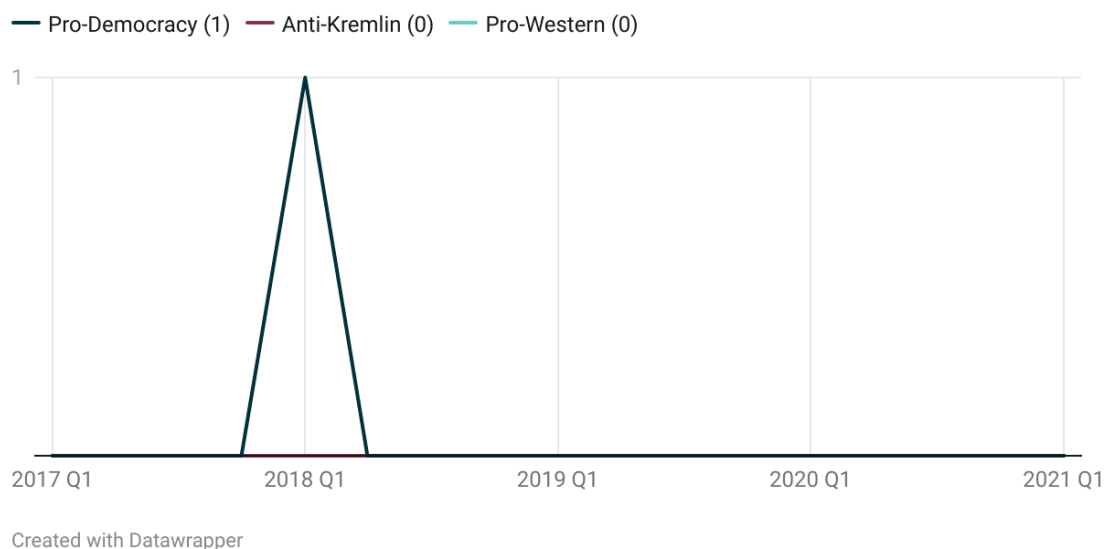
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<sup>9</sup> A target organization or individual was only tagged as pro-democratic if they were a member of the political opposition (thus actively promoting electoral competition) and/or explicitly involved in advancing electoral democracy (narrowly defined).

<sup>10</sup> A tag of pro-Western was applied only when there was a clear and publicly identifiable linkage with the West by virtue of funding or political views that supported EU integration, for example.

<sup>11</sup> The anti-Kremlin tag is only applied in instances where there is a clear connection to opposing actions of the Russian government writ large or involving an organization that explicitly positioned itself as anti-Kremlin in ideology.

## State-backed Legal Cases



*Notes: This figure visualizes the targets of recorded restrictions of any type initiated against civic space actors in Montenegro between January 2017 and March 2021. The targets were manually tagged by AidData staff to identify groups or individuals known to be “pro-democracy,” “pro-Western,” or “anti-Kremlin.” Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

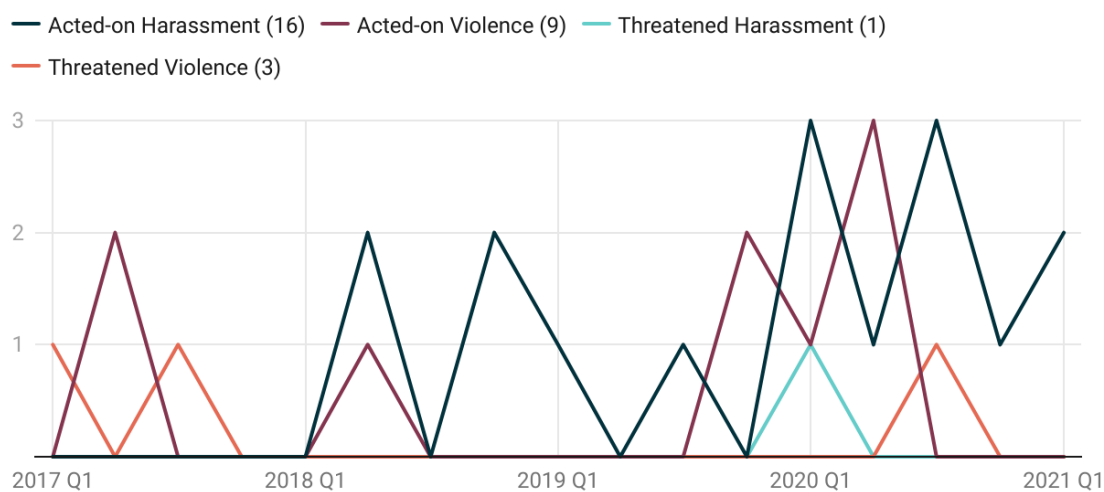
### 2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (1 threatened, 16 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (3 threatened, 9 acted upon) during the period. The majority of these restrictions (75 percent) were acted-upon rather than merely threatened (Figure 5). Violence most often broke out in the context of protesters clashing with police or journalists being attacked; however, this occurred to a lesser degree than elsewhere in the region.<sup>12</sup> Of the 42 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment counted for the largest percentage (38 percent). Common examples of such harassment included arrests and smear campaigns targeting journalists or civil society organizations.

<sup>12</sup> One outlier was in May 2018, when unidentified assailants attacked journalist Olivera Lakic, best known for her investigative work exposing corruption. The initiators shot her in the leg, outside her home in Podgorica.

Figure 5. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Montenegro

Number of Instances Recorded



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*Notes: This figure visualizes the instances of harassment/violence against civic space actors in Montenegro categorized by type of harassment or violence and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (8) in Montenegro were relatively few in number but are important to capture as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors, either subgroups or in general. Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

Taking a closer look at instances of restrictive legislation, the Montenegrin government used a two-pronged approach to constrain civic space: (i) impeding the ability of CSOs to organize and raise funds; and (ii) making it more difficult

for media to protect sources, access information, and criticize authorities without retribution:

- In May 2017, the Ministry of Interior announced it would amend the law on gatherings to prohibit protests on the boulevard in front of Parliament. Several CSOs called on the government to consult experts on international best practices for peaceful assembly before impeding on the right to peaceful protest.
- The Law on NGOs, adopted in 2017, drastically reduced the state financial funding that NGOs receive and grants the Ministry of Public Affairs the power to reject the formation of new organizations if their objectives are deemed in opposition to the country's constitution and laws. Although reasonable to require NGO activities to proceed under the law, the rhetoric of some politicians warning of NGO interference in government and of CSOs transforming into political parties,<sup>13</sup> raises the possibility that the authorities will use these powers in ways that are intended to curb dissent or create an otherwise unfriendly environment for civil society.
- Proposed amendments to the Criminal Code in February 2017 would enable the authorities to prosecute anyone who criticized the Courts or the Prosecutor's Office.
- In March 2019, amendments to the Law on Classified Information were drafted which allowed data to be withheld from the public for vague reasons. In a similar vein, amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information were proposed in October 2019 that included several problematic proposals such as allowing authorities to deny "unreasonable" requests for information and broad exclusions to the Right to Freedom of Information.
- The Montenegrin parliament adopted a new Media Law in July 2020 which states that a journalist must reveal their sources at the request of the Prosecutor's Office if it is "necessary to protect the interests of

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<sup>13</sup> <http://prcentar.me/clanak/medojevi-namjerno-pokuao-da-nateti-ugledu-juventasa/871>

national security, territorial integrity and health.” This would violate the confidentiality of the sources and would weaken media freedom in Montenegro.

Civic space actors were targets of 5 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2017 and March 2021 (Table 3). Cases were fairly evenly spread throughout the period. Journalist Jojo Martinovic was the defendant in 3 of 5 recorded instances. First arrested in October 2015, while researching arms trafficking in the Balkans, Martinovic was convicted on suspicion of drug trafficking and membership of a criminal organization. Many media groups viewed the allegations as fabricated in an attempt to silence the journalist and international human rights groups have called for his acquittal. There were no recorded cases against formal CSOs or NGOs. As shown in Figure 6, 40 percent of the charges were tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). The remaining charges against Martinovic were categorized as indirect nuisance charges (e.g., fraud, embezzlement, tax evasion) similar to those often used by regimes throughout the region to discredit the reputations of civic space actors.

Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Montenegro

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

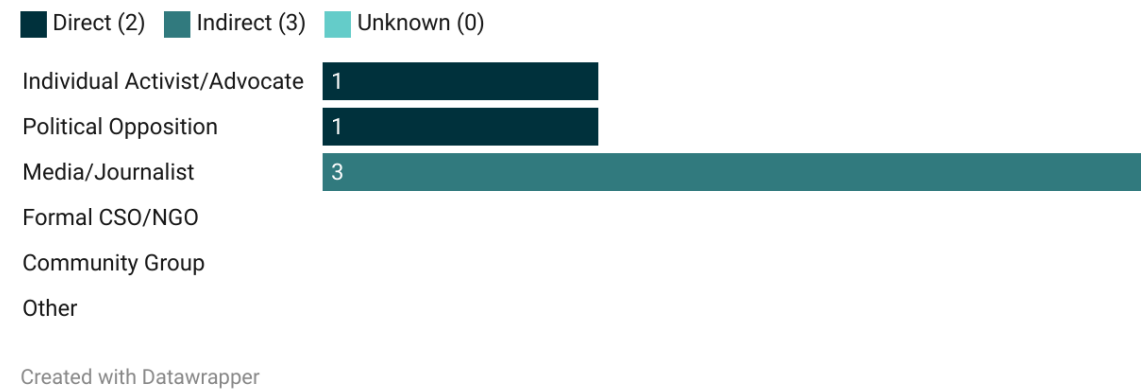
Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	3
Political Opposition	1
Formal CSO/NGO	0
Individual Activist/Advocate	1
Other Community Group	0
Other	0

*Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Montenegro disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other).*

*Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News*

## Figure 6. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Montenegro

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



*Notes: This figure shows the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Montenegro, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other) and the nature of the charge (i.e., direct or indirect). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## 2.2 Attitudes Toward Civic Space in Montenegro

Montenegrins reported low rates of interest in politics and membership in voluntary organizations, likely influenced by concerns of widespread corruption and the belief that they are unable to influence their government's decisions. Nevertheless, Montenegrins were more willing to engage in several forms of political action—discussing political issues with friends, signing petitions, and expressing a willingness to engage in boycotts in future—at levels beyond their regional peers. Moreover, even as Montenegrins expressed low levels of confidence in their institutions, they found other ways to offer practical support to their fellow citizens, particularly via charitable donations and helping strangers. In this section, we take a closer look at Montenegrin citizens' interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions. We also examine how Montenegrins' involvement in

less political forms of civic engagement—donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

### 2.2.1 Interest in Politics and Willingness to Act as Barometers of Montenegrin Civic Space

In 2016, a minority of Montenegrins engaged in protests (7 percent) or otherwise commented on political issues via social media or public debates (8 percent), according to the Balkan Barometer survey (Figure 7). A quarter of Montenegrins said their political activity was limited to discussing issues with their friends and a further 54 percent did not even do this. By 2019, there was a slight uptick in political participation, driven by a shift away from respondents reporting no activity at all (-7 percentage points) towards being willing to discuss political issues with friends (+10 percentage points), engage in political conversations on social media or join protests (+1-4 percentage points).

Figure 7. Political Action: Participation by Montenegrin Citizens versus Balkan Peers, 2016 and 2019

Percentage of Respondents

**Public Debates**



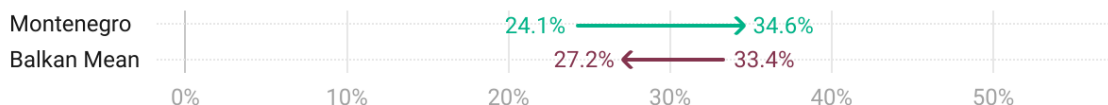
**Protests**



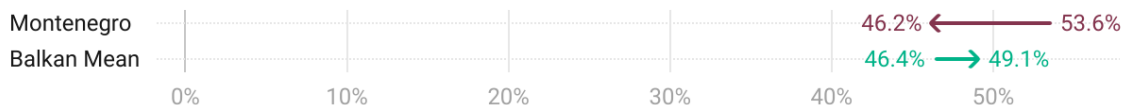
**Commenting on Social Networks**



**Discussed With Friends**



**Did Not Even Discuss**



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents who reported past participation in each of five types of political action in 2016 and 2019, as compared to the Balkan average. Sources: Balkan Barometer 2016, Balkan Barometer 2019.

The World Values Survey (WVS),<sup>14</sup> conducted in Montenegro in 2019, found Montenegrins involved in at least some forms of political activity, even as they expressed high rates of disinterest in politics (Figure 8). Thirty-nine percent of Montenegrins expressed interest in politics, slightly more (+3 percentage points) than their peers across the E&E region.<sup>15</sup> Forty-one percent of Montenegrins

<sup>14</sup> Note that the WVS wave here and throughout the profile refers to the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021 (EVS/WVS Wave 2017–2021) which is the most recent wave of WVS data. For more information, see Section 5.

<sup>15</sup> Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine.



reported that they had signed a petition (+23 percentage points above the regional average) and 52 percent said they might be willing to join a boycott in future (Figures 9 and 10). Montenegrins were more willing than other Balkans countries to discuss political issues with their friends (+7 percentage points) and join protests,<sup>16</sup> according to the 2019 Balkan Barometer survey.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 8. Interest in Politics: Montenegrin Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2019

Percentage of Respondents

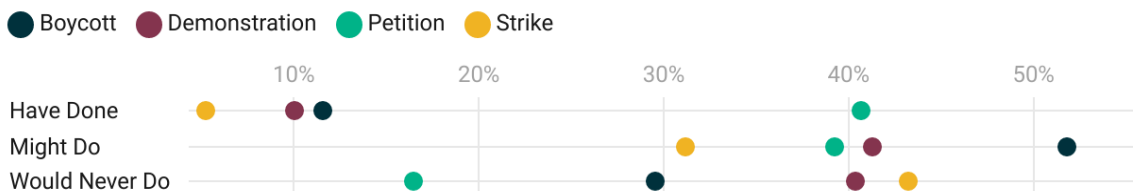


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2019, as compared to the regional average. Sources: The Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Political Action: Montenegrin Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2019

Percentage of Respondents



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents reported past participation in each of four types of political action—petition, boycott, demonstration, and

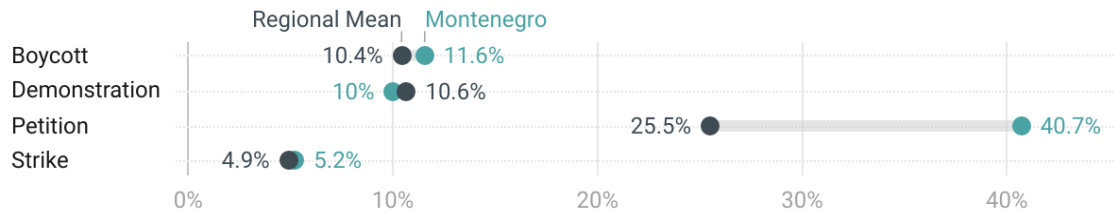
<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the 2019 Balkan Barometer and the joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021 used slightly different questions to gauge whether respondents joined a protest or a demonstration. In this respect, the difference in percentage of respondents reporting that they had participated in protests versus demonstrations might be partly attributable to how respondents understood the question. The observed difference in Montenegro between the two surveys (2 percent).

<sup>17</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia.

strike—as well as their future willingness to do so. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 10. Political Action: Participation of Montenegrin versus Regional Peers, 2019

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”



Created with Datawrapper

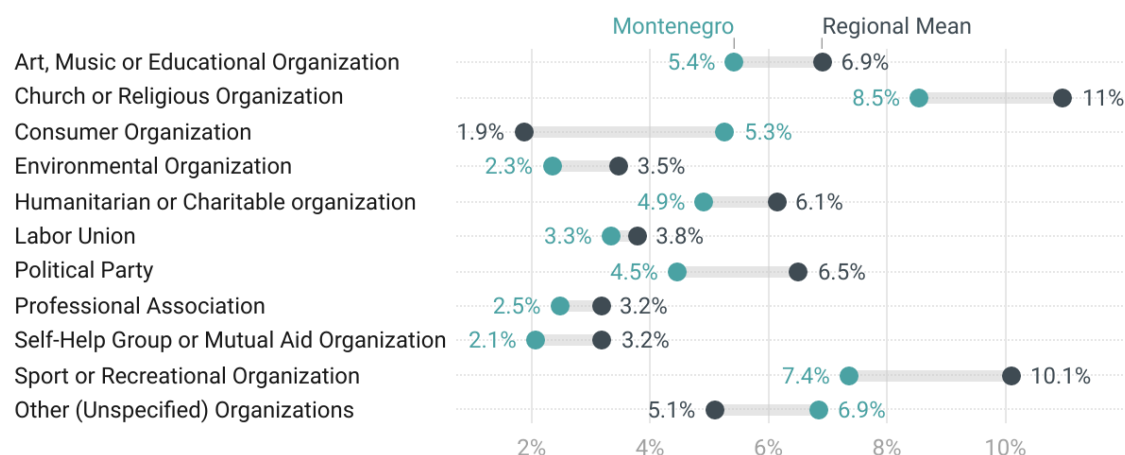
Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents that reported past participation in each of four types of political action as compared to the regional average in 2019. Sources: The Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

As shown in Figure 11, Montenegrins were less likely to be members of voluntary organizations (4 percent)<sup>18</sup> or volunteer their time<sup>19</sup> to these institutions than their peers across the E&E region (-3 and -10 percentage points, respectively). Even the most popular organization type—religious organizations—only attracted 9 percent of Montenegrins as members (Table 4). This low level of participation may reflect a broader crisis of confidence among Montenegrins about the state of their institutions. As a case in point: the only institutions enjoying the confidence of the majority of Montenegrins in 2019 were religious institutions (80 percent) and the military (57 percent).

<sup>18</sup> The one exception was consumer organizations, which were slightly more popular in Montenegro than across the region (+2 percentage points), though only 5 percent of Montenegrins were members of these institutions.

<sup>19</sup> See next section for more information on the Civic Participation Index, of which volunteerism is one of the tracked indicators.

Figure 11. Voluntary Organization Membership: Montenegrin Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2019



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for Montenegro. "Other community group" is the mean of responses for the following responses: "Art, music or educational organization," "Labor Union," "Environmental organization," "Professional association," "Humanitarian or charitable organization," "Consumer organization," "Self-help group, mutual aid group," "Other organization." Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Table 4. Montenegrin Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2019

Voluntary Organization	Montenegrin membership, 2019	Regional mean membership, 2019	Percentage point difference
Church or Religious Organization	9%	11%	-3
Sport or Recreational Organization	7%	10%	-3
Art, Music or Educational Organization	5%	9%	-3
Labor Union	3%	11%	-8
Political Party	4%	8%	-3
Environmental Organization	2%	4%	-2

Professional Association	2%	5%	-3
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	5%	6%	-1
Consumer Organization	5%	3%	+2
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	2%	4%	+2

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2019 versus regional peers. Rounded to nearest percent. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

Despite fairly low reported membership, Montenegrins placed a higher degree of confidence in their religious institutions (+11 percentage points) and viewed them as less corrupt (-10 percentage points), as compared to regional peers (Table 5). Montenegrins' trust in their armed forces—among the institutions that routinely attract the highest levels of confidence across the region—though still high, trailed their peers (-14 percentage points).<sup>20</sup> By contrast, Montenegrins were quite negative towards other institutions: 76 percent expressed no confidence in the press and 67 percent did not trust workers organizations. Over two-thirds of Montenegrins said their medical institutions, political parties, and police were corrupt.

In both 2016 and 2019, the most common reason Montenegrins said they were not actively involved in government decision-making was that they felt that they were unable to influence the government's decisions.<sup>21</sup> Montenegrins were less prone to apathy as an excuse for political disengagement than their Balkan neighbors (Figure 12), with fewer respondents saying that they did not care about these issues (-4 and -7 percentage points in 2016 and 2019, respectively).

<sup>20</sup> Of course, somewhat lower confidence in the military may not necessarily be a net negative for civic space in Montenegro. E&E countries with the highest support for the armed forces, also tend to have more authoritarian tendencies and a more constrained civic space.

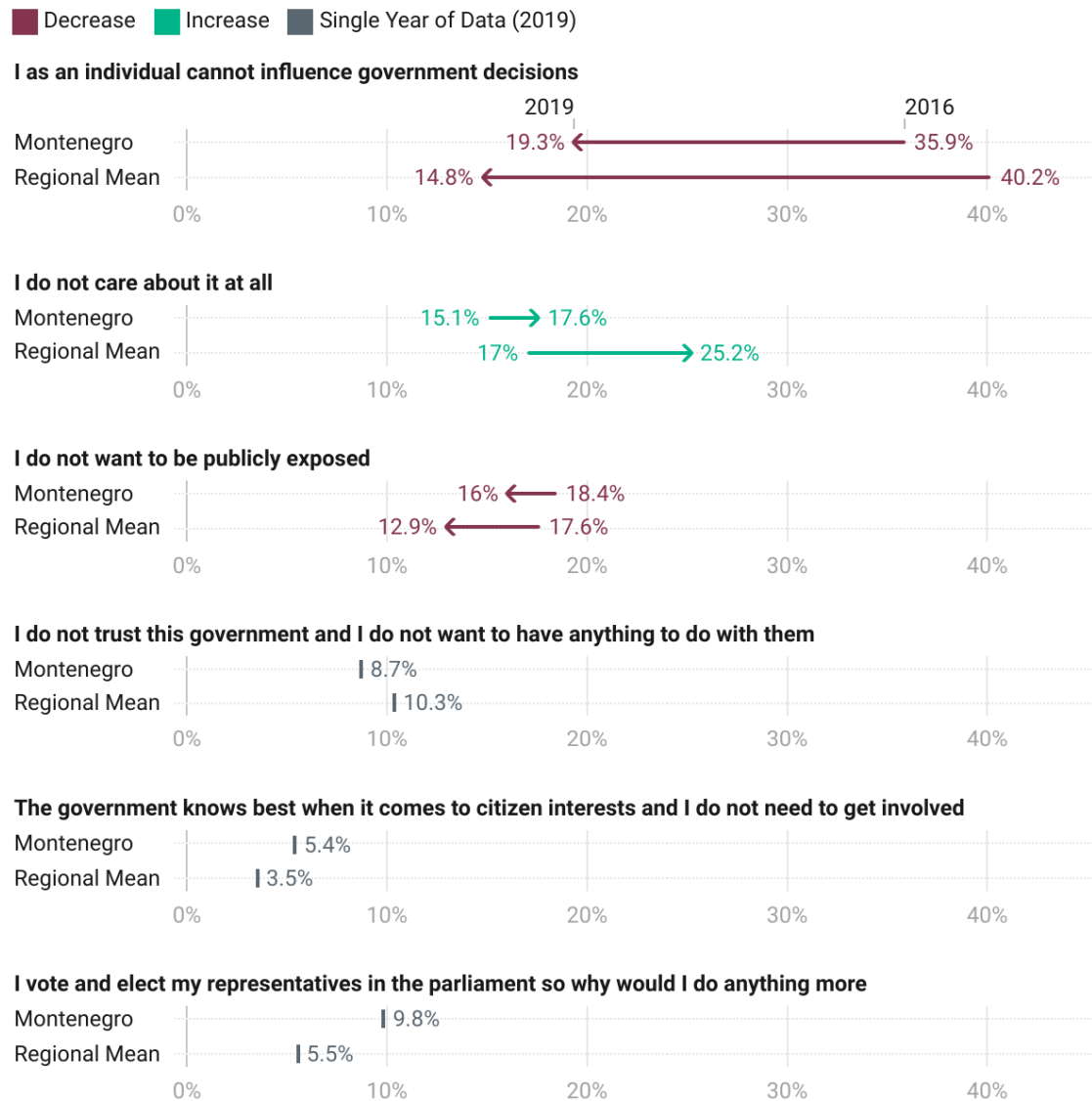
<sup>21</sup> This was the view of 36 percent of respondents in 2016 and 19 percent in 2019; however, there were additional response options provided in 2019 which makes it less useful to derive meaning from any change among those who selected the "I cannot influence government decisions" option. The 2019 Balkan Barometer survey added two new response options, "I do not trust this government" and "I vote for parliament so why do more", though "I cannot influence government decisions" was still the most common response option (19 percent of respondents).

Table 5. Montenegrin Confidence in Key Institutions versus Regional Peers, 2019

Institution	Montenegrin confidence, 2019	Regional mean confidence, 2019	Percentage point difference
Churches	80%	68%	+11
Armed Forces	57%	71%	-14
Press	22%	34%	-11
Labor Unions	26%	31%	-5
Police	47%	57%	-10
Courts	35%	41%	-7
Government	36%	42%	-6
Political Parties	29%	26%	+3
Parliament	33%	36%	-2
Civil Service	36%	46%	-10
Environmental Organizations	39%	44%	-5

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2019 versus regional peers. Rounded to nearest percent. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

Figure 12. Political Activity: Reason for Non-Involvement, Montenegro versus Balkan Peers, 2016 and 2019



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents' reported reasons for not engaging in political action as compared to the Balkan region average in 2016. It also shows the percentage of Montenegrin respondents' reported reasons for not engaging in political action as compared to the Balkan region average in 2019. Sources: Balkan Barometer 2016, Balkan Barometer 2019.

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Montenegrin citizens' attitudes towards less political forms of

participation between 2010 and 2021. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>22</sup> Overall, Montenegro's civic engagement index scores steadily improved across the period, though there were visible declines in apolitical forms of altruism in 2015 and 2019, coinciding with an uptick in anti-government protests. Donating and helping strangers were the two key factors that drove Montenegro's overall performance.<sup>23</sup>

Towards the start of the period (2011-2013), Montenegro's civic engagement score trailed the regional average—16 to 26 points, respectively (Figure 13). During this three year period, 13 percent of Montenegrin respondents reportedly gave money to charity, 7 percent volunteered at an organization, and 29 percent reported helping a stranger.<sup>24</sup> Montenegro's civic engagement score saw a sharp increase in 2014, 42 percent of Montenegrins reporting that they had donated to charity (+27 percentage points from 2013), catapulting the country into the middle of the region's rankings.<sup>25</sup> This uptick in engagement could be connected to an outpouring of generosity following the 2014 Balkan floods;<sup>26</sup> however this newfound sense of solidarity was ultimately not sustained and donation rates quickly fell the next year.

Montenegro declined by 6 index points in its civic engagement score in 2015, despite an increase in the number of citizens who reported helping a stranger. This decline in apolitical altruism came amid rising concern about corruption and

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<sup>22</sup> The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you " Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month?, Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a "yes" answer. The country score is then determined by calculating the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

<sup>23</sup> Donating to charity has a correlation value of 0.911\*\*\* at p=0.000, helping strangers correlates with the index overall with 0.877\*\* at p=0.001, while volunteering has a correlation value of 0.804\* at p=0.011.

<sup>24</sup> During that period, Montenegro trailed the regional mean for volunteering by an average of 14 percent and trailed the regional mean for helping strangers by 11 percent.

<sup>25</sup> Notes: Elsewhere in the region, donating to charity frequently positively correlates with the overall performance of a country's economy. However, in Montenegro, charity does not appear to correlate with GDP (constant Euro): 0.337 at p=0.313.

<sup>26</sup> As a case in point, the Red Cross of Montenegro raised nearly half a million Euros via small donors to help fund its humanitarian response efforts.

[https://reliefweb.int/report/bosnia-and-herzegovina/neighbouring-red-cross-societies-come-together-help-each-other-after;](https://reliefweb.int/report/bosnia-and-herzegovina/neighbouring-red-cross-societies-come-together-help-each-other-after)

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140519003941/http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/crna-gora-se-organizuje-prikuplja-se-pomoc-dobrovoljci-posli-srbiju-clanak-210455>

anti-government protests.<sup>27</sup> This cycle repeated itself in 2019. Following several years of improvement, Montenegro's civic engagement score dropped that year by 3 index points amid anti-corruption protests and negative reactions to the government's attempts to weaken the Orthodox Church.<sup>28</sup> This decline was driven by a five-percentage point drop in respondents' charitable activity and 3 percentage point drop in the share of respondents that helped a stranger.

Montenegro's 2020 index score improved by 10 points compared to the previous year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This upward trend is consistent with improving civic engagement around the world as citizens rallied in response to COVID-19, even in the face of lockdowns and limitations on public gathering. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen as to whether this initial improvement will be sustained in future. Although Montenegro still trailed the regional mean, it closed the gap (Figure 14). In 2020, 52 percent of Montenegrins reported helping a stranger, nearly 40 percent donated to charity. Montenegrins also increased their level of volunteerism to 11 percent (up from 9 percent in 2019).

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<sup>27</sup> These protests culminated in a riot in Podgorica and a schism among the ruling coalition in parliament, while then Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic won the dubious honor of OCCRP's "Person of the Year in Organized Crime and Corruption." <https://www.occrp.org/en/poy/2015/>

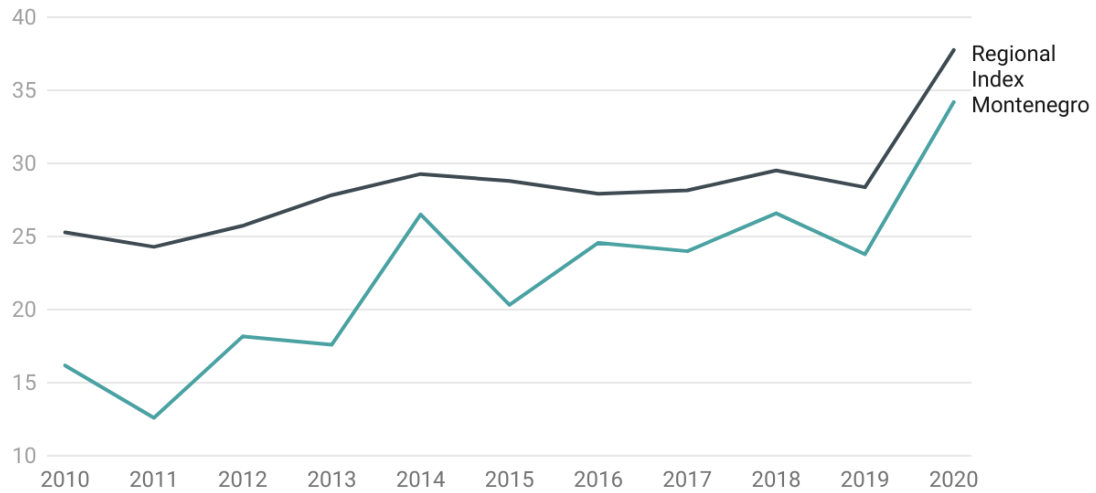
<sup>28</sup> Specifically, the government sought to weaken the Orthodox Church's financial sway by stripping it of some of its properties. These protests helped oust Dukanovic and his Democratic Party of Socialists and opened up space for the opposition Democratic Front to move in. In both 2015 and 2019, a general civic malaise and strong anti-corruption sentiment sparked protests that the political opposition used to its benefit, the only difference appearing to be the Orthodox Church lending its significant sway to the second wave.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/moscow-montenegro-russia-putin-church-bikers-coup-b1077241.html>,

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/17/russian-night-wolves-bikers-support-montenegro-church-protests/>



Figure 13. Civic Engagement Index: Montenegro versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This graph shows how scores for Montenegro varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2021, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries. Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2020. While 2021 Gallup data is available for much of the Europe and Eurasia region, it has not yet been released for Montenegro.*

### 3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Montenegro

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in Montenegro (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2).

#### 3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Montenegro's Civic Space

There were no identified instances of direct projectized Kremlin support to civic space actors in Montenegro from January 2015 to August 2021. Russia is not entirely inactive in the country, as it is in neighboring Kosovo (the only other Balkan state with no identified project support). Russia enjoys full diplomatic relations with Montenegro and maintains an active branch of Rossotrudnichestvo—often at the forefront of its engagement with civic space actors in other countries—in Podgorica. Nevertheless, the Kremlin's presence in Montenegro's civic space is relatively shallow, relying on Rossotrudnichestvo's language programming and statements of support for the Orthodox Church issued from Moscow, rather than establishing partnerships with Montenegrin civic organizations.

The Podgorica branch of Rossotrudnichestvo appeared to be quite active across Montenegro, donating literature to secondary schools, awarding friendship

medals,<sup>29</sup> as well as hosting roundtables on Russian “Living Classics,”<sup>30</sup> and celebrations to commemorate WWII.<sup>31</sup> However, the Kremlin appears to partner with individuals to host these events in Montenegro, while it would more typically partner with teacher associations,<sup>32</sup> compatriot unions or established civic organizations elsewhere in the region. While the Kremlin leverages the shared fight against Nazi Germany to promote Russian leadership across the E&E region, Montenegrin civic organizations do not appear to be as receptive of this narrative, as none engaged in partnerships around this theme.

Montenegro’s decision to join NATO may have influenced the Kremlin to deprioritize engagement with local civic space actors,<sup>33</sup> similar to dynamics observed in North Macedonia,<sup>34</sup> and pursue other influence strategies<sup>35</sup> such as an alleged \$200,000 payoff to Serbian nationalist Sasa Sindjelic to disrupt the 2016 Montenegrin election and seize the Parliament building.<sup>36</sup> Two members of

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<sup>29</sup> In June 2019, it awarded a Medal of Pushkin to a Russian literature teacher in Bijelo Polje. The medal celebrated the individual’s contributions to “strengthening friendship and cooperation between peoples.” The ceremony was the center’s highest profile support to any individual in Montenegro, and at the same time revealed how limited Russian networks are in the country. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190629141719/http://mne.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/49845>

<sup>30</sup> In March 2021, due to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, Rossotrudnichestvo hosted its 10th Anniversary “Living Classics” competition online and reached out directly to students via their social media.

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1776490235844052&id=899327680226983](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1776490235844052&id=899327680226983)

<sup>31</sup> In May 2017, Rossotrudnichestvo coordinated with 35 students at the University of Montenegro campus in Nikšić to hand out St. George ribbons and in November 2020 hosted an event commemorating WWII and lessons of the “Great Patriotic War.”

<sup>32</sup> Where possible, the center convenes as many Russian language teachers as possible. If the teachers do not already have an association amongst themselves, Rossotrudnichestvo often provides meeting space to encourage them to form a group.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/europe/100000004070036/russia-reacts-to-montenegro-nato-invite.html>

<sup>34</sup> In North Macedonia, overt Russian engagement with civic space actors operated at a relatively low level while the country’s NATO membership was in limbo prior to 2018 and then halted with North Macedonia’s formal accession to the Western-led bloc in 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Although the Kremlin is broadly interested in derailing attempts by those countries in its sphere of influence to join NATO and EU, it does not appear to have a one-size fits all strategy. In Serbia, for example, anti-EU parties have openly worked alongside Russian actors, and Russian centers in Belgrade host activities openly promoting Eurasian integration as an alternative to the EU.

<sup>36</sup>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/09/world/europe/montenegro-coup-plot-gru.html>,

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/12/montenegro-witness-retracts-coup-plot-testimony/>

the Democratic Front coalition were subsequently sentenced to prison for coordinating with Russian actors to disrupt an election, along with ten other Montenegrins and two Russians tried in absentia.<sup>37</sup> Although the episode is relevant to Montenegro's civic space, we exclude it from our database of Russian projectized support given the murky details of this case and the fact that Sindjelic later retracted his testimony.

Membership in NATO has not ended Russian attempts to influence Montenegro, particularly as the Kremlin remains interested in deterring the country's accession to the EU. Notably, the Serbian Orthodox Church—viewed by many Montenegrins as a “pawn of Russia”<sup>38</sup>—lent its support to the opposition coalition, For the Future of Montenegro, ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections. In a similar vein, the “Night Wolves,” a Kremlin-affiliated biker gang, declared support for the Church and protesters from Russia.<sup>39</sup> Montenegro's EU accession progress did slow down this past year, though these developments are linked to inter-party conflict in Parliament and lingering ethnic divisions,<sup>40</sup> and the new government affirmed its stance as pro-Western and pro-European.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Montenegrin civic actors a total of 285 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Seventy-nine percent of these mentions (225 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining 21 percent (60 instances) consisted of mentions of foreign and intergovernmental civic space actors. Russian state media covered a diverse set of civic actors, mentioning 41 organizations by name as well as 24 informal groups operating in Montenegro. In an effort to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Orthodox congregations are one element of civic space that the Kremlin frequently partners with to carry out pro-Russian programming elsewhere.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/moscow-montenegro-russia-putin-church-bikers-coup-b1077241.html>

<sup>39</sup>

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/17/russian-night-wolves-bikers-support-montenegro-church-protests/>

<sup>40</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/montenegro-report-2021\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/montenegro-report-2021_en)

<sup>41</sup>

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/09/09/montenegro-coalition-leaders-agree-on-pro-european-course/>

understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Montenegrin citizens, we also analyzed 272 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with the Montenegro: North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. In this section, we examine Russian state media coverage of domestic and external civic space actors, how this has evolved over time, and the portrayal of democratic institutions and Western powers to Montenegrin audiences.

### 3.2.1 Russian State Media's Characterization of Domestic Montenegrin Civic Space Actors

Roughly two-thirds (60 percent) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Montenegro's civic space referred to specific groups by name. The 30 named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types, ranging from political parties to community organizations to media outlets. Political parties dominate Russian media mentions of domestic actors (100 instances), followed by formal civil society groups and NGOs (18 instances). The high number of political party mentions is driven by references to members of the Democratic Front alliance (13 mentions), a right-wing populist and Eurosceptic parliamentary opposition coalition. Member parties include the Movement for Changes (17 mentions), New Serb Democracy (12 mentions),<sup>42</sup> Democratic People's Party (9 mentions), and the Workers Party (6 mentions).

Russian media mentions of named Montenegrin civic space actors were most often neutral (87 percent) in tone. The remaining mentions were generally positive (10.5 percent) and, consistent with other Balkan countries we analyzed, Russian state media ascribed positive sentiment to Eurosceptic right-wing political parties, pro-Russian news media, and non-sectarian Orthodox churches. In Montenegro, these trends are exemplified by positive coverage of right-wing coalitions such as the Democratic Front (3 mentions) and True Montenegro (1 mention); the anti-NATO news outlets IN4S (2 mentions) and Dan (1 positive mention); and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro (1 mention).

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<sup>42</sup> New Serb Democracy is a right-wing political party in North Macedonia.

Comparatively, negative mentions of domestic Montenegrin actors were few in number, but the targets of this coverage are instructive. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church received the only “extremely negative” mention, as Russian state media labeled the group “schismatic and unrecognized,” accusing it of stealing members from the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>43</sup> The Kremlin often depicts itself as the guardian of Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe; and Orthodox churches, such as the Montenegrin variant, that depart from the model of Russian Orthodoxy are immediately characterized as radicals. Dnevne Novine—a pro-government, pro-NATO, and pro-European newspaper—also received a negative mention, consistent with Russian state media’s broader antagonism towards NATO and the EU. In addition to its normally positive coverage, the Democratic Front coalition received one negative mention from Russian state media for causing “unrest”<sup>44</sup> related to the use of violence by some group members to prevent a controversial vote on the ownership of church buildings, but this criticism was downplayed.

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 91 generalized mentions of 17 domestic Montenegrin NGOs, protesters, opposition parties, and other informal groups during the same period. Coverage was predominantly neutral (56 percent of mentions) for these informal domestic civic actors. The remaining coverage of these groups was divided unevenly between positive (29 percent), and negative (15 percent) mentions. Eurosceptic or anti-West actors received largely positive coverage, such as “Montenegrin opposition” (8 positive mentions) and “anti-NATO protesters” (4 positive mentions). On the other hand, “Montenegrin Patriots” (1 negative mention) and “local media” (5 negative mentions) were among those that attracted negative reporting.

Looking at the domestic civic space actors as a whole, groups associated with Montenegro’s bids for accession to the EU and NATO were frequently mentioned. Opposition political parties and informal protest movements with Eurosceptic views dominated Russian state media headlines regarding Montenegro as shown by the top mentioned domestic actors (Table 6).

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<sup>43</sup> “Oppression of Serbian Orthodox Church fraught with great problems - Russian ministry.” ITAR-TASS. Published December 30, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Eurosceptic and anti-NATO political parties received the vast majority of mentions, with the Movement for Changes (MfC), New Serb Democracy, and Democratic Front receiving significant positive and neutral sentiment. These political parties are also related to the “Montenegrin Opposition” and “Protesters” actors, as conservative opposition parties encouraged their anti-NATO constituencies to protest in the streets.

This anti-NATO sentiment from supporters of the opposition led to a high percentage of positive coverage of these groups from Russian state media. A Sputnik article from November 2015 highlights Russian support for anti-NATO protesters, “the peaceful protest was dispersed brutally with gas and physical force - something that usually always catches the West's eye. However, the eye it caught turned blind - and the West did not see the massive violation of human rights from the side of the authorities.”<sup>45</sup> Although Russian coverage of the Montenegrin civic space is predominantly neutral, the few non-neutral reports offer evidence of Russian state media’s preferential treatment of anti-Western civic actors.

Table 6: Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Montenegro by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Actor	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
Montenegrin Opposition		3	24	8	0	35
Movement for Changes (MfC)		0	16	1	0	17
Democratic Front		1	9	3	0	13
Protesters		1	5	6	1	13
New Serb Democracy		0	12	0	0	12

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the domestic civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) between January 2015 to March 2021*

<sup>45</sup> “NATO is ‘Inquisition of Our Era’ – Montenegrin Anti-War Leader.” Sputnik News Service. Published November 4, 2015.

and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. New Serb Democracy is a right-wing political party in North Macedonia. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

### 3.2.2 Russian State Media’s Characterization of External Actors in Montenegrin Civic Space

Russian state media dedicated the remaining mentions (60 instances) to external actors in the Montenegrin civic space. TASS and Sputnik mentioned 2 intergovernmental organizations (3 mentions) and 9 foreign organizations (46 mentions) by name, as well as 7 general mentions of foreign actors (11 mentions) including “Serbian journalists” or “international media.” Sputnik, TASS, and other foreign media organizations conducting interviews with opposition politicians were also frequently mentioned (Table 7).

Table 7: Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Montenegro by Sentiment

External Civic Actor	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
Sputnik	0	0	34	0	0	34
International Media	0	2	3	0	0	5
Matica Srpska	0	0	3	0	0	3
TASS	0	0	3	0	0	3
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)	0	0	2	0	0	2

Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Montenegro between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Russian state media mentions of external actors, both named and unnamed, were highly neutral (83 percent) in tone. The remaining mentions were split, with 6 “somewhat negative” and 4 “somewhat positive” mentions. Once again, the negative mentions, though few in number, are illustrative of broader trends in Russian state media coverage elsewhere in the E&E region. First, Russia covered



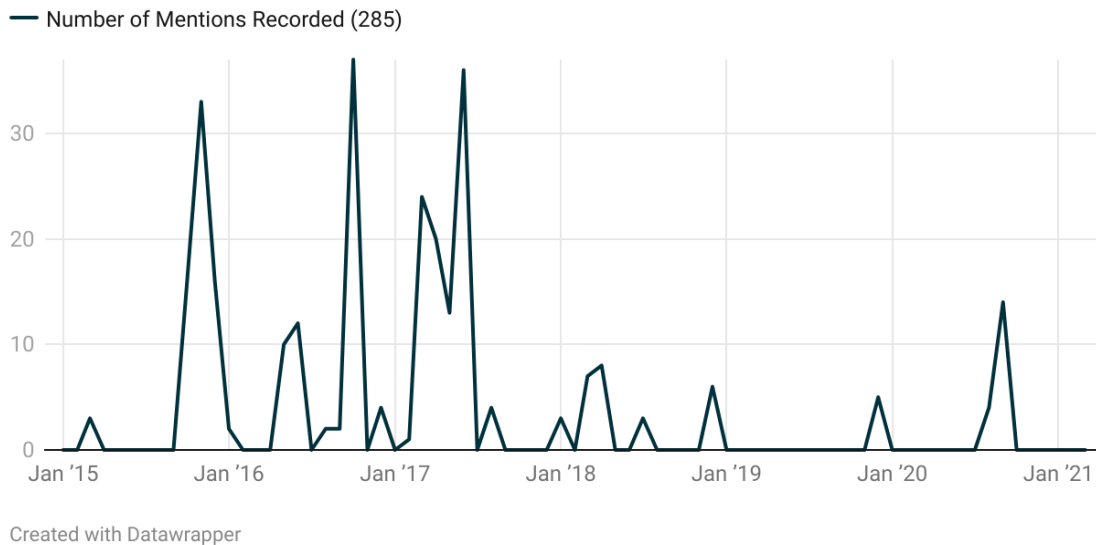
Kosovar actors negatively, reporting that they had claimed a piece of Montenegro as Kosovar land. Both the “Kosovo nationalist movement” (1 mention) and Kosovo’s Self-Determination Movement (1 mention) were referenced. This negative portrayal of ethnic Albanian organizations is a common tactic of Russian state media coverage across the Balkans and appears to be an attempt to stoke ethnic tensions against Albanian minorities in Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia. Second, international media (2 mentions) and U.S. media (1 mention), were accused of manipulating the Montenegrin people during the NATO accession vote in 2017, consistent with a recurring theme in Russian state media of portraying actors associated with the ‘West’ as manipulative.

### 3.2.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Montenegro’s Civic Space over Time

As shown in Figure 14, Russian state media coverage tends to spike around major events and show up in clusters. In Montenegro, the preponderance of media mentions (44 percent) spiked around three events: a string of anti-government protests in October and November 2015, the parliamentary elections in October 2016, and Montenegro’s NATO accession in June 2017. These three events received mostly neutral (75 percent) coverage from Russian media.

#### Figure 14. Russian State Media Mentions of Montenegrin Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



*Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Montenegrin civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Russian state media’s overall coverage of the 2015 anti-government and anti-NATO protests was mostly neutral (51 percent of mentions) or positive (34 percent of mentions). However, the Kremlin reserved its more negative coverage for local media (2 negative mentions) and NGOs (1 negative mention), which Russian state media outlets blamed for pushing a pro-Western agenda. Sputnik noted in a November 2015 article, “as for the West, it will continue supporting NGOs and individuals fostering the idea of Montenegro's NATO membership even if it is rejected in a referendum...”<sup>46</sup> Russia’s state media coverage of anti-government protests varies depending upon its relationship with the counterpart government. Notably, Russian state media did not look as kindly on anti-government protesters in Belarus, where Russia has a strong relationship with the government.

Similarly, during the Parliamentary Elections in October 2016, Russian state media covered the elections with overwhelmingly neutral sentiment (93 percent of mentions). The remaining mentions were of “local media” (2 negative

<sup>46</sup> “NATO is ‘Inquisition of Our Era’ – Montenegrin Anti-War Leader.” Sputnik News Service. Published November 4, 2015.

mentions) and Montenegrin opposition parties (1 negative mention). Russian state media downplayed the role of opposition parties in a coup attempt coinciding with the parliamentary elections. Only one negative mention of Montenegrin opposition parties occurred, with Russian state media choosing to accuse local media of misreporting the facts rather than report on the alleged coup.<sup>47</sup>

Taken together, Russian state media coverage of civil society actors in Montenegro underscores several themes. First, the Kremlin seeks to downplay violent actions taken by anti-government groups that support Russian interests in Montenegro, in stark contrast to its approach in countries such as Belarus, where Moscow has closer affinity with the incumbent political leaders. Second, consistent with its strategy across the Balkans, Russian state media appears to use its coverage as a megaphone to promote visibility and positive sentiment towards Eurosceptic, anti-NATO, Serbian nationalist, and pro-Russian Orthodox groups. By contrast, Russian state media uses negative coverage to sour attitudes towards pro-Western media, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, and Kosovar Albanian groups.

### 3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Montenegrin citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Montenegro (Table 8).<sup>48</sup> Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced all five keywords from January 2015 to March 2021. Russian state media mentioned the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (357 instances), the United States (162 instances), the European Union (90 instances), the “West” (89 instances), and democracy (29 instances) with reference to Montenegro during this period. The majority of mentions were either “somewhat negative” or “neutral.”

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<sup>47</sup> “REVIEW: Montenegro Opposition Yet Undecided on Joint Move to Contest Election Results.” Sputnik News Service. Published October 18, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

Table 8. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive	Grand Total
NATO	54	197	97	9	0	357
United States	13	68	80	1	0	162
European Union	1	26	59	4	0	90
West	19	46	24	0	0	89
Democracy	0	0	20	8	1	29

*Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to five key words—NATO, the European Union, the United States, democracy, and the West—between January 2015 and March 2021 in articles related to Montenegro.*

*Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Russian state media mentioned NATO the most frequently (357 instances) in reference to Montenegro. The majority of these mentions were negative (70 percent), and they overwhelmingly occurred in the time period leading up to three events: (i) NATO’s invitation for Montenegro to join the Alliance in 2015; (ii) the Montenegrin parliament’s vote to join NATO; and (iii) the country’s official accession to NATO in 2017. Many of these negative mentions speculated on the damage Montenegro would do to its relationship with Russia if the country joined NATO, saying that this went against citizens’ wishes: “the majority of Montenegrins cherish no NATO membership dreams and therefore plunging the country into the bloc goes against the nation’s will.” A handful of somewhat positive mentions noted interestingly that, by joining NATO, Montenegro could better contribute to stability and peace in the region.<sup>49</sup>

The United States received the next highest number of mentions (162 instances), which were fairly evenly split between neutral and negative references. Many of these mentions related to U.S. support of Montenegro’s accession to NATO and U.S. presidential and vice-presidential visits to the region. One event that spurred several negative mentions occurred at a NATO summit, where U.S.

<sup>49</sup> “NATO? Montenegro is ‘Suffering from Cancer Epidemic They Triggered.’” Sputnik News Service. Published November 5, 2015.

President Donald Trump was portrayed as pushing Montenegro's Prime Minister Dusko Markovic out of the way during a photo opportunity. The European Union received 90 mentions, the majority of which were neutral. Similarly, many of the mentions of the EU involved Montenegro's accession to NATO and depicted the country as becoming closer to Europe. Negative mentions of the EU most often discussed border control—from refugee status earlier in the period to coronavirus and tourism restrictions in later years.

The West received 89 mentions and consistent with broader trends in Russian state media coverage elsewhere in the region, the majority of these references were negative (73 percent). Most mentions occurred in the period leading up to Montenegro's accession to NATO, which was viewed by Russian state media as a "deterioration of East-West political relations."<sup>50</sup>

Lastly, we recorded 29 instances of democracy in reference to Montenegro. The majority of these references were neutral (20 instances) or positive (8 instances). Many instances again related to Montenegro's accession to NATO and encouraged citizens prior to the parliamentary vote that democratic processes be followed.

In sum, Russian state media did not report on many major civil society events in Montenegro but made a major effort to highlight the Kremlin's preferred anti-NATO narratives, particularly during the lead up to the country's accession to the Alliance. Russian state media emphasized historical, cultural, and economic ties with Russia as a reason to not join the alliance. While mentions of these terms slowed later in the time period (following the country's ascension), anti-West commentaries have continued, perhaps to persuade Montenegro that they still belong in Russia's sphere.

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<sup>50</sup> "NATO Needs to Recognize Russia's Historic Concerns in East Europe - Ex-State Dept. Adviser." Sputnik News Service. Published March 29, 2017.

## 4. Conclusion

The profile of Russia's engagement with Montenegro is decidedly different from that observed elsewhere in the E&E region with minimal indication of attempts to build ties with Montenegrin civic organizations or regulators other than blanket statements of support for the Orthodox Church. Yet, even in this context, Russian state media actively reinforced familiar themes, raising doubts about the motives of the U.S., EU, and NATO, promoting pro-Kremlin parties and organizations, as well as advancing an anti-NATO narrative to dissuade the country from joining the alliance.

It is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

## 5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org).

### 5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from two primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Montenegro; and (ii) Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions.

Restrictions that took place prior to January 1, 2017 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

Survey data on citizen perceptions of civic space were collected from three sources: the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021, the Gallup World Poll (2010-2021), and the Balkan Barometer 2016 and 2019. These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the three surveys and the exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality and comparability of the datasets remains high.

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 7 in Montenegro was conducted in Montenegrin between July and December 2019 with a nationally representative sample of 1003 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of

nationality or language.<sup>51</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable “computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment, and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases.”<sup>52</sup>

The E&E region countries included in the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 dataset, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question “How interested have you been in politics over the last 2 years?” were first collapsed from “Very interested,” “Somewhat interested,” “Not very interested,” and “Not at all interested” into the two categories: “Interested” and “Not interested.” Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

Regional means for the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group, etc.). Respondents to WVS 7 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. For our analysis purposes, we collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to “Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance

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<sup>51</sup> See

<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>.

<sup>52</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssor.70110>.



with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the "Other community group" cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in "Art, music or educational organizations," "Environmental organizations," "Professional associations," "Church or other religious organizations," "Consumer organizations," "Sport or recreational associations," "Self-help or mutual aid groups," and "Other organizations."

The confidence indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service, etc.). Respondents to the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: "A great deal," "Quite a lot," "Not very much," or "None at all." The "A great deal" and "Quite a lot" options were collapsed into a binary "Confident" indicator, while "Not very much" and "None at all" options were collapsed into a "Not confident" indicator.<sup>53</sup>

The fieldwork for the Balkan Barometer 2016 Survey in Montenegro was conducted in Montenegrin with a nationally representative sample of 1000 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, whose usual place of residence is in the country surveyed, and who speak the national languages well enough to respond to the questionnaire. Responses were weighted by demographic factors for both country-specific and regional demographic weights.<sup>54</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data.

The fieldwork for the Balkan Barometer 2019 Survey in Montenegro was conducted in Montenegrin with a nationally representative sample of 1000 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, whose usual place of residence is in the country surveyed, and who speak the national languages well enough to respond to the questionnaire. Responses were weighted by

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<sup>53</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

<sup>54</sup><https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Balkan%20barometer%202016-Public%20Opinion%20Survey%202016%20-%20final%20report.pdf/73c1992c50128aca7f318ee25cbe5350.pdf>

demographic factors for both country-specific and regional demographic weights.<sup>55</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data.

The E&E region countries included in both waves of the Balkan Barometer survey were Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Respondents to the question “Have you ever done something that could affect any of the government decisions?” were allowed to choose multiple options from the following options: “Yes, I did, I took part in public debates,” “Yes, I did, I took part in protests,” “Yes, I did, I gave my comments on social networks or elsewhere on the Internet,” “I only discussed about it with friends, acquaintances, I have not publicly declared myself [sic],” “I do not even discuss about it [sic],” and “DK/refuse.” Most respondents selected only one option, however, due to double coding the values in this analysis were calculated by the total number of respondents who selected each option in any combination of responses, and therefore add up to a total percentage slightly greater than 100%. Balkan means were calculated using the regional respondent weights from all six Balkan Barometer countries.

Respondents to the Balkan Barometer 2016 question “What is the main reason you are not actively involved in government decision-making?” were allowed to choose a single response from the following options: “I as an individual cannot influence government decisions,” “I do not want to be publicly exposed,” “I do not care about it at all,” and “DK/refuse.” Balkan means were calculated using the regional respondent weights from all six Balkan Barometer countries. These response options differ from those available in 2019, so the two waves’ values cannot be directly compared for Montenegro but should be assessed relative to the regional mean.

Respondents to the Balkan Barometer 2019 question “What is the main reason you are not actively involved in government decision-making?” were allowed to choose a single response from the following options: “The government knows best when it comes to citizen interests and I don't need to get involved,” “I vote and elect my representatives in the parliament so why would I do anything

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[https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Balkan-Barometer\\_Public-Opinion-2019-07-03.pdf/adad30ca8a8c00a259a1803673c86928.pdf](https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Balkan-Barometer_Public-Opinion-2019-07-03.pdf/adad30ca8a8c00a259a1803673c86928.pdf)

more," "I as an individual cannot influence government decisions," "I do not want to be publicly exposed," "I do not trust this government and I don't want to have anything to do with them," "I do not care about it at all," and "DK/refuse." Balkan means were calculated using the regional respondent weights from all six Balkan Barometer countries. These response options differ from those available in 2016, so the two waves' values cannot be directly compared for Montenegro but should be assessed relative to the regional mean.

The perceptions of corruption indicator uses responses to a series of Balkan Barometer 2019 questions which asks respondents "To what extent do you agree or not agree that [institution] in your economy is affected by corruption?" for several institutions (e.g., religious organizations, political parties, the military, NGOs, etc.). Respondents to the survey could select whether they "Totally agree," "Tend to agree," "Tend to disagree," "Totally disagree," or "DK/refuse." The "Totally agree" and "Tend to agree" responses were collapsed into the binary indicator of "Agree" and the "Tend to disagree" and "Totally disagree" responses were collapsed into the binary indicator of "Disagree." Regional means were calculated using the regional respondent weights from all six Balkan Barometer countries.

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2010-2021, except for the countries that did not complete fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. The data are weighted to be nationally representative.

The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens' willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: "Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?" The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Montenegro's country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2020 was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2021 was not conducted for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro, and Turkmenistan.

### 5.3 Russian Projectized Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones between January 1, 2015 and August 30, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to global news, we reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where possible, confirm reports from news sources.

While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, a greater portion of instances only identified support provided in-kind, through modes of cooperation, or through technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). These were recorded as such without a monetary valuation. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from three Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS, Russia Today, and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles

published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData was able to record mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in Montenegro. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news.

Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.