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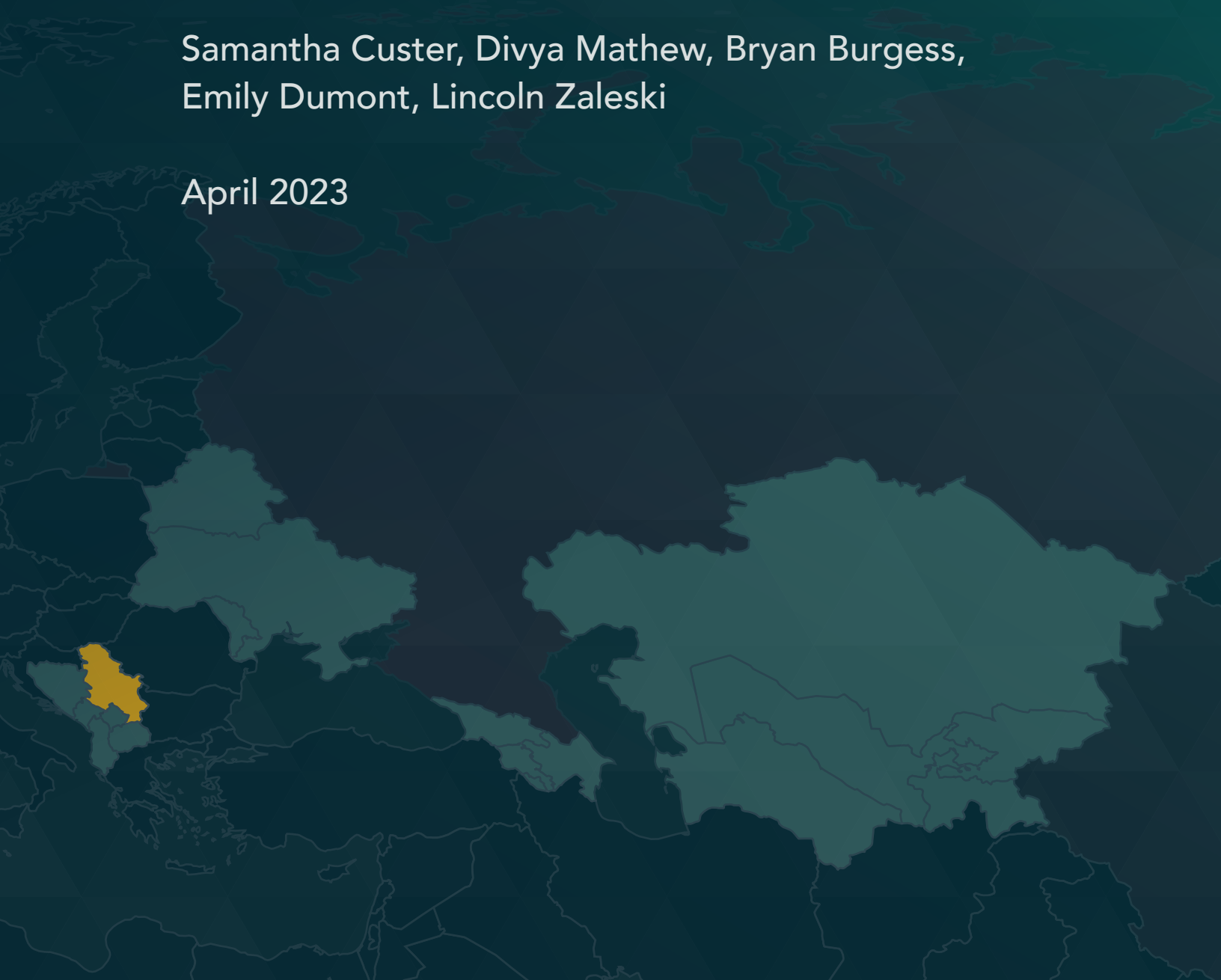
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

Serbia: Measuring civic space risk,
resilience, and Russian influence

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Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Serbia'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. Crucially, this report underscores that the Kremlin's influence operations were not limited to Ukraine alone and illustrates its use of civilian tools in Serbia 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 Serbia, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Serbian civic space actors were the targets of 299 restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021, including harassment or violence (90 percent), state-backed legal cases (6 percent) and restrictive legislation (4 percent). Twenty-six percent of cases were recorded in 2020, coinciding with mass protests against President Aleksandar Vucic's pandemic restrictions. Journalists were most frequently targeted, and the Serbian government was the primary initiator. The governments of Croatia and the United Arab Emirates were involved in three restrictions of Serbian journalists.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Few Serbians were interested in politics and participation in certain forms of political activity decreased from 2016 to 2019, alongside an uptick in citizens feeling that they do not care about government decisions at all. Serbians' membership in

voluntary organizations and rates of volunteerism trailed regional peers, depressed by low levels of confidence in institutions. Religious organizations are one of the few civic actors that Serbians trust and engage with, though NGOs are seen as relatively less corrupt than many institutions. Even as they expressed distrust of formal channels to affect change, Serbians demonstrated heightened levels of individual civic altruism in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as over 60 percent helped a stranger or gave to charity in 2021.

- Russian-backed Civic Space Projects: The Kremlin supported 19 Serbian entities via 19 civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 to August 2021. The most prominent themes of these relationship-building activities focused on promoting Russian-Serbian cooperation by highlighting shared history, engaging with youth, and emphasizing Eastern Orthodox religious ties between the two countries. The Kremlin routed its engagement in Serbia through 12 different channels, the most prolific being the Gorchakov Fund, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Embassy in Belgrade; however, this also included commercial actors such as Gazprom Neft and the Russian military company E.N.O.T. Corp.
- Russian State-run Media: Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Serbian civic actors 486 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Domestic actors, frequently political parties and media organizations, accounted for two-thirds of these mentions, largely neutral in tone. Pro-European parties and organizations garnered more negative coverage, while Eurosceptic parties, Orthodox churches, and pro-Russian institutions were covered more favorably. Serbia's accession to the EU was a recurring topic, alongside criticisms of the West, United States, and NATO.

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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 Serbia? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Serbia 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).¹ In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Serbia from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (see Table 1).²

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.³ 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 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 Serbian civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly

¹ 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.

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

³ 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.

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 Serbia 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 2015–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors ● 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 ● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (2010–2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics ● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) ● 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 ● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers) ● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space (January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country ● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country

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

- Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Serbia by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Serbia 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 Serbia 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 Serbia by Russian state-owned media

Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Serbia'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 Serbia

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 Serbia over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Serbians engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

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

Serbian civic space actors experienced 298 known restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (90 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (6 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (4 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).⁴

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Serbian Civic Space Actors

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	9	51	40	24	64	72	8	268
Restrictive Legislation	0	2	1	4	2	2	0	11
State-backed Legal Cases	0	3	5	3	5	3	0	19
Total	9	56	46	31	72	77	8	298

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

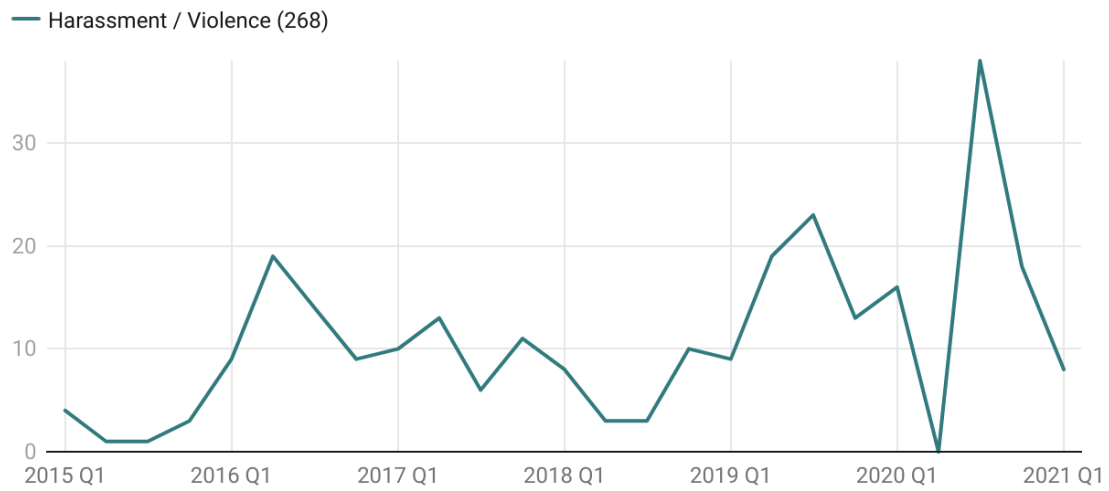
Instances of restrictions of Serbian civic space actors were unevenly distributed across the time period and spiked in 2019 and 2020, with eight restrictions recorded in the first quarter of 2021 (Figure 1). Twenty-six percent of cases were recorded in 2020 alone, as mass protests erupted against President Aleksandar Vucic’s increasingly autocratic rule and pandemic-related restrictions. Journalists and other members of the media were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, accounting for 62 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2).

⁴ 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.

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Serbia

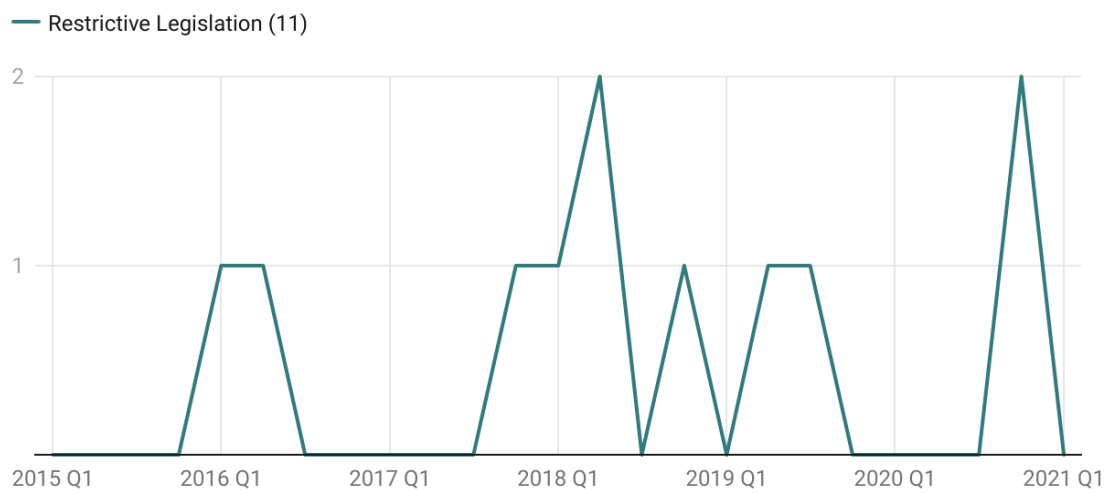
Number of Instances Recorded

Harassment/Violence



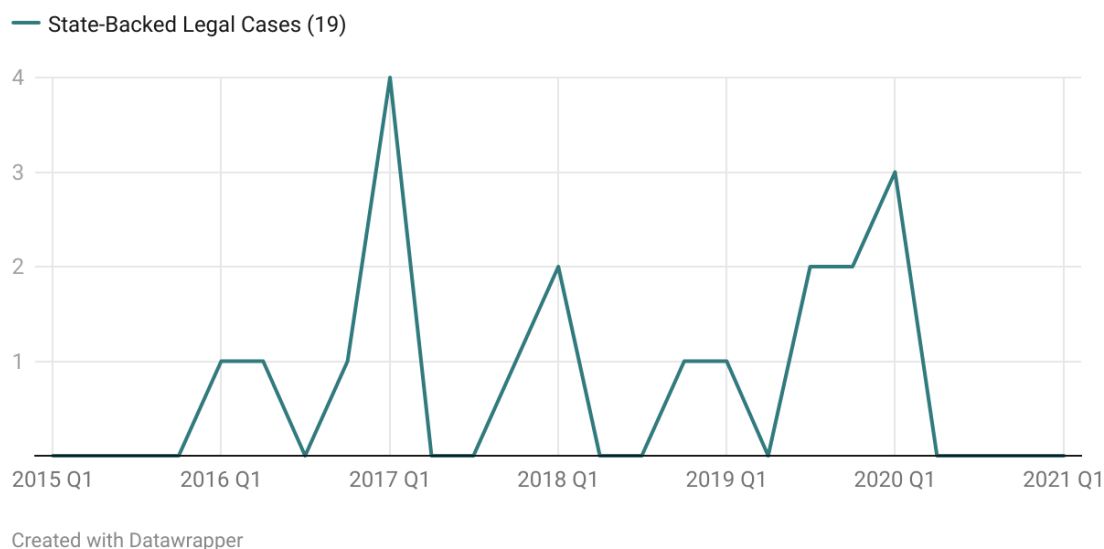
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Restrictive Legislation



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State-backed Legal Cases



Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Serbia

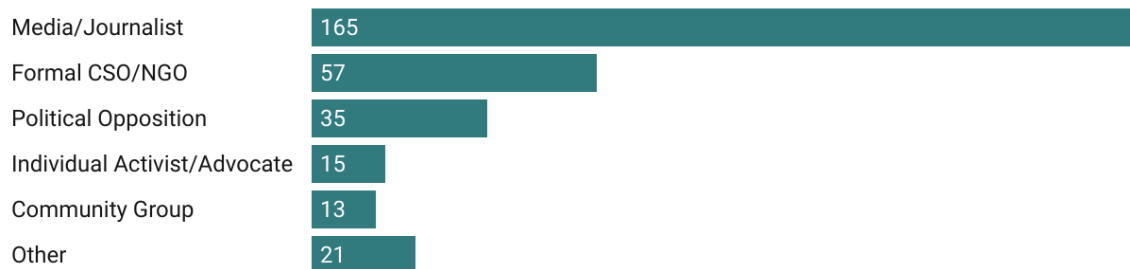
May 2015	PM Aleksandar Vucic says Serbia will add a US-backed pipeline to bring gas from Azerbaijan, reducing dependency on Russian gas.
July 2015	In Belgrade, leaders of former Balkan foes, Serbia and Bosnia, pledge to boost fragile post-war ties on the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre.
December 2015	Days after opening talks to join the EU, Serbian police step up an anti-corruption drive, arresting 80 on graft charges, including a former minister.
March 2016	Thousands march against NATO and the West, carrying banners praising Vladimir Putin, on the anniversary of NATO's 1999 intervention into Serbia's crackdown on Kosovo Albanian separatists.
April 2016	Thousands of opposition supporters protest against the landslide victory of incumbent pro-EU populists, which they argue was won by widespread vote rigging.
December 2016	Amidst growing tensions in the region, the Serbian government says that it will purchase six Russian MiG-29 combat jets and nine French Airbus light choppers.
February 2017	Several thousand joined renewed protests in Belgrade over a shady demolition last year in an area marked for a UAE-financed real estate project.
April 2017	PM Vucic wins the presidency for the pro-EU SNS Party. In June, Ana Brnabic was endorsed as Serbia's first female and openly gay PM.
October 2017	President Vucic promises to lead Serbia into the EU, stating that Russia's arming of the Serbian military with six MiG-29 jets doesn't affect that goal.
January 2018	In northern Kosovo, leading Serb politician, Oliver Ivanovic, is gunned down, raising ethnic tensions and suspending EU-mediated Kosovo-Serbia talks.
August 2018	Serbian authorities order the closure of a military-style youth camp run by Serbian and Russian veterans on Zlatibor mountain.

December 2018	Thousands of people protest for a fourth consecutive week over what they say has been a stifling of democratic freedoms under President Vucic.
April 2019	Thousands gather in Belgrade to protest against President Vucic. Riot police are deployed at the parliament to prevent the opposition from storming the building.
October 2019	Russia sends anti-aircraft missiles to joint air defense drills in Serbia. PM Brnabic signs a trade deal with the Eurasian Economic Union in Moscow, despite warnings from the EU.
March 2020	Campaign events for the April 26 parliamentary election are canceled in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
June 2020	Serbia holds parliamentary elections amid COVID-19 concerns. President Vucic's SNS Party is set for victory, facing little challenge from a divided opposition.
July 2020	Hundreds of protesters try to storm the parliament building in downtown Belgrade. 71 are detained after four days of anti-government protests that were sparked by a new COVID-19 lockdown.

Notes: The figure visualizes instances of civic space restrictions in Serbia 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 Serbia from January 2015 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Serbia and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Serbia

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



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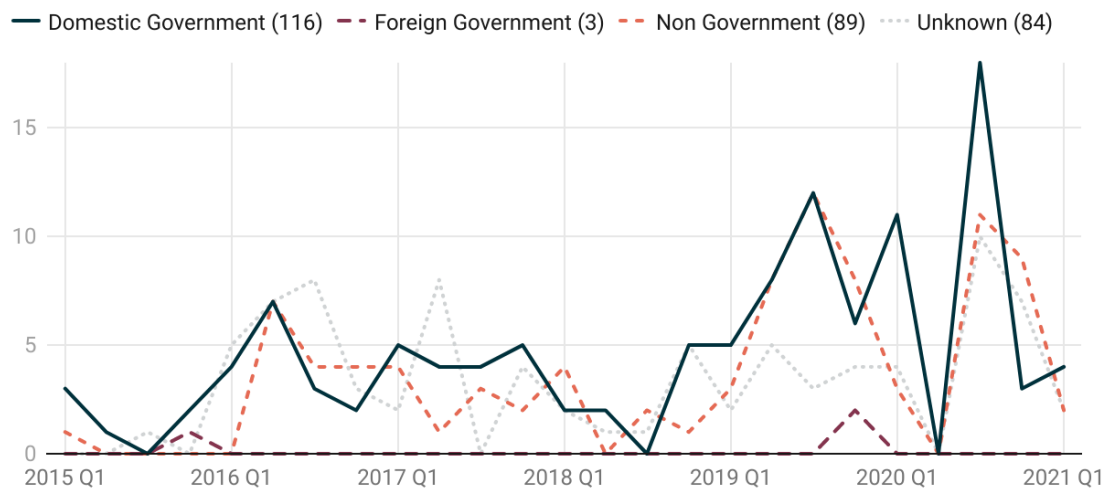
Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Serbia, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor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

The Serbian government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 116 recorded mentions. The police were less

frequently the channel of restrictions of civic space actors, instead, politicians and bureaucrats were more often the initiators of hostility including verbal attacks and threats (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 89 restrictions and there were many incidents involving unidentified assailants (84 mentions). By virtue of the way that the state-backed legal cases indicator was defined, the initiators 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 3. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Serbia 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 Serbia, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Serbia and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

There were three recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors during this period involving foreign governments:

- In October 2015, along the border between Croatia and Serbia, AFP photographer, Andrej Isakovic, had his camera and equipment confiscated by Croatian police. Media reports claimed that Isakovic was

thrown in the mud and his equipment was thrown over the border into Croatia, where he could not get to it. This incident is illustrative of the aggressive conditions journalists face in the Balkan states as well as of the animosity between the countries.

- In 2016 and 2017, there were protests in Serbia following demolitions in an area marked for a real estate development project financed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Some news agencies took a negative stance towards the Gulf country and the UAE government appeared to retaliate by subsequently harassing Serbian journalists from the critical outlets on more than one occasion. For example, N1 TV and Al Jazeera crews were denied entry to a ceremony attended by Serbian President Vucic in October 2019 marking the opening of the Abu Dhabi-made Citluk 1 wind farm in northern Serbia.⁵ The President's press office later confirmed that the decision on the ban was made by the UAE company and supported by UAE's ambassador to Serbia.
- In December 2019, Stevan Dojcinovic, a Serbian journalist and editor of the Crime and Corruption Research Network (KRIK), was deported from UAE where he was scheduled to participate in a UN conference on corruption. Dojcinovic, known for his work exposing links between Balkan businessmen and organized crime, was detained at the airport for being on a "blacklist" at the request of "another country."

Figure 4 breaks down the targets of restrictions by political ideology or affiliation in the following categories: pro-democracy, pro-Western, and anti-Kremlin.⁶ Pro-democracy organizations and activists were mentioned 84 times as targets of restriction during this period.⁷ Pro-Western organizations and activists were mentioned 121 times as targets of restrictions.⁸ There were 29 instances where

⁵ This denial of access was in violation of Serbia's Law on Public Information, which prohibits the discrimination of journalists on any grounds.

⁶ 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).

⁷ A target organization or individual was only tagged as pro-democratic if they were a member of the political opposition (i.e., thus actively promoting electoral competition) and/or explicitly involved in advancing electoral democracy, narrowly defined.

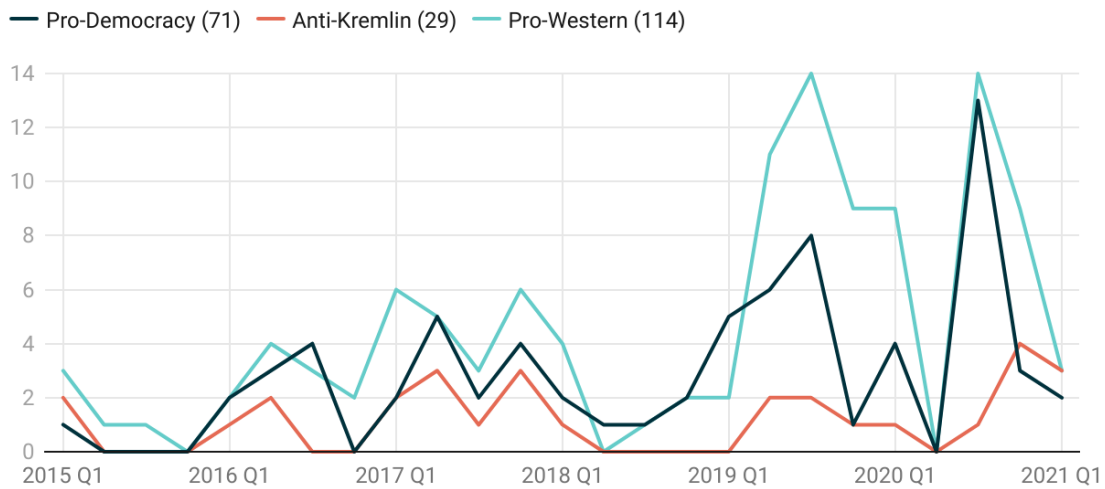
⁸ A tag of pro-Western was applied only when there was a clear and publicly identifiable linkage with the West by virtue of funding or political views that supported EU integration, for example.

we identified the target organizations or individuals to be explicitly anti-Kremlin in their public views.⁹

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 Serbia by Political or Ideological Affiliation

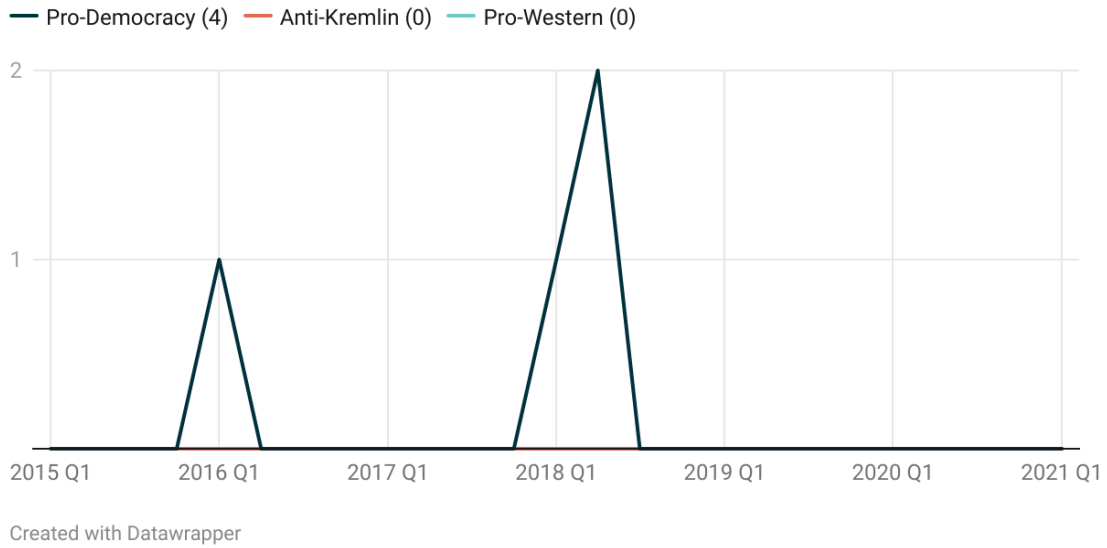
Number of Instances Recorded
Harassment / Violence



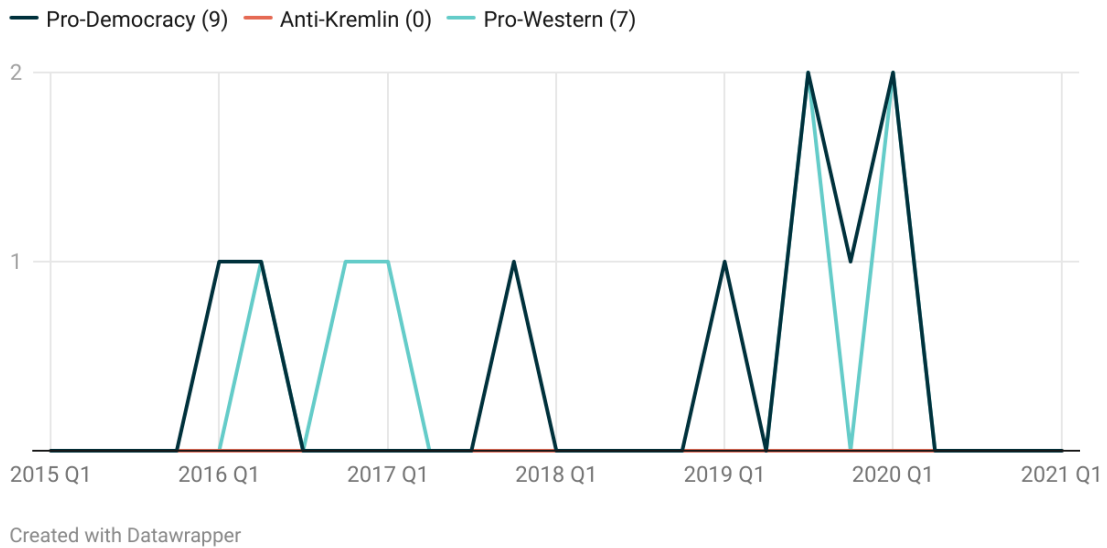
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⁹ The anti-Kremlin tag is only applied in instances where there is a clear connection to opposing actions of the Russian government writ large or involving an organization that explicitly positioned itself as anti-Kremlin in ideology.

Restrictive Legislation



State-backed Legal Cases



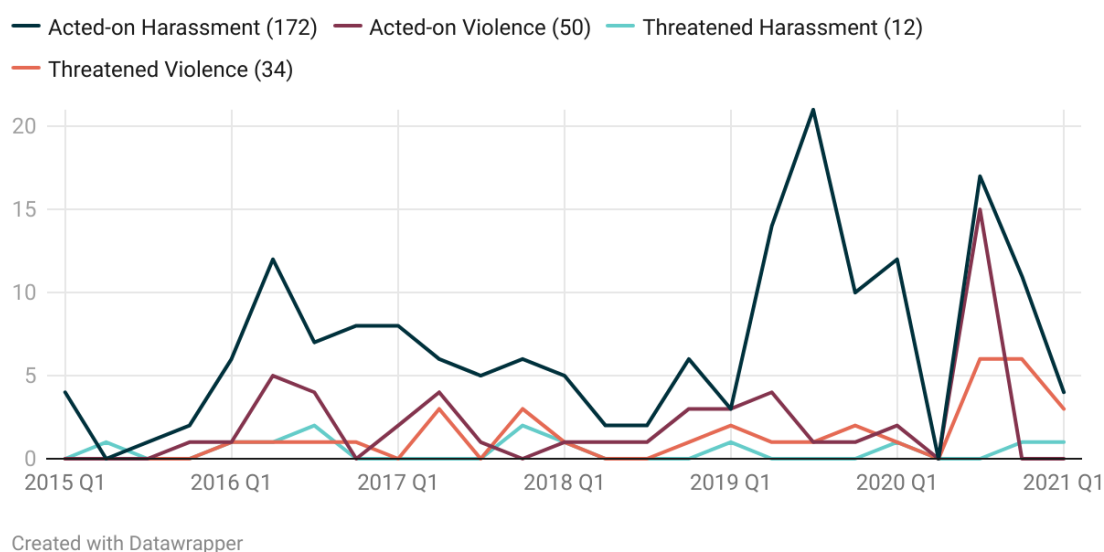
Notes: This figure visualizes the targets of recorded restrictions of any type initiated against civic space actors in Serbia, between January 2015 and March 2021. The targets were manually tagged by AidData staff to identify groups or individuals known to be "pro-democracy," "pro-Western," or "anti-Kremlin." Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Serbia 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 (12 threatened, 172 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (34 threatened, 50 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these restrictions (83 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However, since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 5). Of the 268 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (64 percent).

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

Number of Instances Recorded



Notes: This figure visualizes the instances of harassment/violence against civic space actors in Serbia categorized by type of harassment or violence and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Serbia 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 (11) in Serbia 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 Serbian government employed laws to restrict all three fundamental civic rights: (i) the freedom of expression, (ii) the freedom to protest peacefully, and (iii) the freedom of association. A few illustrative examples include:

- A highly controversial “strategic document” to regulate the media proposed establishing new state-run media through public-private partnerships in 2017. In late 2020, the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media restricted the broadcasting of reality shows before 11PM. Both these policies were seen, by critics, as the introduction of censorship.
- The amendments to the Law on Public Gatherings, enacted in January 2016, resulted in selective denial of permission to protest, particularly to political opposition groups.
- In early May 2019, a pro-government group started an online petition calling for the introduction of a new law on NGOs in Serbia. Modeled on Russia's notoriously burdensome "Foreign Agents Law" the petition called for further controls on human rights groups who access foreign funds to complete their work.

Civic space actors were the targets of 19 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2015 and March 2021. Members of the media were most frequently the defendants (Table 3), often charged in connection with their investigations into the misuse of government funds and corruption. As shown in Figure 6, charges in these cases were entirely directly (100 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). There were no indirect charges such as drug possession or bribery as was the case in some other countries in the region, often intended to discredit the reputations of civic space actors.

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

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021

Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	6
Political Opposition	5
Formal CSO/NGO	3
Individual Activist/Advocate	4
Other Community Group	0
Other	1

Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Serbia 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 Serbia and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

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

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



Notes: This figure shows the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Serbia, 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 Serbia 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 Serbia

The majority of Serbian citizens reported low interest in politics, and participation in certain forms of political activity decreased from 2016 to 2019 alongside an uptick in citizens saying they do not care about government decisions at all. Compared to its regional peers, Serbia's civic space appears much weaker, with lower rates of activity and membership in voluntary organizations. Despite a rise in charitable giving and individual assistance to strangers during the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens largely distrusted civic institutions and were unlikely to volunteer with an organization. Religious institutions were the exception, enjoying high rates of membership and trust among Serbians. In this section, we take a closer look at Serbian citizens' interest in politics and participation in political action. We also examine how Serbians' 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 Serbian Civic Space

In 2016, roughly half of Serbian respondents said that they did not engage in any public political activity, according to the Balkan Barometer survey (Figure 7), and a further 32 percent limited their political engagement to discussing issues with friends. Less than 5 percent of Serbians reported engaging in activities such as protests, public debates, or commenting on social media. By 2018, this low level of political participation declined further, largely driven by a decline in the percentage of respondents who said they discussed political issues with friends (-4 percentage points). The World Values Survey (WVS),¹⁰ conducted in Serbia in 2018, reinforces this theme of political apathy, as over 68 percent of Serbian respondents said they were disinterested in politics altogether (Figure 8).

The 2018 World Values Survey found slightly higher, though still meager, levels of engagement in a separate set of political activities than those included in the Balkan Barometers surveys. One-quarter of respondents reported having signed a petition, and 10 percent of Serbians had joined a boycott or demonstration

¹⁰ 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.

(Figure 9).¹¹ An additional 30 to 40 percent of respondents indicated that they may participate in each of these three activities in the future. Even strikes, in which fewer Serbians had previously taken part (6 percent), motivated 30 percent of respondents to say they would be open to considering joining such activities in future.¹²

Comparatively, Serbians' interest in politics trailed their regional peers¹³ (-5 percentage points) in 2018, but they were more likely (+1 to +9 percentage points) to have participated in petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, and strikes (Figure 10). However, the 2018 Balkan Barometer survey¹⁴ (Figure 7) found that Serbians were less likely than their regional counterparts to have joined in public debates, protests, and social media commentary (-5 percentage points) or to discuss political issues with friends (-3 percentage points). In fact, Serbians were more likely to not discuss politics at all (+13 percentage points).

¹¹ Differences between respondents who had joined protests (2018 Balkan Barometer) versus demonstrations (2018 World Values Survey) could be due to differences in survey questions and methods or a difference in how respondents interpreted "protest" versus "demonstration."

¹² Just under a quarter of respondents declared they would never sign a petition (22 percent), while many more would never participate in a boycott (39 percent), join a demonstration (40 percent), or engage in a strike (46 percent).

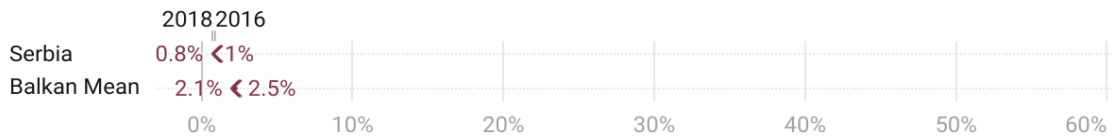
¹³ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine.

¹⁴ Including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia.

Figure 7. Political Action: Participation by Serbian Citizens versus Balkan Peers, 2016 and 2018

Percentage of Respondents

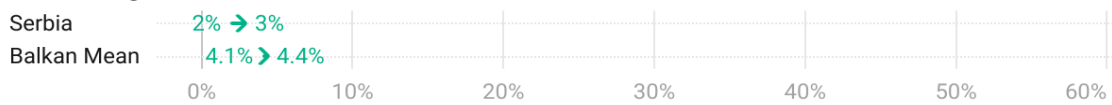
Public Debates



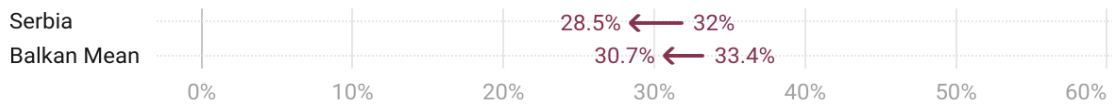
Protests



Commenting on Social Networks



Discussed with Friends



Did not Even Discuss



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Serbian respondents who reported past participation in each of five types of political action in 2016 and 2018, as compared to the Balkan averages.

Sources: Balkan Barometer 2016 and 2018.

Figure 8. Interest in Politics: Serbian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2018

Percentage of Respondents

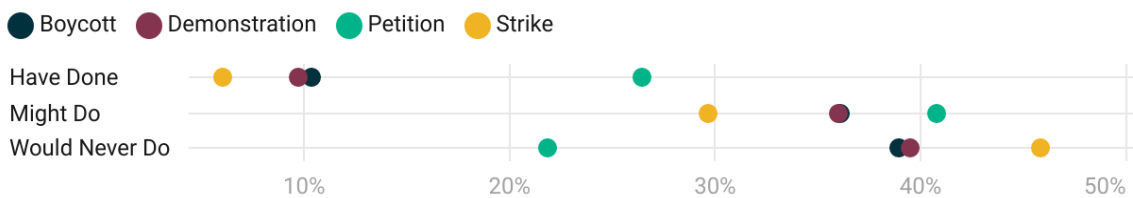


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Serbian respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2018, as compared to the regional average. Sources: The Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Political Action: Serbian Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2018

Percentage of Respondents

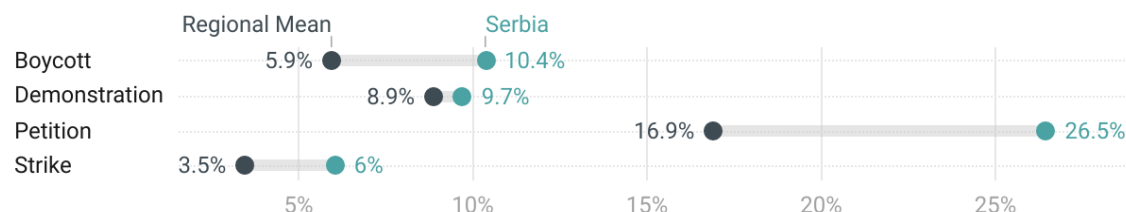


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of respondents who reported past participation in four types of political action—petition, boycott, demonstration, and strike—and their future willingness to do so. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey 2017-2021.

Figure 10. Political Action: Participation by Serbian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2018

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Serbian respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action as compared to the regional average in 2018. Sources: The Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Serbian respondents in 2018 were about as likely as their peers across the E&E region to be members of voluntary organizations (Table 4), except for labor unions (-5 percentage points), churches or religious organizations (+4 percentage points), and sport associations (+2 percentage points) (Figure 11). Some of this variation may reflect differing levels of confidence Serbians have in their institutions (Table 5). Fifty-six percent of Serbians were confident in their religious organizations and the armed forces,¹⁵ compared to fewer than one in six respondents who expressed confidence in the press (11 percent), labor unions (14 percent), or political parties (15 percent). Public distrust of political parties and the central government (parliament, the judiciary, and civil servants) was high, with a majority of Serbians (67-77 percent) viewing these institutions as corrupt.¹⁶

Serbians’ most common response in 2016 for why they were not actively involved in their country’s governance was that they could not influence government decisions (45 percent), according to the Balkan Barometer (Figure

¹⁵ Although Serbians’ views of their religious organizations and armed forces was more positive than their attitudes towards other institutions in their country, levels of confidence in both groups still trailed regional peers by 13 percentage points.

¹⁶ Curiously, nearly half of Serbian respondents (47 percent) were confident in the police, despite viewing this institution as highly corrupt (73 percent). This apparent contradiction may indicate that the positive views of the police likely rely on more than just perceptions of corruption.

12).¹⁷ Serbians were more pessimistic than regional peers about their ability to impact decisions (+9 percentage points), but less likely to not care about political issues (-5 percentage points). Pessimism about being able to influence decisions, and a lack of interest (+9 percentage points since 2016) were the most common factors depressing political activity in 2018. The share of Serbians believing they could not affect the political process still exceeded the regional mean (+3 percentage points) in 2018, but more noticeable was the increased number of respondents who did not care about political issues at all (+7 percentage points).

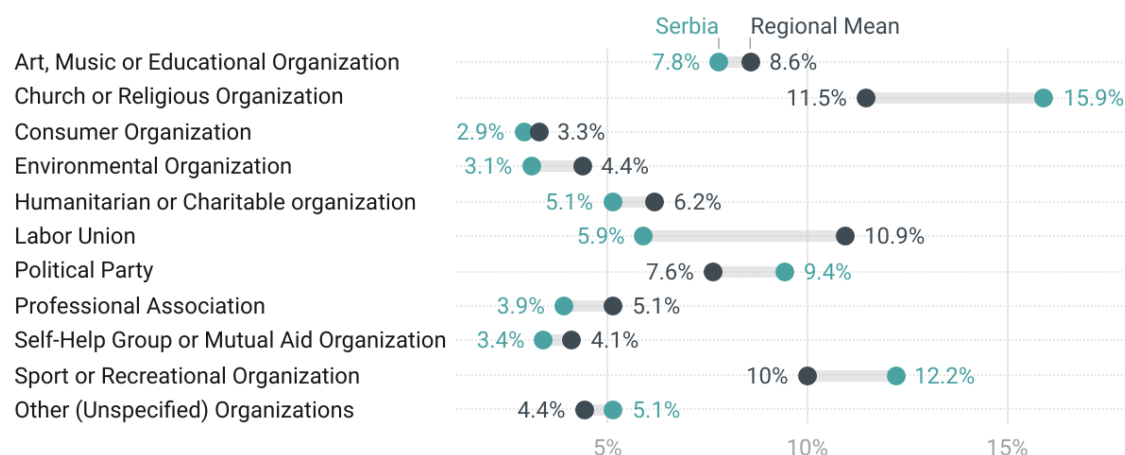
Table 4. Serbian Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type versus Regional Peers, 2018.

Voluntary Organization	Serbian Membership, 2018	Regional Mean Membership, 2018	Percentage Point Difference
Church or Religious Organization	16%	11%	+4
Sport or Recreational Organization	12%	10%	+2
Art, Music or Educational Organization	8%	9%	-1
Labor Union	6%	11%	-5
Political Party	9%	8%	+2
Environmental Organization	3%	4%	-1
Professional Association	4%	5%	-1
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	5%	6%	-1
Consumer Organization	3%	3%	0
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	3%	4%	-1

¹⁷ This was the view of 45 percent of respondents in 2016 and 36 percent in 2018; however, there were additional response options provided in 2018 which makes it less useful to derive meaning from any change among those who selected the "I cannot influence government decisions" option. The 2018 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 (36 percent of respondents).

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Serbian respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2018 versus regional peers. Rounded to nearest percent. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 11. Voluntary Organization Membership: Serbian citizens' membership versus Regional Peers, 2018



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for Serbia. "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.

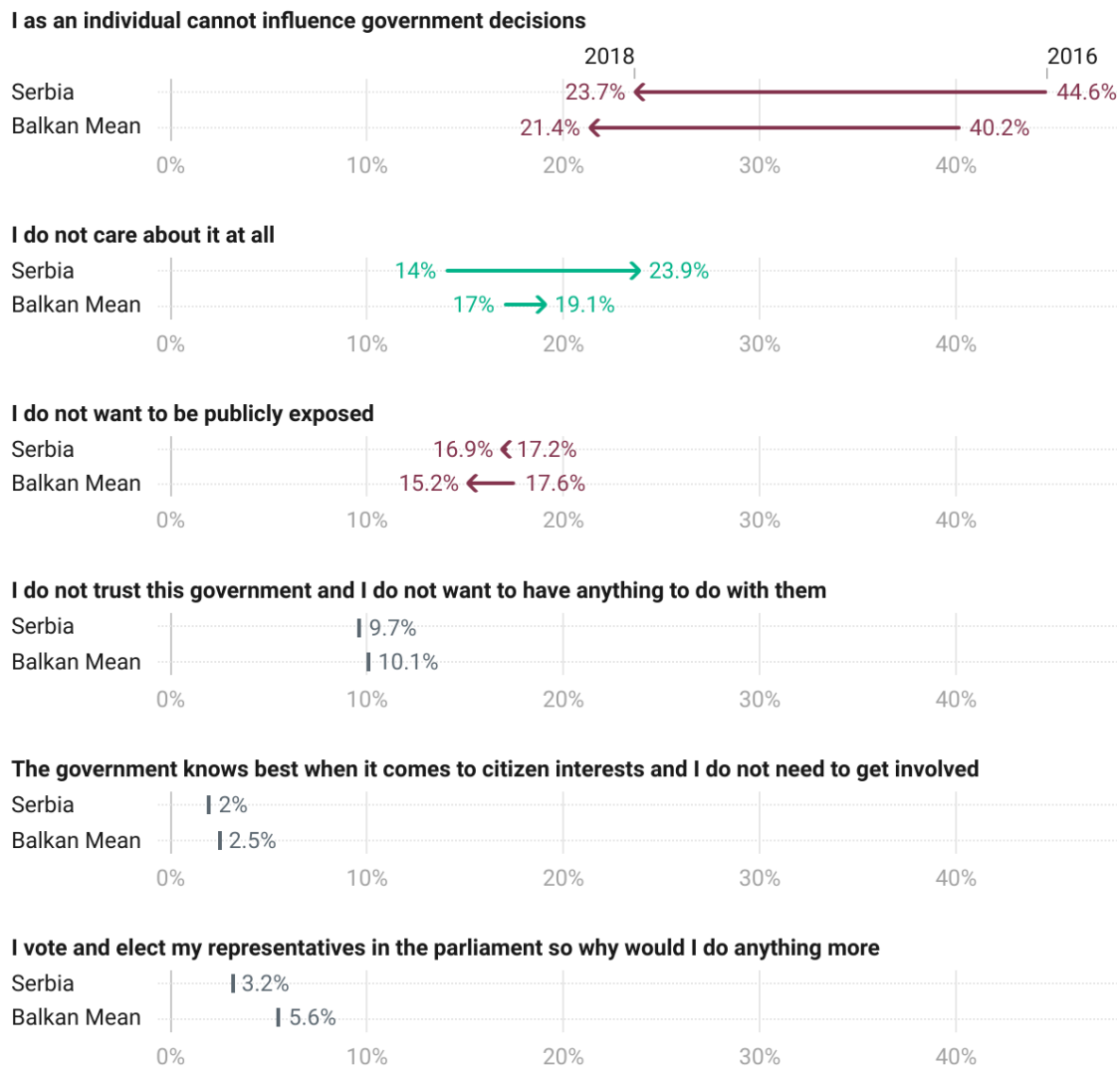
Table 5. Serbian Confidence in Key Institutions versus Regional Peers, 2018

Institution	Serbian confidence, 2018	Regional mean confidence, 2018	Percentage point difference
Churches	56%	68%	-13
Armed Forces	59%	71%	-13
Press	11%	34%	-23
Labor Unions	14%	31%	-17

Police	47%	57%	-9
Courts	29%	41%	-12
Government	29%	42%	-14
Political Parties	15%	26%	-11
Parliament	21%	36%	-15
Civil Service	29%	46%	-16
Environmental Organizations	26%	44%	-18

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Serbian 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, Serbia versus Balkan Peers, 2016 and 2018



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Serbian respondents' reported reasons for not engaging in political action as compared to the Balkan region averages in 2016 and 2018. Sources: Balkan Barometer 2016 and 2018.

2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Serbian citizens' attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2009 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 100.¹⁸ Overall, Serbia ranked among the bottom four E&E countries each year from 2009 to 2019 on the index, with its civic engagement on this measure consistently trailing the regional mean score of 30 by 10 percentage points since 2013. Serbia's performance appears to be positively correlated with the country's economy (using GDP as a proxy), suggesting that Serbians contributed more to their neighbors when they felt economically secure.¹⁹

Donating and helping strangers largely drove Serbia's performance on the index over the period with 22 percent of respondents on average giving to charity and 29 percent helping a stranger, with rates of volunteerism far weaker (6 percent). Comparatively, Serbia trailed its regional peers in rates of volunteering and helping strangers (-12 percentage points on average) but was relatively on par in charitable donations (-0.5 percentage points), due to a sharp uptick in the number of Serbians reporting they had donated money in 2014 (38 percent).

This heightened gift-giving in 2014 was recorded roughly four months after Serbia's parliamentary elections in March and pushed the country's Civic Engagement Index to its highest score for the decade. As respondents did not specify the charity recipients, it is unclear whether this upswell of giving was in direct connection to the election or motivated by religious or other societal factors. Regardless, this increased civic altruism was short-lived, as Serbia's Civic Engagement Index scores plummeted again in 2015 and 2016, as Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) consolidated control and held another round of parliamentary elections. It is possible that the 2014 mandate Serbian voters gave to the SNS brought in a brief period of civic optimism, before Vucic's leadership began to erode freedom of the press and institute "opaque party financing methods."²⁰

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Serbia's overall Civic Engagement Index correlated with GDP (constant Serbian dinar) at 0.833**, p=0.003.

²⁰ https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2018_Final_SinglePage.pdf

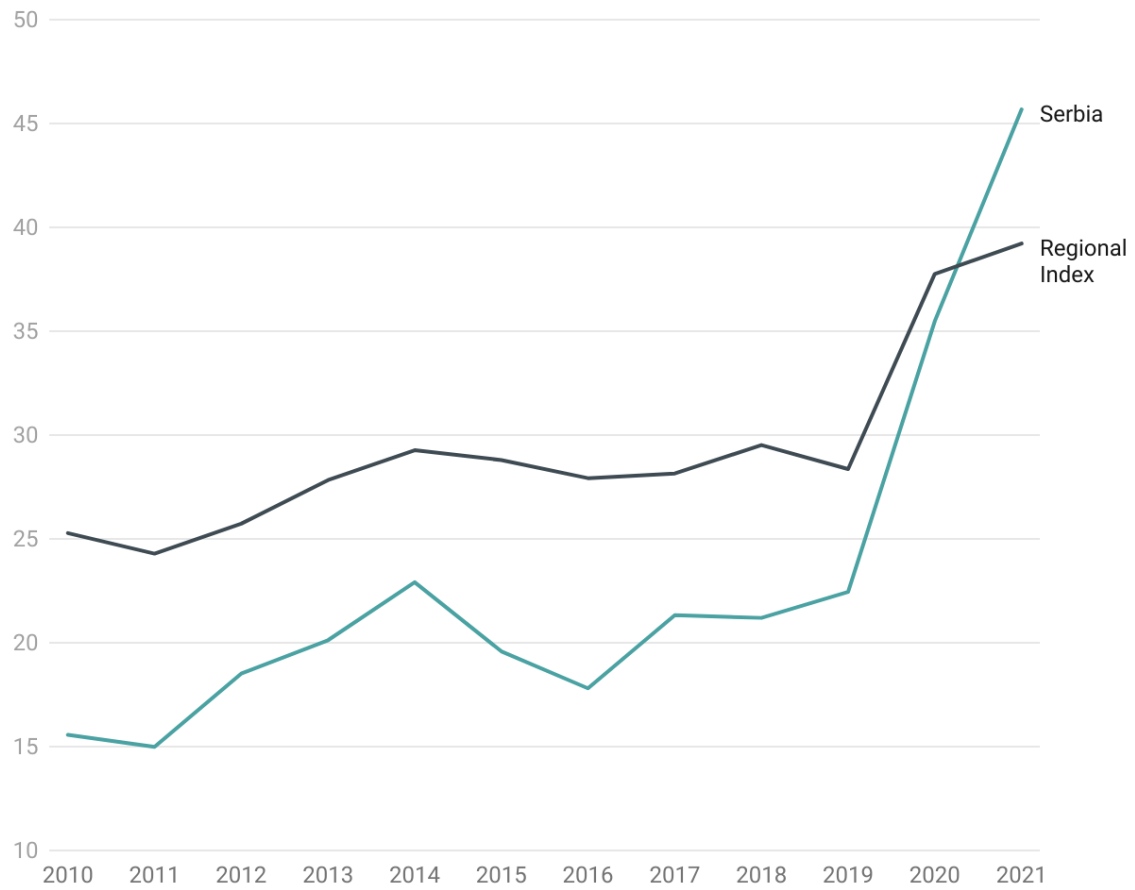
Later in the period, Serbia's 2020 index score improved by 13 points compared to the previous year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 13): 54 percent of Serbians helped a stranger and 47 percent donated to charity that year.²¹ This growth in civic engagement continued in 2021 (+6 points), surpassing the regional mean—45 to 39 points—for the first time. Over two-thirds of respondents in 2021 reported helping a stranger (68 percent), while 60 percent donated to charity. Volunteering still trailed (9 percent), but also saw improvements. This upward trend is consistent with improving civic engagement across the region and 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.

Taken together, low rates of volunteerism, limited willingness to discuss political matters, and meager faith in their ability to impact government decisions may highlight a critical challenge for Serbian civic space moving forward: the chronic perception that affecting change through formal institutional channels is either impossible or unlikely to produce meaningful results. Serbia's improved civic engagement in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, has largely been the result of individuals making charitable donations or helping strangers, rather than volunteering with organizations or engaging in political action. Religious organizations are one of the few civic actors that Serbians trust and engage with, though NGOs are seen as relatively less corrupt than many institutions.²² Given the importance of religion to Serbia's civic life, the Kremlin's support of the Orthodox Church is quite savvy. Meanwhile, other actors in Serbia, particularly the overtly political, face an uphill battle in improving participation and public trust.

²¹ That year, the regional mean index score improved by 10 points. Serbia still trailed its peers, but by a smaller margin (-2 index points).

²² Fifty-two percent of Serbians viewed NGOs as corrupt, according to the 2018 Balkan Barometer. Not a ringing endorsement, but less than the average of 66 percent for all institutions.

Figure 13. Civic Engagement Index: Serbia versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph shows how scores for Serbia 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, 2010-2021.

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

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 Serbia (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 Serbia's Civic Space

The Kremlin supported 19 known Serbian civic organizations via 19 civic space-relevant projects during the period of January 2015 to August 2021. Moscow prefers to directly engage and build relationships with individual civic actors, as opposed to investing in broader based institutional development which accounted for only 11 percent of all projects (Figure 14). The Russian government's interest in cultivating these relationships with Serbian civic actors peaked in 2016, but has otherwise remained fairly consistent, with multiple projects occurring per year, before a drop-off in 2020 and 2021, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Relationship-building activities focused on promoting Russian-Serbian cooperation by highlighting shared history, engaging with youth, and emphasizing Eastern Orthodox religious ties between the two countries.

Figure 14. Russian Projects Supporting Serbian Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support (17)	Institutional Development (2)
2015	2	1
2016	4	0
2017	2	0
2018	5	1
2019	3	0
2020	1	0
2021	0	0

Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic society actors or government regulators of this civic space between January 2015 and August 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

The Kremlin routed its engagement in Serbia through 12 different channels (Figure 15) including federal centers, state-owned corporations, and the Russian embassy in Belgrade. The stated missions of these Russian government entities include education and culture, public diplomacy, economic development, and security. Two entities were responsible for the Kremlin’s investments in institutional development: the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly and the Federal Protective Service (FSO). The FSO is notable in its capacity as President Putin’s personal security service.²³ Beyond institutional development, one of three Russian state organs were involved in each identified CSO Support project: the Gorchakov Fund (7 projects),²⁴ Rossotrudnichestvo (7 projects), and the Embassy in Belgrade (8 projects).

²³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/23/putin-coup-russian-regime/>

²⁴ Formally The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, founded in 2010 as a soft power instrument to promote Russian culture abroad and provide funding to CSOs/NGOs.

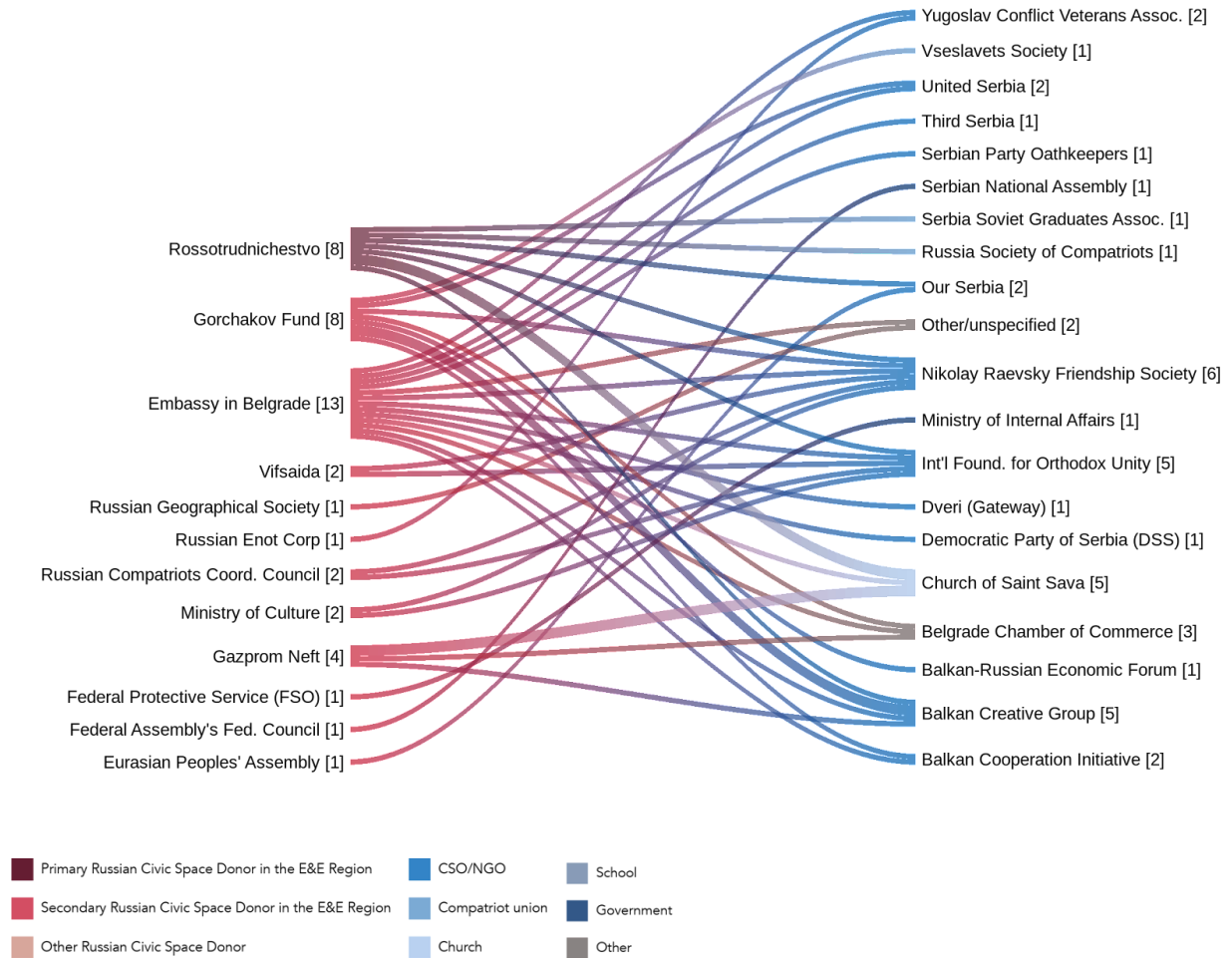
The Gorchakov Fund awarded grants to Serbian civil society organizations to organize seven conferences promoting Russian-Serbian cooperation and “youth leadership.” Although financial information is seldom available for Russia’s support to civic space actors, two of the Gorchakov Fund’s awards to the Balkans Creative Group were valued at 200,000 and 300,000 rubles in 2018. The Russian Embassy and Rossotrudnichestvo operated in a similar manner by partnering with Serbian organizations to host events celebrating shared Russian-Serbian history. A number of these events were supported in conjunction with the Gorchakov Fund, though the Embassy and Rossotrudnichestvo appeared to focus on cultural and religious activities rather than explicitly economic or political cooperation.

These three Russian organizations also collaborated with other Kremlin-affiliated entities to mobilize additional resources. Gazprom Neft, a subsidiary of Gazprom and majority shareholder of Naftna Industrija Srbije, supported four projects: a Balkans Creative Group conference, “Russian Light”; a young experts’ roundtable on interdisciplinary education, youth policy, and international cooperation with the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce; and two donations to support the construction and interior decoration of the Church of Saint Sava, valued at 4 million and 10.5 million euros, respectively. The Kremlin’s ability to tap into the cash reserves of semi-private corporations, many times larger than the grants that Gorchakov typically provides to CSOs, is a powerful supplement to the funds distributed by its Embassies, the Gorchakov Fund, and Rossotrudnichestvo.

The Russian E.N.O.T. Corp, a private military company, is another example of a partnership between the Embassy and semi-private Russian entities. In 2018, with the support of the Russian embassy, the E.N.O.T. Corp co-organized a military-patriotic camp with the Association of Participants in Armed Conflicts on Former Yugoslav Territory. The camp saw youth as young as 12 participate in paramilitary drills and train in combat skills. The E.N.O.T. Corp previously trained combatants in the Donbas conflict and Syrian civil war, as well as operated youth military-patriotic camps in Belarus. The Serbia case is notable as the E.N.O.T. Corp worked with a veteran’s association, not a military or paramilitary group.

Figure 15. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Serbian Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civil society actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects such that thicker lines represent a larger volume of projects and thinner lines a smaller volume. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Serbia’s Civic Space

Russia supported a variety of actors in Serbian civic space including formal civil society organizations (CSOs), compatriot unions for the Russian diaspora in

Serbia,²⁵ Orthodox churches, and political parties. One-third of the Serbian recipient organizations worked in the education and culture sector (6 organizations), many with an emphasis on promoting shared Russian-Serbian history and increased cooperation. This includes the Balkan Creative Group (Balkan Initiative) which received a Gorchakov Fund grant to host the “Conference of young leaders of Russia and Serbia, dedicated to the 180th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries,” and the Society of Compatriots and Friends of Russia “Vseslavets,” which received a Gorchakov Grant for the conference “The Role of Russia as a Defender in the Balkans.”

On several occasions, the Kremlin sought to cultivate its relationship with legislative and executive branch actors in a position to influence the enabling environment for Serbian civic space. In 2015, the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly and delegations from the Serbian National Assembly exchanged two visits in May and December. Later, in March 2018, the Federal Protective Service of Russia (FSO) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia discussed a cooperation agreement to build upon training exercises where Serbian personnel went to Russia. However, these events did not appear to foster ongoing connectivity, as there are no further events connecting these actors.

Five Serbian political parties also received support from Russian actors, exceeding the Kremlin’s involvement in such engagement in most other E&E region countries.²⁶ The news portal Blic identified four parties—Dveri, The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), Oathkeepers, and Third Serbia—receiving Russian support to “media promotions, organize events, rallies, and gatherings,

²⁵ Russia has centered compatriot unions within their soft power toolkit since 2013, with these unions funded by Russian agencies and with the Embassy coordinating and approving membership. Through these groups, the Kremlin aims to “organise and coordinate the Russian diaspora living in foreign countries to support the objectives and interests of Russian foreign policy under the direction of Russian departments... to influence decisions taken in the host countries, by guiding the Russian-speaking population, and by using influence operations inherited from the KGB, and also by simply financing various activities.” Estonian Internal Security Service, 2013. pp. 5-6 <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

²⁶ In Armenia, the Kremlin partnered with three politically-oriented NGOs, but did not explicitly work with parties standing for local or national elections.

and provide political advice.”²⁷ Notably, leaders from each of the four groups deny directly receiving funds from Russia,²⁸ consistent with the Kremlin’s preference for supplying event support and organizational assistance elsewhere in the E&E region. Each party is right-wing and Eurosceptic, from the center-right DSS to the far-right Oathkeepers. A fifth political party, United Serbia, partnered with the Gorchakov Fund and Balkan Cooperation Initiative to host the Vlasina Youth Forum in 2016. Although it supports EU accession, United Serbia’s national-conservative ideology and leader’s history of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric aligns with the other right-wing parties receiving Russian support.²⁹ The Kremlin may have viewed these political stances as making United Serbia the easiest to extract from pro-EU electoral alliances.

Elsewhere in the E&E region, the Kremlin often folds religious elements into its cultural programming and collaborates with Orthodox religious organizations to make inroads and build positive associations with citizens. In Serbia, the ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church are even more established and centralized, underscored by the 14 million euros Russian actors donated to Serbia’s Church of Saint Sava. The Gorchakov Fund and Rossotrudnichestvo partnered with the Serbian branch of the International Public Fund for the Unity of Orthodox People,³⁰ along with the Ministry of Culture, and the Serbian NGO Russian-Serbian Friendship Society "Nikolay Raevsky" to host a children’s film festival, "The Days of Russian Children's Cinema in Serbia 'Tales of Childhood'."

Geographically, Russian-state overtures were primarily oriented towards Belgrade (Figure 16). Eleven of the 19 identified projects were directed to the

²⁷ Blic is among the most popular news sites in Serbia, and does not appear to have an exaggerated editorial bias or substantial credibility issues, according to the 2020 NATO Stratcom report "Tracking Russia’s Narrative in Western Balkan Media":
https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfs/?file=/cuploads/pfiles/tracking_russias_narratives_western_balkan_media_30-04_v4.pdf?page=36;

<https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/tacno-je-da-nam-rusi-pomazu-dss-dveri-zavetnici-i-treca-srbija-ade-protiv-srbije-u/g9kq9vf>

²⁸

<https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/tacno-je-da-nam-rusi-pomazu-dss-dveri-zavetnici-i-treca-srbija-ade-protiv-srbije-u/g9kq9vf>

²⁹ <http://www.jedinstvenasrbija.org.rs/o-nama>;

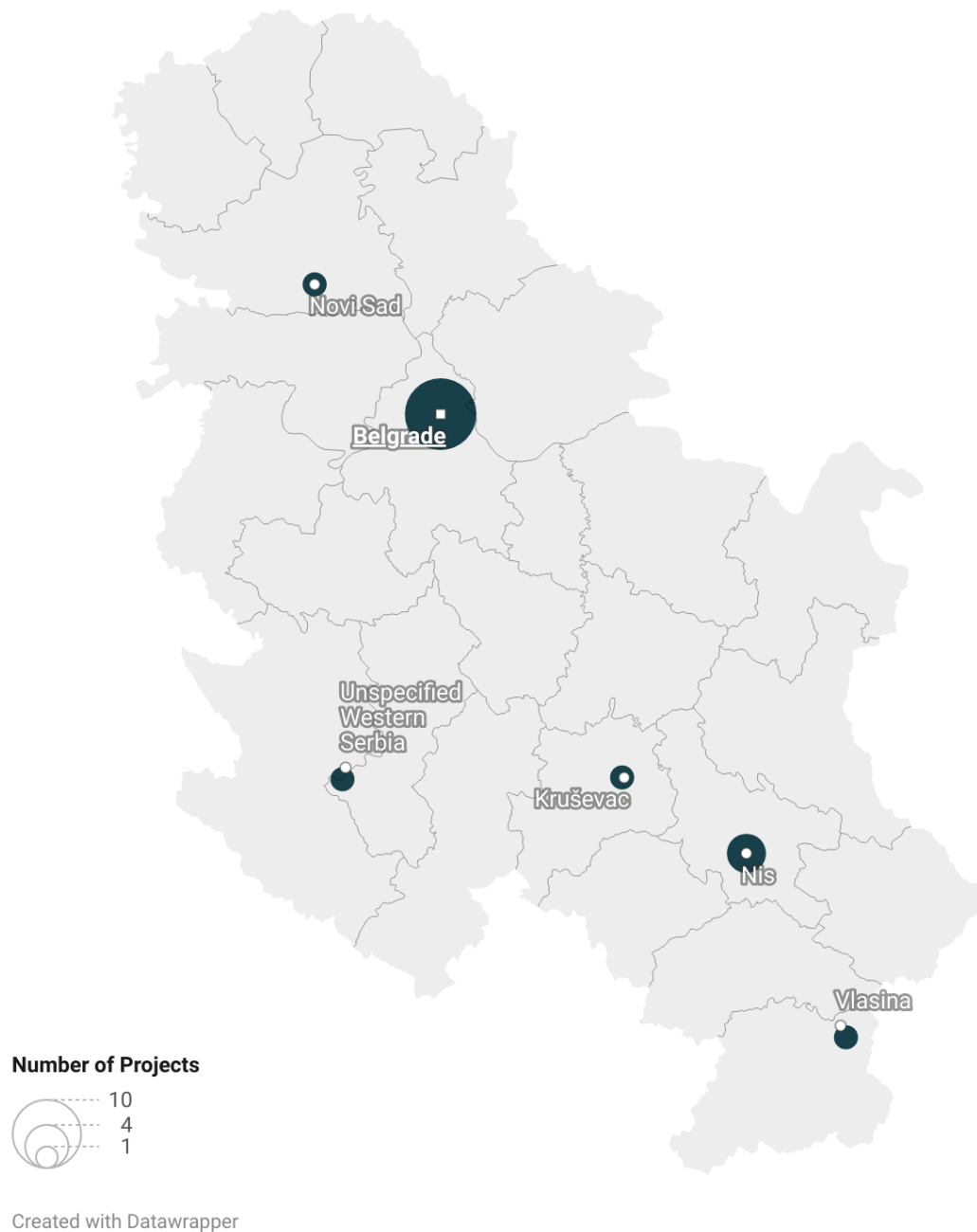
<https://balkaninsight.com/2016/08/12/serbia-lesbian-minister-promises-to-visit-homophobic-mp-08-12-2016>

³⁰ This organization's focus on moral and cultural education with an emphasis on Orthodox values falls slightly outside the scope of a typical religious congregation.

Serbian capital. Three conferences, organized in partnership with the Serbian branch of the International Public Fund for the Unity of Orthodox Peoples, the Russian-Serbian Friendship Society "Nikolay Raevsky," and the Balkan-Russian Economic Forum, took place in Nis between 2015 and 2018. One project involved a recipient from Novi Sad, a 2019 presentation of a Novi Sad University professor's book "Help from Russians and Russia to Serbs and Serbia" organized by the local Society of Compatriots "Russia." With the headquarters of Naftna Industrija Srbije in Novi Sad, it is surprising that all of Gazprom Neft's civic support activities occurred in Belgrade, though this further underscores the importance of the capital for civic actors.

Figure 16. Locations of Russian Support to Serbian Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Serbia. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Serbia's Civic Space

With a few notable exceptions, Russian support in Serbia appears to be weighted toward non-financial support rather than direct transfers of funding. Over 70 percent of the projects identified (12 projects) did not explicitly describe receiving grants. Instead, Russian actors supplied various forms of non-financial “support” such as training, technical assistance, and other in-kind contributions to its partners. For example, one of the main modes of Russian assistance was supporting local conferences and round tables, typically providing space, materials, or other logistical and technical support to local partners via organs such as Rossotrudnichestvo or the Gorchakov Fund.³¹

Interestingly, the Russian House in Belgrade—home to Rossotrudnichestvo’s offices in Serbia—is one of the older Russian centers abroad, having opened its doors in 1933, but it does not appear to be a primary venue for hosting Russian language and cultural events in Serbia. Elsewhere in the region, the offices of the local Rossotrudnichestvo branch serve as an important convening space for most Russian engagement with local partner organizations. However, activities in Serbia appear to be far more diffuse, taking place around the country and in spaces arranged by Serbian partners rather than Russian actors.

Nearly half of the Kremlin’s civic space support activities (8 projects) were designed with youth as the target audience. These ranged from fairly benign screenings of children's movies and roundtables of “young specialists” to the more troubling paramilitary youth camp supported by the E.N.O.T. Corp. Kremlin-affiliated actors have directed their activities toward youth elsewhere, but almost always with a narrower selection of activities than in Serbia. The only other countries where the Kremlin supported military education for youth were Belarus and in Moldova.³²

³¹ Several examples have already been discussed in this profile, including the Gorchakov Fund’s grants to two local CSOs and one compatriot union: Balkan Creative Group (Balkan Initiative), Balkan-Russian Economic Forum, and the Society of Compatriots and Friends of Russia “Vseslavets.” These grants went to support conferences on Balkan-Russian history and economic cooperation, including a “Conference of young leaders of Russia and Serbia, dedicated to the 180th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries.”

³² In Belarus, this included the Orthodox Church’s support of military-patriotic boot camps for Belarusian children. In Moldova, this included support to the Tiraspol Suvorov school in Moldova’s occupied territory of Transnistria.

3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Serbian civic actors 486 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Roughly two-thirds of these mentions (336 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining one-third (150 instances) focused on foreign and intergovernmental actors operating in Serbia's civic space. Russian state media covered a variety of civic actors, mentioning 123 organizations by name and 38 informal groups. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Serbian citizens, we also analyzed 1181 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with Serbia: 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 Serbian audiences.

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

The majority (69 percent) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Serbia's civic space referred to specific groups by name. The 60 named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types, ranging from political parties to civil society organizations to media outlets. Political parties are the most frequently mentioned domestic organization type (127 mentions), followed by media organizations (60 mentions). The high number of political party mentions is driven by two political parties: the Dveri Movement (53 mentions) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (23 mentions), with the two parties' joint bloc, the Patriotic Bloc, receiving 13 mentions (Table 6).

Russian state media mentions of specific Serbian civic space actors were most often neutral (91 percent) in tone. Positive (12 instances, 5 percent) and negative (9 instances, 4 percent) mentions were fairly evenly distributed. These non-neutral sentiments, while relatively few in number, still lend themselves to some conclusions about Russian state media coverage of domestic Serbian civic groups. Consistent with other E&E countries, pro-European parties and

organizations attracted more negative coverage from Russian state media. The ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) received six total mentions, half of which were negative. The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS), a pro-European think tank in Belgrade, was one of only two domestic organizations to attract "extremely negative" media coverage from Russia. A July 2020 TASS article, denigrated the organization saying, "Although making absurd, ungrounded allegations against Russia is not a rarity for the CEAS, it is still surprising how distorted the perception of reality could be in the 'experts' who managed to find a 'Russian trace' in riots in Serbia."

The Kremlin's use of state-run media to promote Orthodox Christian institutions and pro-Russian institutions was also apparent in the groups that attracted positive coverage in Serbia. The Serbian Orthodox Church was the sole named domestic civic actor receiving an "extremely positive" mention. A 2019 TASS article stated, "We are convinced that it is necessary to strictly respect legitimate rights of canonical Orthodox churches. Disregarding their opinion, encroaching on the historic realities, attempting to seize their properties, artificially creating conditions to split people of faith are fraught with serious consequences." Similarly, the pro-Russian Enough is Enough (DJB) political movement also attracted positive coverage, maintaining the trend of Russian media support of Eurosceptic actors.

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 103 more generalized references to domestic Serbian non-governmental organizations, protesters, opposition activists, and other informal groups during the same period. Seventy percent of these mentions were neutral, with the remaining portion fairly evenly split between positive (16 percent) and negative (14 percent) mentions. Similar to the dynamic described with named actors, informal organizations on the receiving end of negative sentiment from Kremlin-affiliated press were largely pro-European, while those attracting positive sentiment were largely pro-Russian.

Protesters in Serbia attracted both positive and negative sentiment depending on the nature of the protest. Anti-NATO protests were covered more favorably, described with phrases such as "expected," "thousands of protesters," and "peaceful." Notably, when pro-Russian protesters broke into the Serbian

president’s office and national television station, TASS tempered criticism, referring to them as “a small group,” while acknowledging that the actions were “unlawful.” The only 2 negative mentions of the Dveri Movement (a Eurosceptic, conservative, nationalist, and Serbian Orthodox political party) referred to the involvement of the party’s leader Bosko Obradovic, leading the aforementioned protest, but even this was fairly tame. One article stated, “Over the past four months, Serbia has been seeing peaceful rallies of the opposition. However, after an anti-government rally ended on March 16, a small group of protesters led by opposition leader Bosko Obradovic broke into the state TV headquarters in Belgrade.”

Table 6. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Serbia by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Actor	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Extremely Negative	Grand Total
Dveri Movement	1	50	2	0	53
Democratic Party of Serbia	1	21	1	0	23
Local Media		15	2	3	20
Protesters	2	11	2	2	17
Patriotic Bloc	0	13	0	0	13

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 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.

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

Russian state media dedicated the remaining mentions (150 instances) to external actors in Serbia’s civic space. TASS and Sputnik mentioned 17 intergovernmental organizations (33 mentions) and 44 foreign organizations (95

mentions) by name, as well as 17 general foreign actors (22 mentions). Interestingly, while many of the expected Western organizations were mentioned in the articles, Russian organizations were mentioned at a much higher rate than anticipated. This higher proportion of Russian actors in Serbia is illustrated in the top external mentions (Table 7).

Two clear highlights emerge from the top-mentioned external actors: intense anti-NATO sentiment and strong support of the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Nis (RSHC). Russian state media's coverage of NATO and other Western-backed international organizations has been predominantly negative across the entire Europe and Eurasia region, and Serbia is no exception. Sputnik plainly lays out Russian sentiment towards NATO's presence near Serbia in a February 2016 article, stating that "Russia views NATO's eastward expansion as a threat to its national security and a breach of the military bloc's post-Soviet pledge not to encroach on Russian borders."

Russian state media's positive reporting of RSHC is unique to Serbia. RSHC describes itself as a bilateral humanitarian organization, jointly funded by the Russian and Serbian governments. However, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Hoyt Yee testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee questioned the legitimacy of RSHC as a humanitarian organization in 2017, leading to a staunch defense by Russian state media to counter accusations that the RSHC was a front for espionage.³³ For example, TASS in a September 2017 article argued: "We can clearly see the anti-Russian hysteria in the Western countries, and the existence of the Russian center is considered to be proof Russia has a big influence on our region." The same article continues, quoting a Serbian politician saying, "I think, everyone in the world has heard about the humanitarian center, which consists of five Serbs, four Russians, and one dog. If it is a spy center, of which the West is so much afraid, then, I think, we have fallen so low."

³³

<https://www.voanews.com/a/united-states-sees-russia-humanitarian-center-serbia-spy-outpost/3902402.html>

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

External civic actor	Extremely Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Extremely Negative	Grand Total
Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Nis (RSHC)	1	9	11	0	0	21
NATO	0	0	1	3	5	9
Human Rights Watch	0	0	7	0	0	7
Kommersant	0	0	6	0	0	6
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	0	0	5	1	0	6

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 Serbia 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.

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

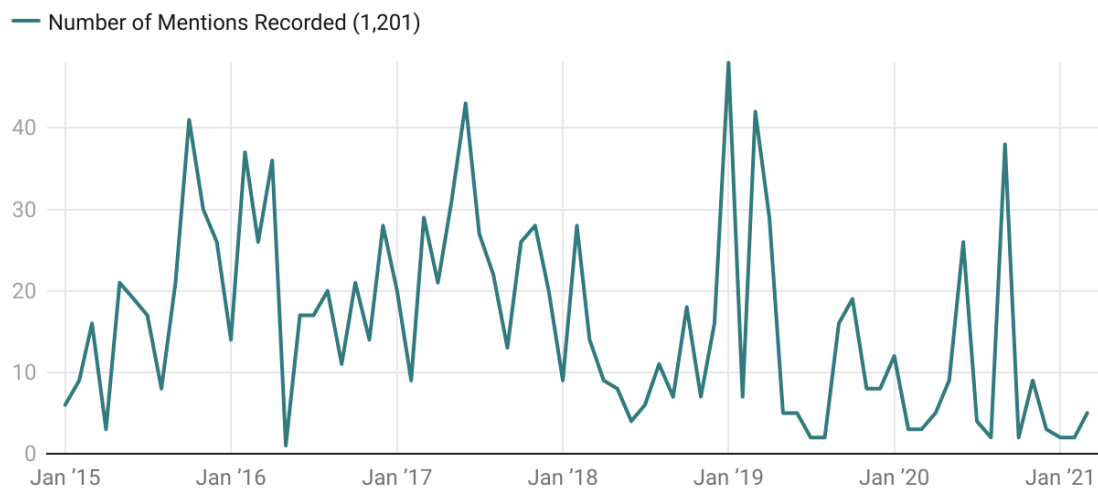
In many E&E countries, Russian state media mentions spike around major events and tend to show up in clusters. However, this is not the case with Serbia, as Russian media mentions were fairly consistent between January 2015 to March 2021. The largest spike occurred in October 2015, with 66 mentions of civic actors, driven by coverage of a Serbian delegation of political figures visiting Crimea to support the Russian annexation (Figure 17). Conspicuously missing is coverage of domestically important civic space events such as the 1 in 5 Million protests, which started late in 2018, and anti-government protests spurred by very tight COVID-related regulations in July 2020. Both events saw days of unrest and violence covered extensively by domestic and international outlets but were significantly downplayed in Russian state media reporting.

Analyzing Russian state media coverage of Serbia’s civic space offers two key takeaways. First, the Kremlin employs negative coverage in its state media

reporting to discredit Western-backed or pro-European organizations in Serbia (e.g., NATO, the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, the Serbian Progressive Party), much as it does elsewhere in the region. Second, Russian state media directs positive coverage towards pro-Russian or Russian-affiliated civic space actors, such as the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center, presenting them as attractive alternatives to pro-European organizations. These two trends are consistent across most of the E&E region but are especially pronounced in Serbia.

Figure 17. Russian State Media Mentions of Serbian Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Serbian 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.

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 Serbia’s citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction

with Serbia.³⁴ Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced all five keywords from January 2015 to March 2021 (Table 7). Russian state media mentioned the European Union (368369 instances), the United States (289291), NATO (305282 instances), the “West” (229 instances), and democracy (10 instances) with reference to Serbia during this period. Over half of these mentions (5152 percent) were negative, while an extremely small share was positive (4 5 percent).

Table 7. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive	Grand Total
NATO	9189	8485	124102	6	0	305306
European Union	48	108109	182	28	2	368369
United States	66	6970	141142	10	3	289291
Democracy	0	2	8	0	0	10
West	73	7778	7473	5	0	229

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 Serbia. 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 the European Union most frequently in reference to Serbia, roughly split between neutral (4959 percent) and negative (4243 percent) coverage. Serbia’s accession to the EU was the most common recurring topic. Neutral mentions simply noted that Serbia was moving toward joining the EU, though some included parallel criticisms of the West or United States. For example, TASS published quotes from Russian MP Alexey Pushkov claiming that the West uniquely targeted Serbia: “In spite of Serbia’s aspiration to join the

³⁴ These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West.

European Union, 'the West's attitude to the country is specific,' he said and the draft resolution condemning the genocide in Srebrenica confirmed it."³⁵ The negative mentions vary from claiming the EU is an "archaic political tool,"³⁶ to publishing quotes claiming that the EU is trying to destabilize the government,³⁷ and highlighting anti-EU protests.³⁸

Although Russian state media heavily emphasized Serbia in its coverage oriented towards Kosovo, likely an attempt to deepen ethnic divisions between the country's Serb and Albanian populations, there were fewer mentions of Kosovo in coverage oriented towards Serbia.³⁹ Notably, a high concentration of Kosovo mentions in Russian state media appeared in combination with two of our keywords—the EU or the U.S. These references often noted that Kosovo was a continuing issue in Serbia's EU accession or that the EU was a facilitator in the peace talks.⁴⁰ But many of these articles attacked the EU's role in supporting Kosovo or claimed that the bloc "deepened problems and conflicts in which the Serb side suffered the greatest damage."⁴¹

Russian mentions of the United States were also roughly split between negative (47 percent) and neutral (4945 percent) coverage. Many references to the U.S. were concurrent with mentions of the EU and NATO, criticizing the U.S. for overstepping its role in the region or attacking the U.S. for its historical role in bombing Serbia in 1999. Seeking to relitigate history, on the 20th anniversary of

³⁵ "UN SC draft resolution on Srebrenica aims to legalise restrictions of Yugoslavia - Russian MP." TASS. Published June 18, 2015.

³⁶ "Serbia Has No Plans to Join EU Anti-Russia Sanctions – Ambassador." Sputnik News Service. Published July 4, 2015.

³⁷ "Serbia PM Accuses EU of Trying to Silence Him, Backing Anti-Gov't Media." Sputnik News Service. Published January 11, 2015.

³⁸ "Serbian Radical Party Activists Burn EU, NATO Flags in Central Belgrade." Sputnik News Service. Published March 24, 2019.

³⁹ In Kosovo, 65 percent of all articles either referenced "Serbs," "Serbian," and "Serbia" in the title or in close proximity to one of our keywords; however, only 28 percent of articles in Serbia referenced "Kosovo" or "Kosovar."

⁴⁰ "Serbian, Kosovar Prime Ministers Could Meet in Brussels on Wednesday."

⁴¹ "Serbian President's Kosovo Partitioning Statement Contradicts Constitution – Opposition." Sputnik News Service. Published August 9, 2018.

the Kosovo war, Sputnik published an article claiming that the U.S. was backing jihadists and killing civilians indiscriminately.^{42,43}

Nevertheless, the U.S. also received the highest number of “extremely positive” mentions (3) of any of our keywords, though these were all quotes from various speeches. One article noted a “successful working visit” between the U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic.⁴⁴ Another quoted a Serbian member of parliament ahead of the 2020 U.S. presidential election saying that “Serbia has high hopes” that the next U.S. administration will make contributions that help Serbia’s economy.⁴⁵ The third mention was in a TASS article quoting Aleksander Vucic in 2017, noting that Serbia “reached the highest level of cooperation” with the United States, but that if Serbia joined NATO it would “create a rift in society that would last for decades.”⁴⁶ This article is an example of a larger trend of Kremlin’s news agencies pairing a positive mention of the U.S. or EU in an anti-NATO article, arguably to give some veneer of impartiality to its coverage.

NATO received the third-highest number of mentions in the sample (305282 mentions): 5762 percent were negative in tone and 4136 percent of references were neutral. Many NATO mentions referred to the alliance bombing Serbia in the 1990’s. Much like the references to Kosovo, Russian outlets likely mention NATO as a means to reopen divisions from the Balkan Wars, portray the U.S.-led alliance as Serbia’s foremost enemy, and Moscow as Belgrade’s stalwart ally. For example, a March 2021 article included the Russian Embassy in Belgrade statements that “the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia was stopped by joint efforts of Moscow and Belgrade.”⁴⁷ The facts of the bombing campaign and the negotiations that followed appear to be far less important to the Kremlin than

⁴² “Kosovo War at 20: How Britain and America Backed Jihadists Throughout Conflict.” Sputnik News Service. Published March 27, 2019.

⁴³ Notably, this was the only article in our sample that mentioned Milošević. This suggests that the Kremlin is wary of tying itself too closely to the former president– it likely finds it easier to make up new claims of war crimes than paper over the evidence against Milošević.

⁴⁴ “Improvement of Relations With U.S. Among Serbian Foreign Policy Priorities - Statement.” Sputnik News Service. Published August 2, 2018.

⁴⁵ “Serbia Wants Next U.S. President to Improve Economy, Politics in Balkans – Belgrade Lawmaker.” Sputnik News Service. Published November 3, 2020.

⁴⁶ “Prime minister says Serbia refrains from joining NATO to avoid rift in society.” TASS. Published May 22, 2017.

⁴⁷ “Belgrade, Moscow united efforts to stop 1999 NATO bombing - Russian embassy.” TASS. Published March 24, 2021.

the ability to promote the idea that Russia, and only Russia, can be the protector of Serbia against the NATO menace.

Similar to NATO, coverage of “the West” was most often negative (66 percent) or neutral (3234 percent). A recurring theme in Russian state media was Western nations, led by the U.S. and NATO, meddling in Serbia and continuing to punish Serbians unfairly.⁴⁸ One key difference between the references to the West and to NATO is that while references to NATO were often just criticizing the alliance, references to the West were comparatively more likely to mention the East or Russia as an alternative power. For example, in May 2015, Sputnik published remarks by Sanda Rašković Ivić that Serbia needed alternative media to the “discredited western news,” highlighting Russian media as a suitable replacement.⁴⁹ This is a subtle difference, however, as NATO and the West were frequently mentioned in the same article, and outside of Serbia, the Kremlin seems to use these terms almost interchangeably.

The term “democracy” received the fewest mentions (10 mentions) of the key words. Coverage was largely neutral (80 percent), with two negative mentions (20 percent). Neutral mentions often used the notion of “protecting democracy” to oppose Western influence in Serbia⁵⁰ or justify the Russian occupation of Crimea, with Sputnik quoting a Serbian delegation to Crimea that was “convinced that the referendum [on joining Russia] is the best way to protect democracy.”⁵¹ The two negative mentions were both centered on perceived U.S. overreach. One included a quote from a Serbian politician claiming that if the United States “really wanted to defend democracy and human rights, they would have started with Saudi Arabia.”⁵² The other negative mention highlighted protestors rejecting NATO and “American Democracy.”⁵³ Across

⁴⁸ “West Broke Yugoslavia Up and Continues Punishing Serbs - Analyst.” Sputnik News Service. Published October 3, 2018.

⁴⁹ “Serbia Needs Alternatives to Discredited Western Media News – Democratic Party of Serbia.” Sputnik News Service. Published May 19, 2015.

⁵⁰ “West should stop to think if it is really democratic - Serbia’s president.” TASS. Published October 13, 2016; “Russia will reject proposal on changing UN Kosovo Mission at Security Council - Lavrov.” TASS. Published April 17, 2019.

⁵¹ “Serbia’s Delegation to Crimea Sees No Signs of Occupation, Pressure - Democratic Party.” Sputnik News Service. Published October 30, 2015.

⁵² “Greater Serbia’ Architect Reveals Plans for Country’s Future.” Sputnik News Service. Published January 25, 2016.

⁵³ “Serbian activists interrupts U.S. ambassador’s lecture by shouting pro-Russia slogans.” TASS. Published February 2, 2018.

these mentions, the Kremlin paints the American investment in democratic state-building as unpopular, and a hypocritical imposition on Serbia.

4. Conclusion

The data and analysis in this report reinforces a sobering truth: Russia's appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable in Serbia and elsewhere across the E&E region. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see clearly how the Kremlin invested its media, money, and in-kind support to promote pro-Russian sentiment within Serbia and discredit voices wary of its regional ambitions.

The Kremlin was adept in deploying multiple tools of influence in mutually reinforcing ways to amplify the appeal of closer integration with Russia, raise doubts about the motives of the U.S., EU, and NATO, as well as legitimize its actions as necessary to protect the region's security from the disruptive forces of democracy. Cultural and language programming sought to bolster ties with Serbian youth, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Russian compatriots. Companies such as Gazprom Neft and E.N.O.T Corp joined with Russian government entities to crowd in additional resources for this charm offensive. In parallel, Russian state media promoted sympathetic pro-Kremlin parties and institutions, while criticizing pro-Western voices and Serbia's accession to the EU.

Taken together, 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.

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 three primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Serbia; (ii) RefWorld database of documents and news articles pertaining to human rights and interactions with civilian law enforcement in Serbia operated by UNHCR; and (iii) 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, 2015 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 Waves 2016 and 2018. 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 the European Values Study 2017 in Serbia was conducted in Serbian between November and December 2018 with a nationally

representative sample of 1499 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.⁵⁴ 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.”⁵⁵

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, Serbia, 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

⁵⁴ See

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

⁵⁵ European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssolar.70110>.

“Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance 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.⁵⁶

The fieldwork for the Balkan Barometer 2016 Survey in Serbia was conducted in Serbian 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.⁵⁷ The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data.

The fieldwork for the Balkan Barometer 2018 Survey in Serbia was conducted in Serbia 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

⁵⁶ For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

⁵⁷

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

questionnaire. Responses were weighted by demographic factors for both country-specific and regional demographic weights.⁵⁸ 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 2018, so the two waves’ values cannot be directly compared for Serbia but should be assessed relative to the regional mean.

Respondents to the Balkan Barometer 2018 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

⁵⁸

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 2018 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 2009-2021, 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. In Kosovo, the survey was conducted with between 1,000 and 1,080 respondents each year. The survey was conducted in Serbian each year and was also conducted in Montenegrin and Hungarian 2011.

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 donating 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. Serbia'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 Serbia. 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.