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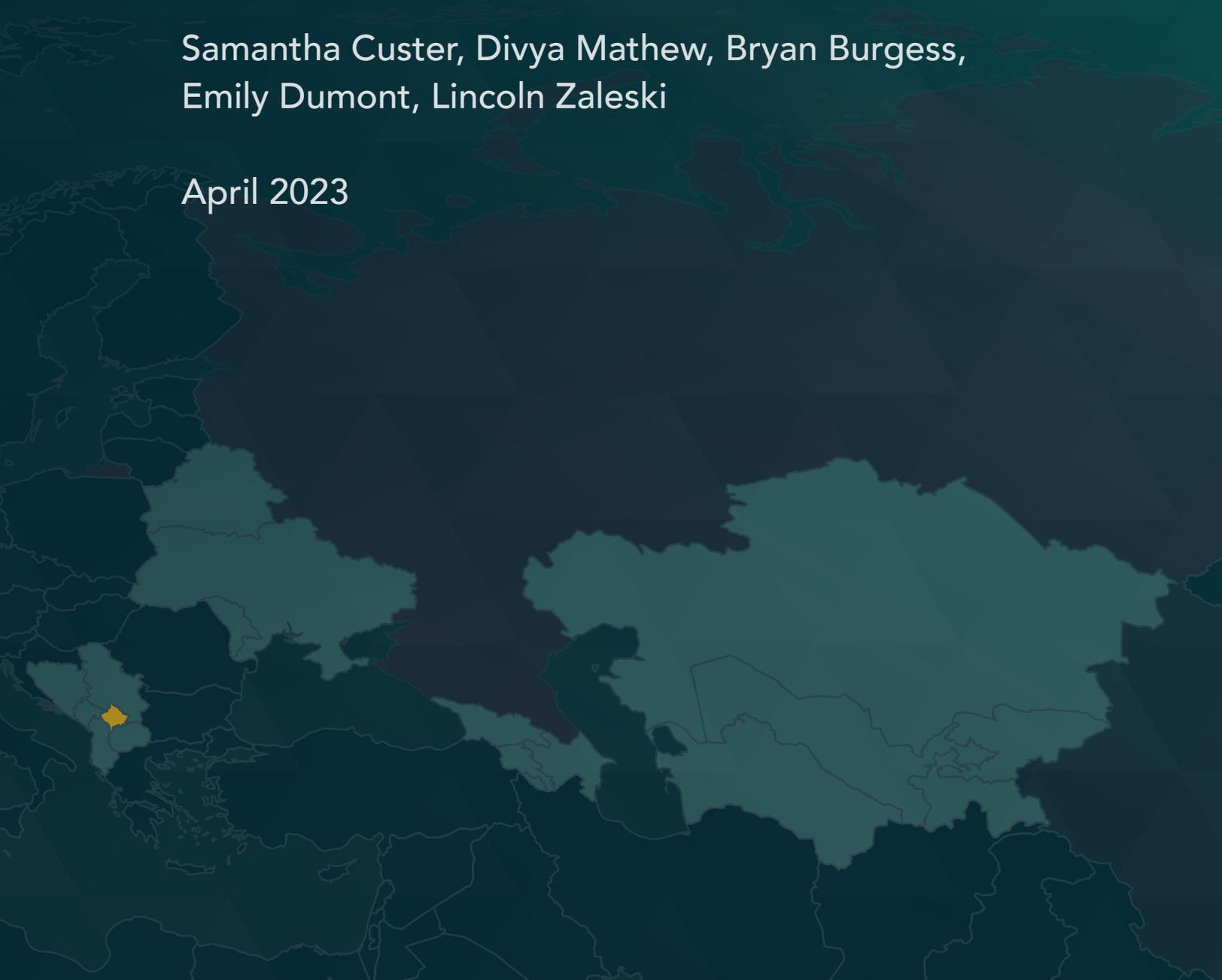
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

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

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Executive Summary

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

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

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Kosovar civic space actors were the targets of 97 restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021, including harassment or violence (89 percent), state-backed legal cases (5 percent) and restrictive legislation (6 percent). Forty-nine percent of restrictions were in 2017—coinciding with mass protests following the death of activist Astrit Dehari and the dissolution of parliament following a no-confidence motion—and 2020 in a string of apparently unrelated incidents. Journalists were most frequently targeted, and the Kosovar government was the primary initiator. One recorded instance of restriction involved Kosovo authorities working at the behest of the Turkish government to extradite six Turkish citizens purportedly associated with the Gulen movement.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Over the last decade, Kosovars' preferred mode of public political activity shifted away from protests to

discussions on social media, likely driven by fear of the repercussions of public exposure, which they identified as the most common reason why they did not try to influence government decision making. Kosovars held civil society in high esteem as a truthful monitor of the country's democratic processes, a view that more than doubled between 2010 and 2020. They far exceeded regional peers in their engagement in less political activities. In 2021, 59 percent of Kosovars donated to charity, 68 percent helped a stranger, and 10 percent volunteered.

- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** There were no identified instances of Russian support directed to civic space in Kosovo from January 2015 to August 2021. This absence of Kremlin support to Kosovar civil society actors is not out of step with its broader foreign policy, as Russia does not recognize Kosovo, nor does it have diplomatic relations with the country. This is distinct, however, from the Kremlin's revealed preference elsewhere in the region to channel support to pro-Russian voices in occupied territories to push for greater autonomy and stoke cleavages in countries prone to inter-ethnic conflict.
- **Russian State-run Media:** Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Kosovar civic actors 136 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Domestic actors, most frequently political parties and civil society organizations, accounted for forty-six percent of Russian media mentions, most of which were neutral in tone. The remaining mentions referred to external actors operating in Kosovo's civic space, such as international missions to Kosovo and pro-Russian Serbian political parties. Negative mentions of the EU, U.S., the West, and NATO reinforced familiar themes: recognition of Kosovo versus Belgrade's claims and Western nations' purported overreach in inciting regional instability.

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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 Kosovo? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Kosovo 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 Kosovo 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 Kosovar civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes

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.

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

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

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

Although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Kosovo 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 [Unavailable in Kosovo] ● 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 Kosovo by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Kosovo 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 Kosovo 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 Kosovo by Russian state-owned media

Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Kosovo’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 Kosovo

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

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

Kosovar civic space actors experienced 97 known restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (89 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (5 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (6 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 Kosovar Civic Space Actors

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	8	15	20	11	4	23	5	86
Restrictive Legislation	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	6
State-backed Legal Cases	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	5
Total	10	16	23	13	6	24	5	97

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

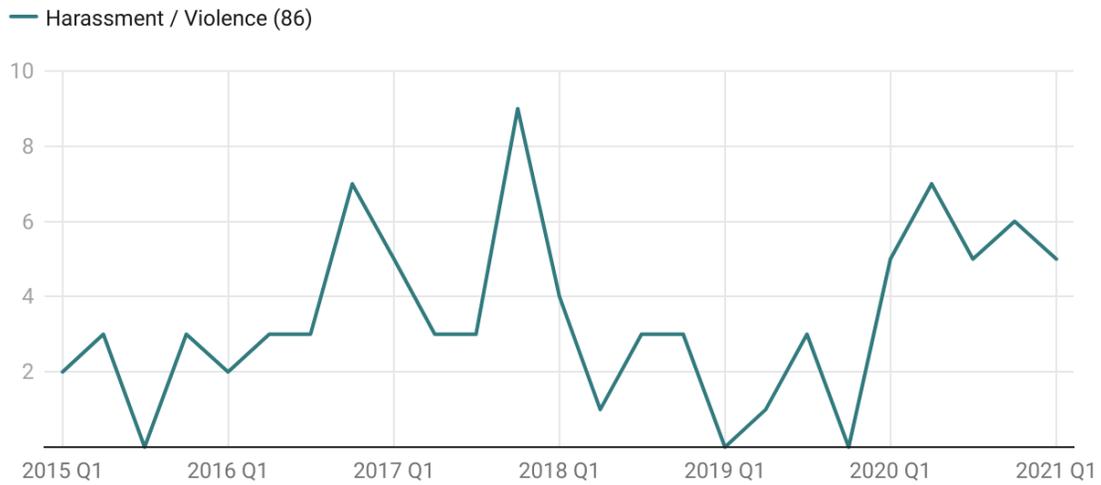
Instances of restrictions of Kosovar civic space actors were unevenly distributed across the time period and spiked in 2020 and 2017, with five restrictions recorded in the first quarter of 2021 (Figure 1). Forty-nine percent of cases were recorded in 2017 and 2020 alone. The first spike coincided with mass protests following the November 2016 death of Astrit Dehari, a 26-year-old jailed activist, and the May 2017 dissolution of the national parliament following a no-confidence motion. The spike in 2020 comprised apparently unrelated incidents, primarily targeting the media. Journalists were the most frequently identified targets of violence and harassment (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. Timeline of Events and Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Kosovo

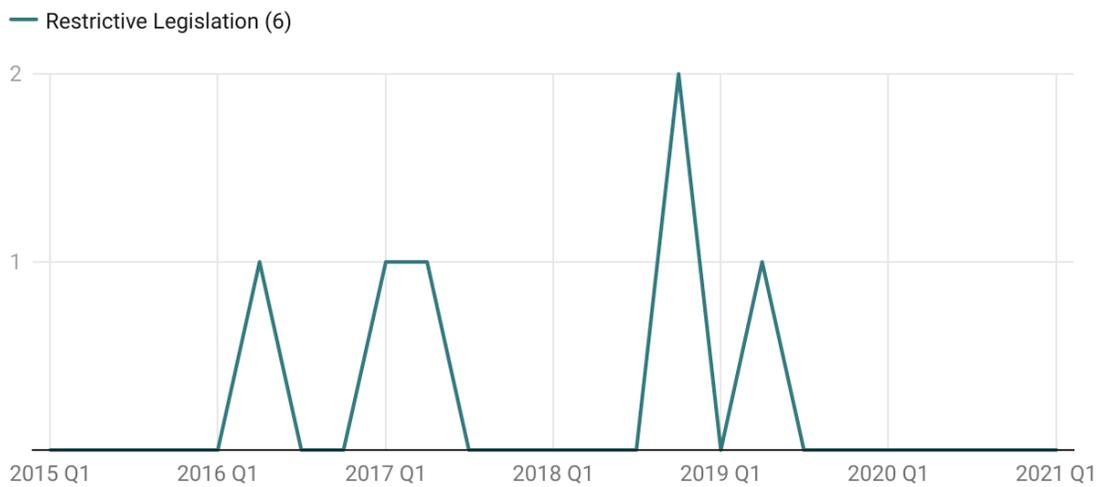
Number of Instances Recorded

Harassment/Violence



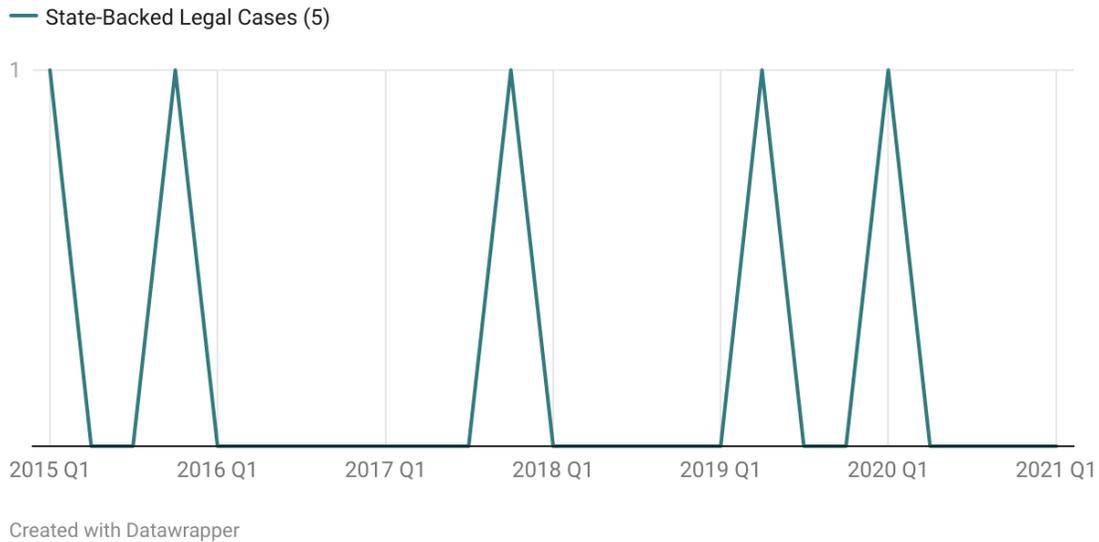
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Restrictive Legislation



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State-backed Legal Cases



Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Kosovo

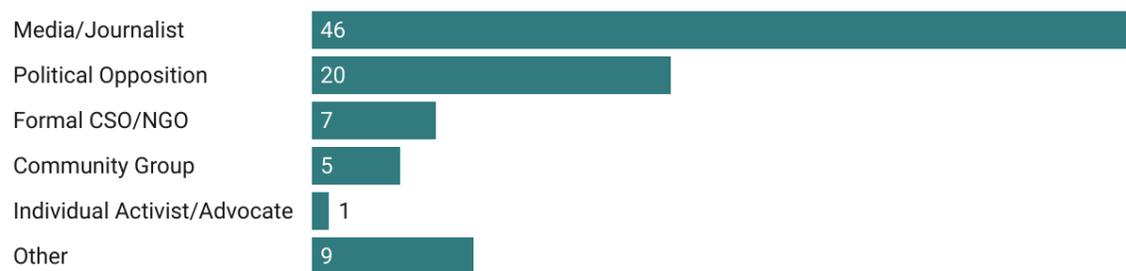
January 2015	Thousands of anti-government protesters demand the resignation of Serbian minister Aleksandar Jablanovic
October 2015	Opposition lawmakers disrupt Parliament's session to protest the government's recent EU-sponsored deal with Serbia
April 2016	Former premier Hashim Thaci is sworn in as president; opposition parties dispute and boycott his election
November 2016	Activist Astrit Dehari dies in jail; he and five fellow Vetevendosje party members had been detained since August
May 2017	President Thaci dissolves parliament just hours after the government loses a no-confidence vote 78-34
September 2017	PM Ramush Haradinaj forms a new government
January 2018	Leading Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic is gunned down, raising ethnic tensions and suspending EU-mediated talks between Kosovo and Serbia
December 2018	Kosovo asserts its statehood and passes laws to build an army, in a US-backed move that angers Serbia
July 2019	PM Haradinaj resigns for the second time after being summoned by the Specialist Prosecutor's Office at The Hague
October 2019	Parliamentary elections lead to a Vetevendosje and LDK coalition taking charge
March 2020	Parliament votes in favor of a no-confidence motion against the government
June 2020	Parliament elects Avdullah Hoti as PM by a narrow margin; he promises to normalize ties with Serbia in a bid for a UN seat

November 2020	Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci, a guerrilla leader during Kosovo's war for independence from Serbia in the late 1990s, resigns and will face charges for war crimes and crimes against humanity at a special court based in The Hague.
February 2021	Parliamentary elections are held. The Self-Determination Movement, or Vetevendosje, led by Albin Kurti won 58 seats in the 120-seat Parliament.

Notes: The figure visualizes instances of civic space restrictions in Kosovo 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 Kosovo from January 2015 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kosovo 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 Kosovo

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



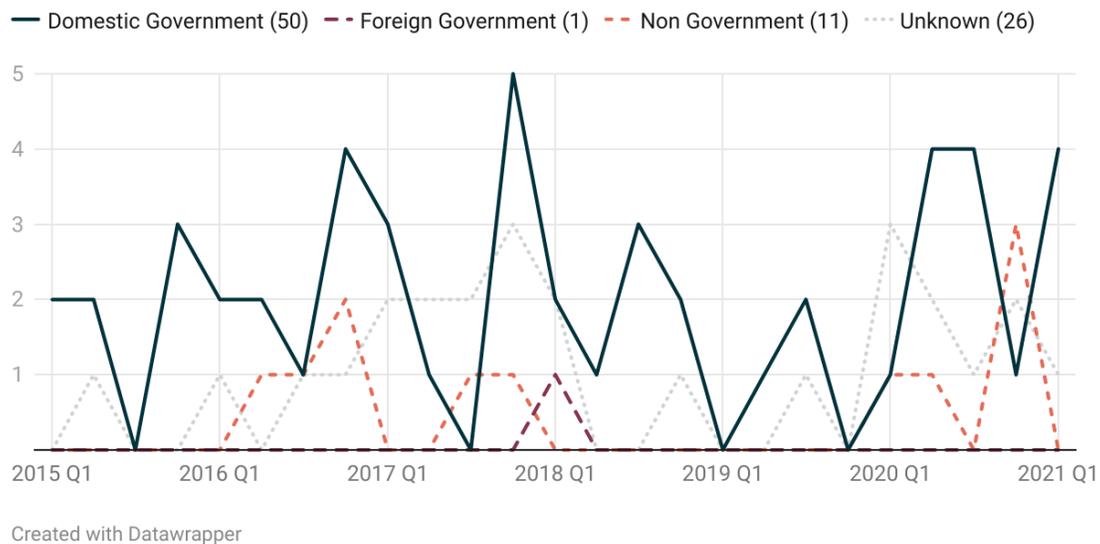
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Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Kosovo, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community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

The Kosovar government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 50 recorded mentions. The police were frequently the channel of restrictions of civic space actors, but politicians and bureaucrats were also often the initiators of hostility including verbal attacks and threats (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 11 restrictions and there were many incidents involving unidentified assailants (26 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 Kosovo by Initiator
Number of Instances Recorded



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

There was only one recorded instance of restrictions of civic space actors during this period involving a foreign government:

- In March 2018, six Turkish citizens were extradited from Kosovo to Turkey in connection with investigations into the Gulen movement. Kosovo's Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, dismissed officials after the incident, saying it was done without his knowledge. Turkish President, Recep Erdogan, said that the operation had been conducted by MIT (the Turkish National Intelligence Organization) in coordination with Kosovo intelligence.

Figure 4 breaks down the targets of restrictions by political ideology or affiliation in the following categories: pro-democracy, pro-Western, and anti-Kremlin.⁵ Pro-democracy organizations and activists were mentioned 24 times as targets of restriction during this period.⁶ Pro-Western organizations and activists were mentioned 25 times as targets of restrictions.⁷ There were 19 instances where we identified the target organizations or individuals to be explicitly anti-Kremlin in their public views.⁸

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.

⁵ 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).

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

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

Number of Instances Recorded
Harassment / Violence

Quarter	Pro-Democracy (20)	Anti-Kremlin (16)	Pro-Western (22)
2015, Q1	2	2	2
2015, Q2	1	0	0
2015, Q3	0	0	0
2015, Q4	3	3	3
2016, Q1	1	1	1
2016, Q2	0	0	0
2016, Q3	0	0	0
2016, Q4	2	2	2
2017, Q1	0	0	0
2017, Q2	2	2	2
2017, Q3	1	0	1
2017, Q4	2	2	2
2018, Q1	1	0	1
2018, Q2	0	0	0
2018, Q3	1	1	1
2018, Q4	0	0	0
2019, Q1	0	0	0
2019, Q2	0	0	0
2019, Q3	0	1	0
2019, Q4	0	0	0
2020, Q1	0	0	0
2020, Q2	0	0	1
2020, Q3	0	0	2
2020, Q4	2	2	2
2021, Q1	2	0	2

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Restrictive Legislation

Quarter	Pro-Democracy (1)	Anti-Kremlin (0)	Pro-Western (0)
2015 Q1	0	0	0
2015 Q2	0	0	0
2015 Q3	0	0	0
2015 Q4	0	0	0
2016 Q1	0	0	0
2016 Q2	0	0	0
2016 Q3	0	0	0
2016 Q4	0	0	0
2017 Q1	0	0	0
2017 Q2	0	0	0
2017 Q3	0	0	0
2017 Q4	0	0	0
2018 Q1	0	0	0
2018 Q2	0	0	0
2018 Q3	0	0	0
2018 Q4	0	0	0
2019 Q1	0	0	0
2019 Q2	1	0	0
2019 Q3	0	0	0
2019 Q4	0	0	0
2020 Q1	0	0	0
2020 Q2	0	0	0
2020 Q3	0	0	0
2020 Q4	0	0	0
2021 Q1	0	0	0

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State-backed Legal Cases

Quarter	Pro-Democracy (3)	Anti-Kremlin (3)	Pro-Western (3)
2015 Q1	1	1	1
2015 Q2	0	0	0
2015 Q3	0	0	0
2015 Q4	1	1	1
2016 Q1	0	0	0
2016 Q2	0	0	0
2016 Q3	0	0	0
2016 Q4	0	0	0
2017 Q1	0	0	0
2017 Q2	0	0	0
2017 Q3	0	0	0
2017 Q4	1	1	1
2018 Q1	0	0	0
2018 Q2	0	0	0
2018 Q3	0	0	0
2018 Q4	0	0	0
2019 Q1	0	0	0
2019 Q2	0	0	0
2019 Q3	0	0	0
2019 Q4	0	0	0
2020 Q1	0	0	0
2020 Q2	0	0	0
2020 Q3	0	0	0
2020 Q4	0	0	0
2021 Q1	0	0	0

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Notes: This figure visualizes the targets of recorded restrictions of any type initiated against civic space actors in Kosovo, 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 Kosovo and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

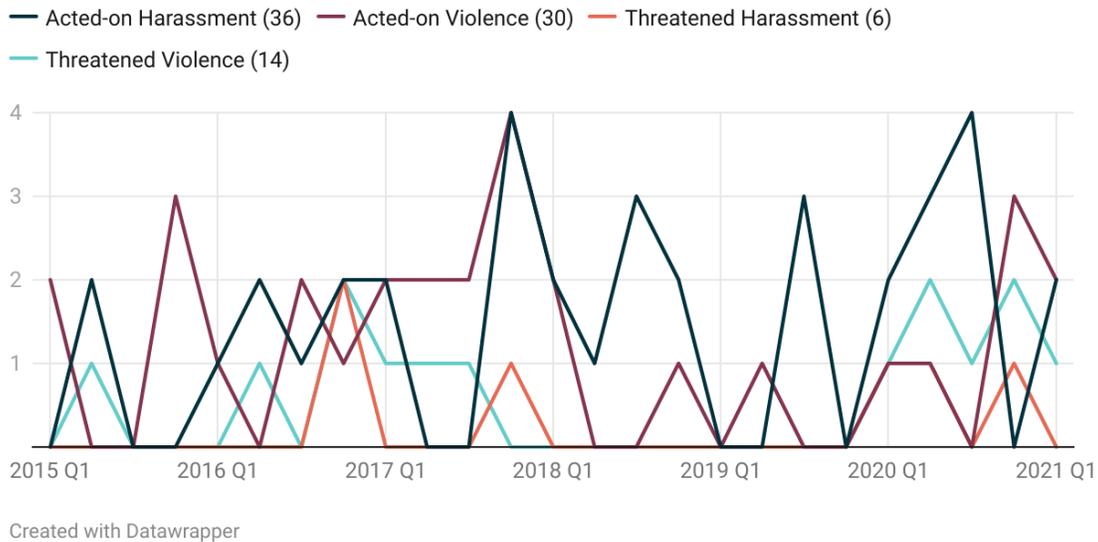
2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

The number of instances of harassment (6 threatened, 36 acted upon) were almost equal to episodes of outright physical harm (14 threatened, 30 acted upon) during the period. The majority of these restrictions (77 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 86 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (42 percent).

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

Number of Instances Recorded



Notes: This figure visualizes the instances of harassment/violence against civic space actors in Kosovo categorized by type of harassment or violence and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kosovo 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 (6) in Kosovo 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.

A few illustrative examples of the Government of Kosovo’s restrictive legislations include:

- Two proposed draft amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic, in April 2017, that would criminalize any insult to the state, symbols of the republic, or Kosovo’s constitutional bodies. The amendments made defamation punishable by fines and jail sentences. Civil society organizations spoke out against the proposed amendments, which would limit freedom of expression and curb the media’s ability to critically cover actions of politicians and government.
- The Law on Freedom of Association was drafted by the Government of Kosovo in December 2017 and under review in November 2018. Proposed amendments curtailed the freedom of association in a number of ways, including increasing the minimum number of persons required to establish associations from 3 to 7 and revoking tax and fiscal benefits for NGOs.

Civic space actors were the targets of 5 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2015 and March 2021. Members of the political opposition were most frequently the defendants (Table 3). 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 Kosovo

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021

Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	1
Political Opposition	2
Formal CSO/NGO	0
Individual Activist/Advocate	1
Other Community Group	0

Other	0
-------	---

Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Kosovo 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 Kosovo 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 Kosovo

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



Created with Datawrapper

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

Over the last decade, Kosovars' preferred mode of public political activity appeared to shift away from protests to discussions on social media. However, there is good reason to believe that this change in behavior is driven largely by fear of the repercussions of public exposure, as Kosovars identified this concern as the most common reason why they did not try to influence government

decision making.⁹ Even as fear has had a chilling effect on political participation, Kosovars hold civil society in high esteem as a truthful monitor of the country's democratic processes (a view that more than doubled between 2010 and 2020) and far exceeded their regional peers in their level of engagement in less political activities such as donating to charity and helping strangers for most of the decade. In this section, we take a closer look at Kosovars' interest in politics and participation in political action. We also examine how Kosovars' 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 Kosovar Civic Space

In 2016, 41 percent of Kosovars said they did not engage in any public political activity, according to the Balkan Barometer survey (Figure 7), and a further quarter of respondents limited their engagement to discussing issues with friends. Nevertheless, Kosovars reported a relatively higher rate of participation in protests (14 percent), social media commentary (8 percent), and public debates (7 percent) than their Balkan peers that year. By 2020, there was an uptick in Kosovars commenting on social networks (+4 percentage points) or discussing political issues with their friends (+8 percentage points); however, participation in protests dropped by 4 percentage points compared to 2016.

Kosovo's falling participation in protests was juxtaposed with rising rates of engagement in this activity throughout the rest of the Balkans. Although Kosovars were more likely than their regional peers to have protested in 2016 (+7 percentage points), they trailed their Balkans peers by 2020 (-1 percentage point).¹⁰ Other supplemental measures of engagement in political activity reinforce this picture of Kosovars' declining appetite to protest over the last decade. UNDP's Public Pulse surveys indicate a drop in Kosovars' willingness to join protests by 23 percentage points between November 2011 (59 percent) and November 2021 (36 percent), with the sharpest drop (-17 percentage points)

⁹ Unfortunately, the European Values Study/World Values Survey has not been conducted in Kosovo. This survey provides our key indicator on political interest and membership in voluntary organizations. However, the Balkan Barometer, UNDP Public Pulse, and Gallup World Poll surveys all provide valuable insights across our other indicators.

¹⁰ Including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia.

occurring within a single year between September 2015 and April 2016 (Figure 8). Notably, this decreased willingness to protest coincides with a period of heightened harassment and violence against civic space actors in 2016 and government crackdowns against opposition politicians at the end of 2015.

When asked why they were not involved in political activity, Kosovars' most common response in both 2016 and 2020 was "I do not care about it at all,"¹¹ according to the Balkan Barometer. Between the two surveys, however, there was a notable jump in the number of Kosovars who reported being afraid of the public exposure political activity would bring (Figure 9).¹² Comparatively, Kosovars were less likely than their regional peers to select other possible deterrents to political action such as the "Government knows best" (3 percent), "I vote for parliament so why do more" (3 percent) and "I cannot influence government decisions" (11 percent).

¹¹ This was the view of 30 percent of respondents in 2016 and 19 percent in 2020; however, there were additional response options provided in 2020 which makes it less useful to derive meaning from any change among those who selected the "I cannot influence government decisions" option. The 2020 Balkan Barometer survey added two new response options, "I do not trust this government" and "I vote for parliament so why do more", though "I cannot influence government decisions" was still the most common response option (19 percent of respondents).

¹² In 2016, Kosovars were much less likely than their peers to report fear limiting their political activity (-10 percentage points), while in 2020 they were on par with their regional peers, selecting it at the second-highest rate of all choices (16 percent).

Figure 7. Political Action: Participation by Kosovars versus Balkan Peers, 2016 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents

Public Debates



Protests



Commenting on Social Networks



Discussed with Friends



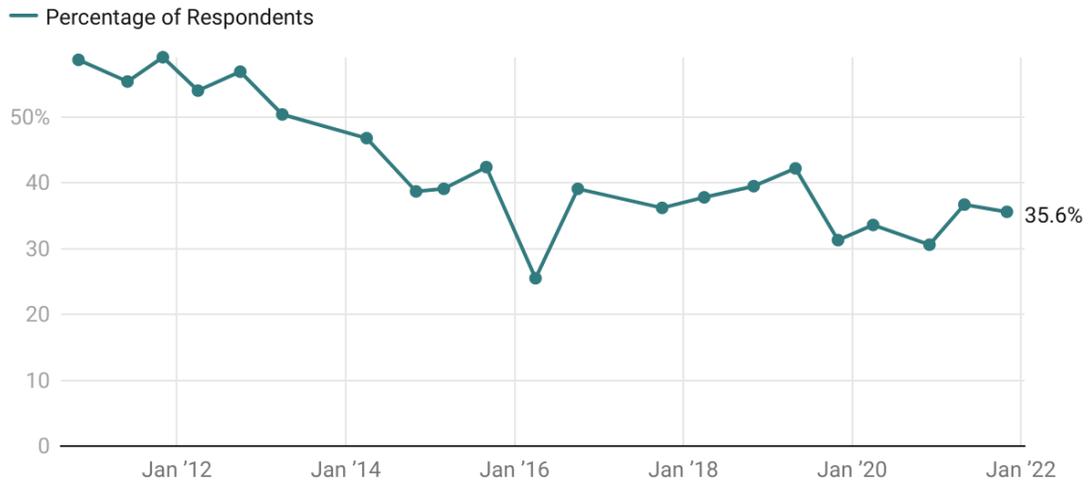
Did not Even Discuss



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kosovo’s respondents who reported past participation in each of five types of political action—public debates, protests, commenting on social networks, discussing with friends, and refraining from discussing issues entirely—in 2016 and 2020, as compared to the Balkan average. Sources: Balkan Barometer Survey Waves 2016 and 2020.

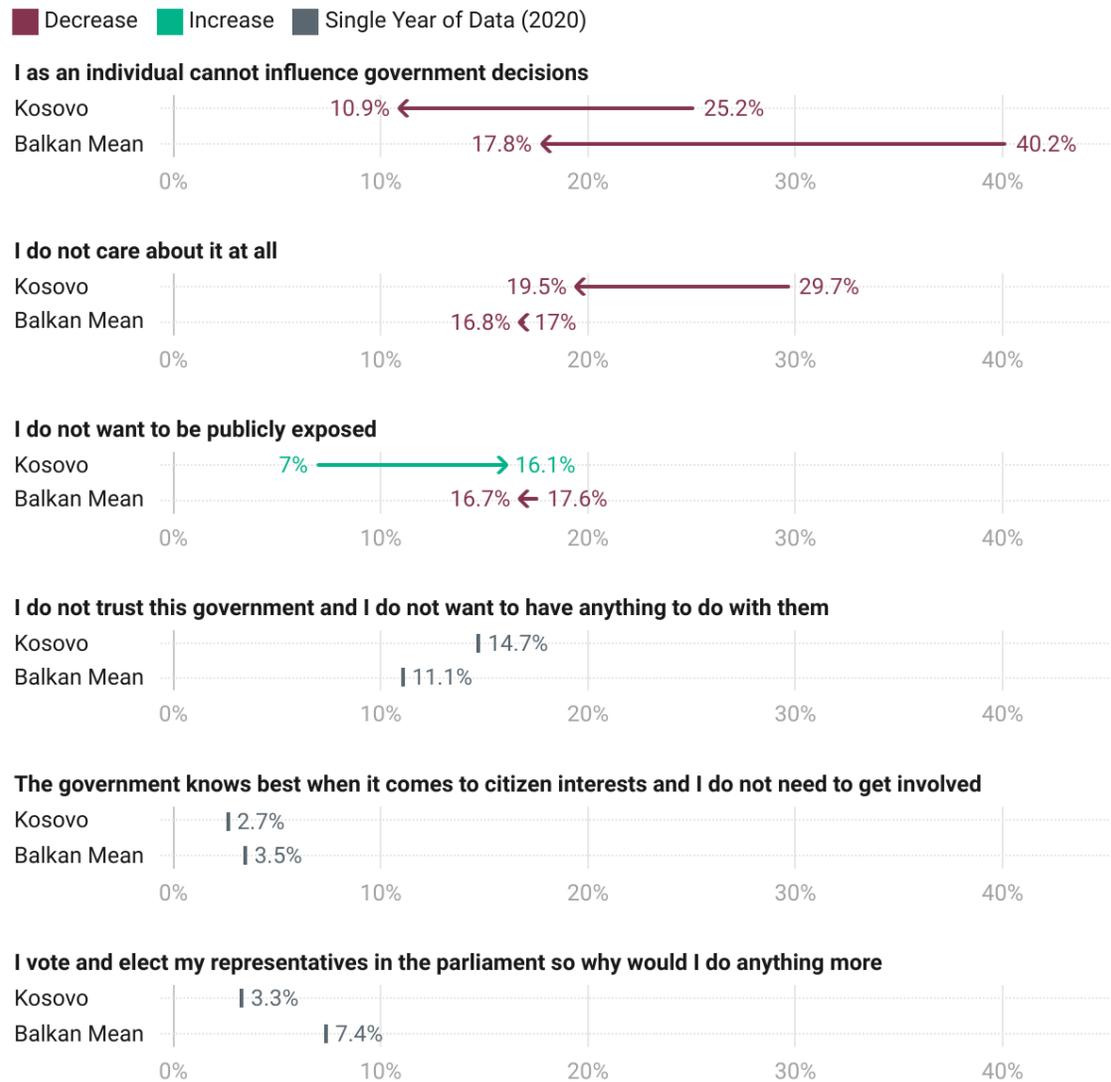
Figure 8. Kosovars' Willingness to Join Political Protests



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kosovo's respondents' who reported that they would be willing to participate in protests due to political reasons. Sources: UNDP Public Pulse Briefs 2010-2021.

Figure 9. Political Activity: Reason for Non-Involvement, Kosovo versus Balkan Peers, 2016 and 2020



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kosovo's respondents' reported reasons for not engaging in political action as compared to the Balkan region average in 2016 and 2020.

Sources: Balkan Barometer 2016 and 2020.

Despite a growing fear of backlash from political action and decreasing appetite to engage in public protests, Kosovars' faith in civil society increased substantially over the last decade. Kosovars viewed NGOs as less corrupt than government institutions in the country, except for the military (Table 4), on the

2020 Balkan Barometer.¹³ According to the UNDP Public Pulse surveys, the share of Kosovars that believed that civil society was a truthful monitor for democratic developments in Kosovo jumped from 23 percent in November 2010 to 56 percent by November 2021 (Figure 10). This positive sentiment reached its highest level (58 percent) as civil society actors fended off proposed constraints to their operations as Kosovo’s parliament debated Law 06/L-43 on Freedom of Association in NGOs in November 2018,¹⁴ which would have imposed significant restrictions on the nonprofit status of NGOs and barriers to founding new organizations.¹⁵ Curiously, support for civil society then tapered off briefly in 2019 before recovering to its present level.¹⁶

Table 4. Public Trust in Institutions: Kosovars’ Perceptions of Corruption versus Balkan Peers, 2020

Institution	Kosovo Perceive Corrupt, 2020	Balkan Mean Perceive Corrupt, 2020	Percentage Point Difference
Businesses	60%	61%	-1
Civil Servants	62%	70%	-7
Courts and the Judiciary	74%	80%	-6

¹³ Forty-eight percent of Kosovar respondents thought NGOs were corrupt, compared to an average of 64 percent across all other institutions.

¹⁴ Civil society moved quickly to counter the proposed legislation, and by November 2018, 76 NGOs were pressuring President Thaci to stop its passage. The renewed focus on NGOs and debate over their independent status may have fueled the spike in Kosovars’ appreciation of the role of civic society in the nation’s democracy which reached a high of 58 percent in November 2018.

¹⁵

https://www.kcsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NGO-Law_Summary-of-issues_EN_G_final.pdf

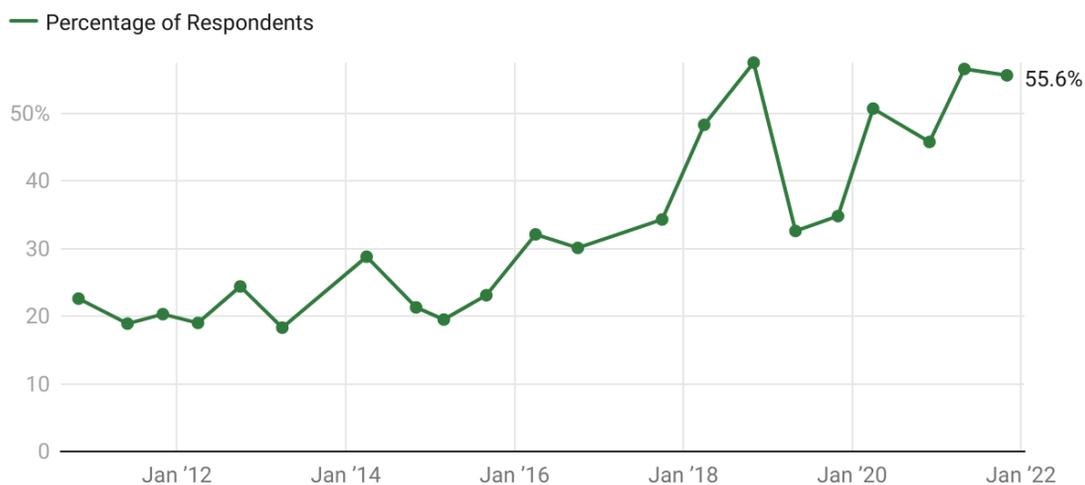
¹⁶ In May 2019, only 33 percent of Kosovars believed that civil society was a truthful monitor for democratic developments in Kosovo. This drop in support closely followed the victory of NGO campaigners against Law 06/L-43 in April 2019 after parliament adopted requested amendments to align with “best international standards and practices.”

<https://www.kcsfoundation.org/en/activity/kosovo-parliament-restored-the-ngo-law/> It is unclear what factors caused this drop and whether it was related to the political victory of NGOs, the movement of the Specialist Chambers in early 2019 to issue war crime indictments against sitting politicians (to eventually include PM Ramush Haradinaj), international factors such as the breakdown of an EU-brokered Western Balkan Conference (a summit between Serbia and Kosovo), or other domestic factors.

Customs	72%	79%	-7
Educational Institutions	70%	63%	+8
Media	56%	68%	-12
Medical Institutions	73%	76%	-4
Military	34%	36%	-2
NGOs	48%	54%	-6
Parliament	80%	76%	+4
Police	55%	71%	-16
Political Parties	82%	83%	-1
Religious Institutions	44%	41%	+3

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Kosovo's respondents that reported that they perceived various institutions as corrupt in 2020 versus Balkan regional peers. Rounded to nearest percent. Source: Balkan Barometer 2020.

Figure 10. Kosovars' Belief that Civil Society Serves as a Truthful Monitor of Democratic Developments



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kosovo's respondents' who responded "yes" to the question "Does Civil Society in Kosovo serve as a truthful monitor of democratic developments in Kosovo?" Sources: UNDP Public Pulse Briefs 2010-2021.

2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Kosovars' attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2021. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.¹⁷ Overall, Kosovo's Civic Engagement Index scores improved across the period, though there was some volatility in 2014. Donating to charity and helping strangers were the two key factors driving Kosovo's overall performance on the index, while volunteering rates appeared to move independently from these two. On average, 43 percent of Kosovars donated to charity and 52 percent helped strangers between 2010 to 2021, as compared to 11 percent who volunteered.

Kosovo's performance appears to be positively correlated with the country's economy (using GDP as a proxy),¹⁸ suggesting that Kosovars contributed more to their neighbors when they felt more economically secure. That said, it is important to note that Kosovo's civic engagement improved in 2020 despite a slight dip in Kosovo's GDP. Beyond economic factors, it is likely that political and social factors also played a role in Kosovo's citizens' decision to engage with their fellow citizens.

At the start of the period in 2010, Kosovo's civic engagement score exceeded the regional average—33 to 25 points, respectively (Figure 11)—as 44 percent of Kosovars gave money to charity, 16 percent volunteered at an organization, and 39 percent reported helping a stranger.¹⁹ Kosovo's civic engagement remained

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ The Civic Engagement Index correlated with Kosovo's GDP (Constant Euro) at 0.783**, p=0.006.

¹⁹ That year, Kosovo exceeded the regional mean for donating by 27 percentage points and was roughly equal with the mean for reported helping strangers (+1 percentage point). However, Kosovo's citizens trailed the E&E regional mean for volunteering by 4 percentage points.

well above the regional average until a sudden drop of 13 index points in 2014,²⁰ the share of citizens who reported helping strangers plummeted from 57 to 28 percent. It is possible that this drop reflects some public disillusionment following the violence-marred election in November 2013,²¹ and the ascendance of Aleksander Vučić as Prime Minister of Serbia.²² Civic engagement rebounded in 2015, and has steadily increased from 2017 to 2020, during which period Vučić ascended to Serbia's Presidency, suggesting that 2014 may have been a uniquely stressful year for Kosovo's civil society.

Kosovo's 2020 index score improved by 4 points compared to the previous year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and even with a slight dip, was still slightly above 2019 levels in 2021 (+1 index point). This upward trend is consistent with improving civic engagement around the world as citizens rallied in response to COVID-19, even in the face of lockdowns and limitations on public gathering. In 2020, 59 percent of Kosovars reported donating to charity, and nearly 68 percent helped a stranger. Kosovo's citizens also increased their level of volunteerism to 10 percent (up from 9 percent in 2019). Nevertheless, it remains to be seen as to whether this initial improvement will be sustained in future.

²⁰ In 2013, Kosovo exceeded the regional civic engagement index by 8 points. In 2014, Kosovo trailed the index mean by 6 points.

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/05/world/europe/violence-mars-election-in-kosovo.html>

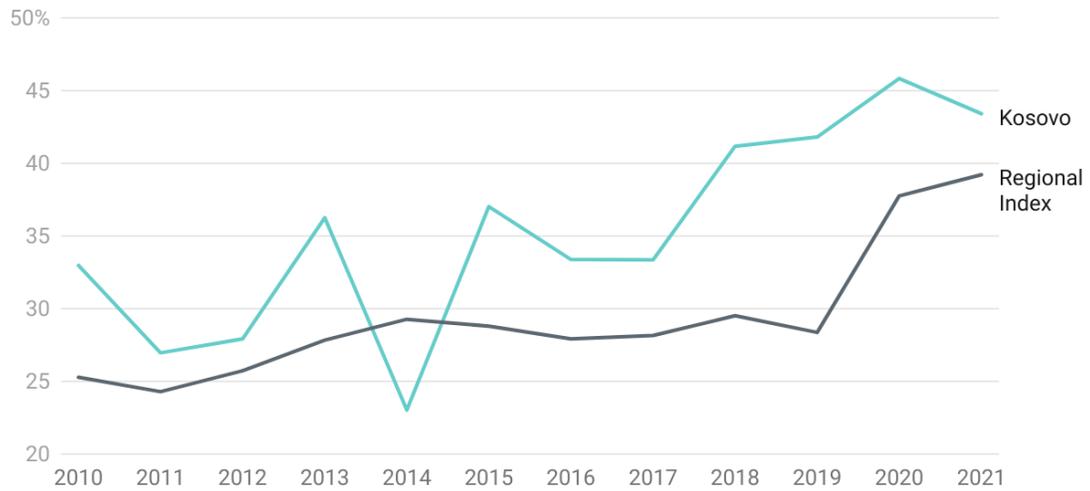
²² The 2014 wave of the Gallup World Poll was conducted in Kosovo between June and August. While Vučić was instrumental in supporting the 2013 power-sharing agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, his past as Information Minister under Milošević during the Kosovo War is not easily forgotten. Indeed, Vučić continues to raise false alarms about the Pristina government targeting ethnic Serbs in Northern Kosovo, as a means to discredit Kosovo's government.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22506485>;

<https://www.ft.com/content/286fad4-5444-11e8-b3ee-41e0209208ec>;

<https://balkaninsight.com/2022/07/07/birn-fact-check-have-serbian-presidents-kosovo-warnings-ever-come-true/>

Figure 11. Civic Engagement Index: Kosovo versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph shows how scores for Kosovo 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 Kosovo

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 Kosovo (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 Kosovo's Civic Space

There were no identified instances of Russian support directed to civic space in Kosovo from January 2015 to August 2021. Although this could be a limitation of our methodology for tracking these activities, this absence of Kremlin support to Kosovar civil society actors is not out of step with its broader foreign policy towards the country. Russia has not recognized the sovereignty of Kosovo and does not have diplomatic relations with the country. Accordingly, there are no branches of its two key channels for public diplomacy, the Gorchakov Fund²³ and Rossotrudnichestvo.²⁴

Nevertheless, the Kremlin's apparent inattention to civic space actors in Kosovo is somewhat distinct from its strategy elsewhere in the region where it has a revealed preference for channeling support to pro-Russian voices in occupied

²³ 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.

²⁴ Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia.

territories to push for greater autonomy and deepening social cleavages in countries prone to inter-ethnic conflict. As the Kremlin courts deeper relations with Serbia, it has bolstered support to Serb ethnic groups. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Kremlin supplied institutional support to local authorities in the majority-Serb autonomous region of Republika Srpska. Moreover, Kremlin-affiliated entities sought to broker ties among like-minded actors, coordinating travel for Serbian civil society leaders to attend a pro-Russian conference in Sarajevo.

It is possible that as Russia looks to expand its influence, it may replicate these tactics in Kosovo in future to exploit tensions between Albanian and Serbian ethnic groups. While Serbs constitute a smaller percentage of Kosovo's population than in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.5 percent vs. 31 percent), the Kremlin has engaged with minority groups that comprise an equally small share of the population before (e.g., the ethnically Russian population of Azerbaijan, estimated at 1.3 percent).²⁵ In addition, it appears that the Kremlin has had a more proactive approach to leveraging its state-run media to promote its preferred narratives within, and about, Kosovo.

3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Kosovar civic actors 136 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Forty-six percent of these mentions (63 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining fifty-four percent (73 instances) focused on foreign and intergovernmental actors operating in Kosovo's civic space. Russian state media covered a variety of civic actors, mentioning 36 organizations by name and 15 informal groups. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Kosovars, we also analyzed 257 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with Kosovo: 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 Kosovar audiences.

²⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>

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

Two-thirds of Russian media mentions of domestic Kosovar civic space actors referred to 15 specific groups by name, including political parties, civil society organizations and media outlets. Political parties were frequently mentioned (19 mentions), particularly the ruling Vetëvendosje or Self-Determination Movement and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)—followed by formal civil society organizations (13 mentions). The Community of Serb Municipalities (ZSO), a planned self-governing entity consisting of local government actors in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, was the single most referenced domestic organization (11 mentions). Russian state media mentions of named domestic civic space actors were most often neutral in tone (86 percent).

Not only did the ZSO attract the highest number of mentions in Russian state media, but it also accounted for the only positive reference to a named domestic organization. The relatively frequent mentions of the ZSO in Russian state media and the positive sentiment accorded the organization likely reflects Russia's sympathetic policies towards Serbia and failure to recognize Kosovo as an independent state.

Comparatively, negative coverage (12 percent of mentions) was exclusively focused on two named domestic organizations: the ruling Kosovar political party Vetëvendosje or Self-Determination Movement (4 negative mentions) and the Islamic Society of Kosovo, a religious organization for Muslims in Kosovo (1 negative mention). These negative mentions are likely intended to discredit the legitimacy of the Kosovar government and the Muslim-majority republic. The single extremely negative reference also underscored Russian cultural and religious ties to the Orthodox Christian Serbs and positioned the Islamic Society of Kosovo as "radical" in one article:

"There are an estimated 800 mosques in Kosovo and around 2,000 people involved in religious organizations allegedly controlled by the

Islamic Society of Kosovo. In reality, radical Islamist ideas are quickly seeping into the self-proclaimed republic.”²⁶

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 22 more generalized references to domestic Kosovar journalists, protesters, opposition activists, or other informal groups during the same period. Eighty-two percent of these references were neutral but Russian state media reserved more negative coverage (18 percent) when referring to “religious organizations” and “radical forces,” in-line with its criticism of the named Islamic Society of Kosovo. While these references are less direct than named entities, the rhetoric around the Muslim-majority organizations reinforces a continued Russian narrative of negativity towards religious actors in Kosovo.

Although the majority of Russian state media references of Kosovar civic actors were neutral, it is perhaps the non-neutral coverage that is most revealing of the Kremlin’s intentions. Russian state media promoted positive coverage of organizations that benefited Serbians in Kosovo, while seeking to undercut the legitimacy of local political parties and Muslim religious organizations as a signal of Russia’s continued support to Orthodox-majority Serbia.

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

Domestic civic actor	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Extremely Negative	Grand Total
Community of Serb Municipalities (ZSO)	1	10	0	0	11
Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination Movement)	0	3	4	0	7
Opposition	0	5	0	1	6
Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)	0	3	0	0	3
Protesters	0	3	0	0	3

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

²⁶ “Kosovo’s Farewell to West, Bid to Join Radical Islam League,” Sputnik News Service, March 6, 2017.

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 Kosovo's Civic Space

Russian state media dedicated over half of the remaining mentions (73 instances) to external actors operating Kosovo's civic space. TASS and Sputnik referenced by name 8 intergovernmental organizations (39 mentions) and 12 foreign organizations (31 mentions). The majority of external actors mentioned fell into two categories: (i) international missions to Kosovo and (ii) Serbian political parties. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) alone attracted one-third of the attention (23 mentions). Other missions referenced in Russia state media included the development missions of the European Union (2 mentions) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (3 mentions) in Kosovo. Serbian political parties including the pro-Russian Enough is Enough party (DJB) and Serbian nationalist right-wing "Dveri" party each received 8 mentions.

Russian state media mentions of external actors in Kosovo's civic space, both named and unnamed, were predominantly neutral (81 percent) in tone. Negative coverage (11 percent of mentions) was disproportionately oriented towards Western-led intergovernmental organizations such as NATO. UNMIK was at times an exception to this rule, attracting several positive mentions. This could reflect a deliberate attempt on the Kremlin's part to erode support for the Kosovar government and use the intergovernmental organization to legitimize Russia's own views, as seen in this quote from a Sputnik article: "Russia agrees with the United Nations' findings regarding the arrest and injury of two UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) personnel by the so-called Kosovo police."²⁷

²⁷ "Russia Agrees with United Nations Findings on Kosovo Police Incident - Nebenzia," Sputnik News Service, October 31, 2019.

Table 7. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Kosovo by Sentiment

External Civic Actor	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Extremely Negative	Grand Total
United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)	3	17	2	1	23
Enough is Enough (DJB) political movement	0	8	0	0	8
Serbian Movement Dveri	0	8	0	0	8
United Nations	0	3	0	1	4
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)	0	2	1		3

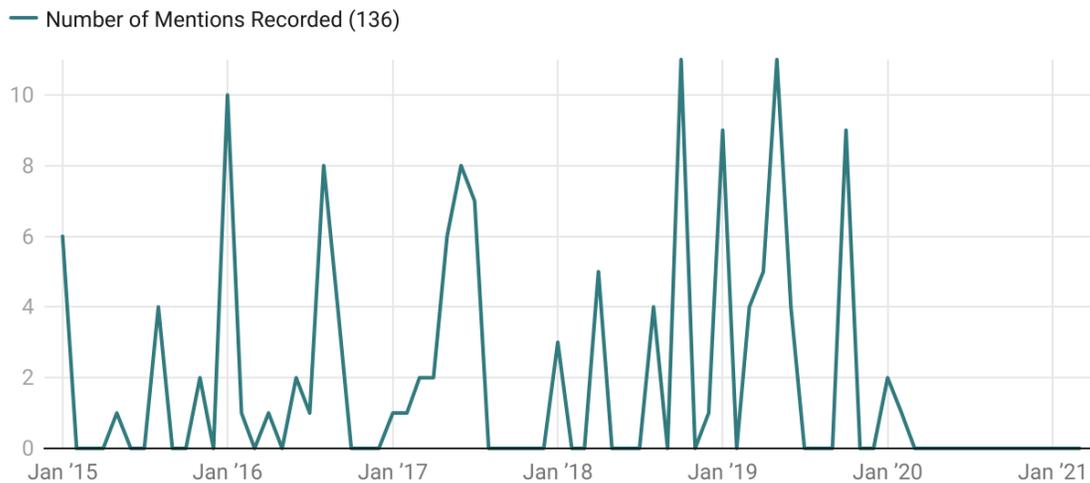
Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Kosovo between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search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

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

Russian state media mentions in other E&E countries tend to spike around major events and tend to show up in clusters. This is not the case with Kosovo, as Russian media mentions remain fairly consistent from January 2015 to September 2020 (Figure 12). There were small spikes around two Kosovar parliamentary elections in June 2017 (8 mentions) and October 2019 (9 mentions), but the lack of intense coverage during key events in Kosovo may reflect Russia’s unwillingness to give visibility towards events that would bolster the Kosovar government’s credibility and undermine the Kremlin’s preferred narrative that the Muslim-majority republic is still part of Serbia.

Figure 12. Russian State Media Mentions of Kosovar Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Kosovar civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. No new relevant media mentions matching our criteria were identified between March 2020 and March 2021. No additional mentions relevant to our criteria were identified between March 2020 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 Kosovo’s citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Kosovo.²⁸ Two state-owned media outlets, the 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 (88 instances), the United States (66 instances), NATO (65 instances), the “West” (35 instances), and democracy (3 instances) with reference to Kosovo during this

²⁸ These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West.

period. Over half of these mentions (54 percent) were negative, while an extremely small share was positive (4 percent).

It is important to note that the majority of Russian media in Kosovo is primarily directed toward the Kremlin’s allies in Belgrade and Kosovo’s Serbs. Coverage of Kosovo itself and the country’s Albanian population are overwhelmingly negative. The main purpose of this coverage appears to be to contest Kosovo’s legitimacy and deepen rifts between the country’s Serb and Albanian populations through relitigating the past and spreading rumors of Kosovo’s restrictions of Serbia.

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

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Grand Total
NATO	20	15	29	1	65
European Union	22	17	44	5	88
United States	13	20	30	3	66
Democracy	0	2	0	1	3
West	18	11	6	0	35

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 Kosovo. 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 Kosovo. The EU’s coverage was split between neutral mentions (50 percent) and negative mentions (44 percent). For both negative and neutral mentions, the coverage largely involves mentions of Serbia’s accession process to the EU,

and the ongoing challenge of its relations with Kosovo. The negative mentions criticize the EU and its Western partners (NATO, the U.S.) as inept in maintaining peace between Serbs and Albanians, including amplifying a number of direct attacks by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov across the years.²⁹ It should be mentioned that many of the neutral mentions of the EU were within articles that criticized Kosovo in general, and Kosovar Albanians in particular. These included Lavrov accusing Kosovo's Albanians of leading to breakdowns in diplomacy, where he stated that "the European Union should be fully aware of its responsibility for this state of affairs and seek to implement the aforementioned UN Security Council resolution."³⁰

Russian mentions of the United States were slightly more negative than the EU, with half of all mentions being negative, followed by neutral mentions (45 percent). In most cases, the articles noted that the U.S. recognized Kosovo, with an implicit or explicit contrast to Russia, which recognized Belgrade's claim to the territory.³¹ More antagonistic mentions claimed that the U.S. and its partners were "inciting" incidents with "irresponsible patronage,"³² publishing claims by Irina Rudnev from the Institute of Slavic Studies in Moscow that "the U.S. wants to destabilize Europe and [the Balkan] region."³³ Russian news agencies cherry-picked statements from American officials to further portray Kosovo as a malign actor, including then Vice President Biden's calls in August 2016 for Pristina to ratify a border agreement.³⁴ Three positive mentions of the U.S. included a quote from Kosovo's Minister of Dialogue Edita Tahiri³⁵ and two broad notes that peace between Serbia and Kosovo can only be achieved with

²⁹ "Pristina's failure to comply with agreements attests to EU's helplessness - Lavrov." TASS. Published May 29, 2019;

"Lavrov calls for implementing an agreement on establishing Serb municipalities in Kosovo." TASS. Published April 1, 2016.

³⁰ "Kosovo Albanians fail to abide by agreements with Serbia - Lavrov." TASS. Published August 21, 2018.

³¹ "Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Bogged Down Due to Kosovo's Lack of Implementation - Churkin." Sputnik News Service. Published November 19, 2015

"Murder of Politician Ivanovic Mars Serbia-Kosovo Dialogue's Prospects - Russian EU Envoy." Sputnik News Service. Published January 22, 2018.

³² "Russia's OSCE envoy urges Kosovo to reverse its decision on creating an army." TASS. Published December 20, 2018.

³³ "Kosovo: A 'Tinderbox' Inside the EU." Sputnik News Service. Published January 25, 2017.

³⁴ "US Vice President Calls on Kosovo to Ratify Border Deal With Montenegro." Sputnik News Service. Published August 17, 2016.

³⁵ "States Around the World Should Lobby For Kosovo's Independence - Minister of Dialogue." Sputnik News Service. Published July 22, 2016.

the cooperation and support of the U.S., EU, and Russia (albeit, in articles clearly biased in favor of Serbia).³⁶

Similar to the U.S. and EU, slightly over half of NATO mentions (54 percent) were negative, with the remainder largely neutral. This is not surprising, as these entities were frequently mentioned in the same article, referencing NATO involvement in peace talks or its continued presence in Kosovo. However, Russian outlets also mentioned NATO as a means to reopen scars from the Kosovo War. One quarter of all NATO mentions mentioned their role in bombing Serbian forces, including quotes that “It is the Euro-Atlantic complex (NATO and the European Union) that has bombed the Federal Yugoslav Republic on Russian [Orthodox] Easter day in 1999”³⁷ and that NATO members have “[n]o feeling of remorse, no memories of how they bombed the bridges with passenger trains and a television center in Belgrade.”³⁸

The West received coverage that skewed the most negative (83 percent), reinforcing common themes as with mentions of the EU, U.S., and NATO. This included assertions that the West has enabled Kosovo to operate with “impunity”³⁹ and that it is putting undue pressure on Serbia to recognize an illegal entity in peace concessions.⁴⁰ Unlike the EU or the U.S., there were comparatively few neutral mentions of the West in Russian media (17 percent). This is partly due to the lack of objective statements on EU accession or U.S. involvement in peace talks, but also speaks to the term being a stand-in for “external bullies” in the media that Russia pushes out to Serbia and Kosovo.

The term “democracy” received the fewest mentions (3 mentions). The one positive mention was a direct quote from Minister Tahiri, which favorably

³⁶ “Kosovo crisis cannot be ironed out without the U.S. and Russia, Serbian president says.” TASS. Published July 8, 2019;

“Kosovo's 'Irresponsible' Intention to Create Army Imperils Europe - Moscow.” Sputnik News Service. Published March 16, 2017.

³⁷ “REVIEW - EU Lawmakers Warn Brussels' Enlargement Policy May Become 'Vector of War' For West Balkans.” Sputnik News Service. Published February 7, 2018.

³⁸ “Russia will reject proposal on changing the UN Kosovo Mission at the Security Council - Lavrov.” TASS. Published April 17, 2019.

³⁹ “West's patronage gives Pristina a feeling of impunity - Lavrov.” TASS. Published May 31, 2019.

⁴⁰ “Kosovo Police Raid Aimed to Wrest 'Peace Deal' Concessions From Serbia - Dveri Movement.” Sputnik News Service. Published May 30, 2019.

referenced the EU and U.S. support to building Kosovo's democracy.⁴¹ The two negative mentions described Kosovo's democratic process as unattainable and illegitimate. One article circulated Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya's quotes claiming that ten years of bolstering political systems in Kosovo "have proved to be futile."⁴² Lavrov returned for the third identified mention of democracy, when he compared NATO's discussion of bringing democracy to their silence on the aftermath of their bombing campaign.⁴³ Between these two mentions, the Kremlin hopes to paint the democratic state-building in Kosovo as an illegal imposition on Serbia and proof that the West is unable to effect any positive change in the world

⁴¹ "States Around the World Should Lobby For Kosovo's Independence - Minister of Dialogue." Sputnik News Service. Published July 22, 2016.

⁴² "Russia sums up 'deplorable results' of ten years of Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence." TASS. Published February 7, 2018.

⁴³ "Russia will reject a proposal on changing the UN Kosovo Mission at Security Council - Lavrov." TASS. Published April 17, 2019.

4. Conclusion

The profile of Russia's engagement with Kosovo is decidedly different from that observed elsewhere in the E&E region, likely an extension of the Kremlin's refusal to recognize Kosovo or maintain diplomatic relations with the country. Yet, even in this context, Russian state media actively reinforced familiar themes, raising doubts about the motives of the U.S., EU, and NATO, particularly arguing that the West's recognition of Kosovo was inciting broader regional instability.

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 Kosovo; (ii) RefWorld database of documents and news articles pertaining to human rights and interactions with civilian law enforcement in Kosovo 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 Balkan Barometer Waves 2016 and 2020, the UNDP Public Pulse Waves 1-21 (November 2010-November 2021) and the Gallup World Poll waves 2010-2021. 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 Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey, which are used in other country profiles, was not conducted in Kosovo.

The fieldwork for the Balkan Barometer 2016 Survey in Kosovo was conducted in Albanian and 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. The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data.

The fieldwork for the Balkan Barometer 2020 Survey in Kosovo was conducted in Albanian and 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. 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 Kosovo but should be assessed relative to the regional mean.

Respondents to the Balkan Barometer 2020 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 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 Kosovo but should be assessed relative to the regional mean.

The perceptions of corruption indicator uses responses to a series of Balkan Barometer 2020 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." Balkan means were calculated using the regional respondent weights from all six Balkan Barometer countries.

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

1,000 and 1,088 respondents each year. The survey was conducted in Albanian and Serbian each year and was also conducted in Bosnian in 2010 and 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 donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?" The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Tajikistan'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 Kosovo. 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.