

(Repeated) Municipal elections in Serbia - May 2024

June 2, 2024 - Serbia will hold repeated Belgrade elections and municipal elections in roughly 2/3 of the 145 towns and municipalities. Previously, on December 17, 2023, Serbia held local elections in 65 municipalities, including the city of Belgrade, and elections for the National Assembly.

As it became obvious, the split municipal vote in December 2023 was to facilitate mass migration of voters from the remaining 2/3 of the country's municipalities not holding elections to those holding them and in particular to the city of Belgrade. This was reinforced by as many as tens of thousands of voters from Republika Srpska in BiH. The largest documented electoral fraud since the ruling party SNS seized power in 2012 was confirmed in reports produced by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the February 2024 resolution of the European Parliament.

SNS secured a comfortable majority of 129 out of 250 MPs in the National Assembly. In Belgrade it was a tie. Regardless of the electoral fraud, the results of the pro-European opposition SPN coalition (Srbija protiv nasilja/Serbia against violence) was the best electoral result any opposition coalition achieved since the SNS seized power in 2012. In spite of mass protests, a hunger strike of several SPN MPs, the biggest achievement

of the opposition was the European Parliament resolution confirming the electoral fraud.

The SPN opposition coalition finally split over different strategies regarding the June 2 repeated Belgrade elections and local elections: **Boycott:** A part of the SPN coalition (Party of Freedom and Justice (SSP), Serbia Centre, Zajedno party) are boycotting the elections. They are joined by the conservative New Democratic Party of Serbia (Novi DSS). They argue that the government did nothing to substantially improve the conditions ahead of the elections and that there was not enough time to deal with electoral irregularities and to implement the ODiHR recommendations ahead of June 2. Additionally, they maintain that had the opposition remained united in boycott, buying time and postponement of elections to late September would have been possible. **Biram borbu (I Choose to Fight):** The other part of the former SPN coalition will take part in the elections. It is composed of the Green-Left-Front, Ecological Uprising, a coalition of numerous local movements across the country, People's Movement of Serbia (NPS), Movement of Free Citizens, the Democratic Party (in power in Serbia from 2001-2004 and 2008-2012) and others. They cite the boycott of the 2020 local elections as detrimental to the survival of the organised opposition across the country. They recognise the electoral conditions are uneven but trust the government will at

least implement some of the ODiHR recommendations ahead of June 2. There are also two other potentially important contenders:

Kreni Promeni (KP): a citizens' movement raised to national prominence after leading large environmental protests in winter 2021-2022 against the prospective Rio Tinto lithium mine in Serbia. Despite having obvious political aspirations since its founding, KP entered the political ring only now. **We-The Voice from the People (Mi)** is a right-wing populist political organisation led by Branimir Nestorović, a conspiracy theorist who became a household name during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Possible results

Voter turnout is expected to be lower than on December 17 2023 which will benefit the ruling party. The split in the SPN coalition will additionally work against a high turnout thus raising the ruling party's chances to keep control of Belgrade.

Why are these elections important?

SNS victory in Belgrade and several other big cities across Serbia will probably cause a protracted voter apathy that would in turn result in President Vučić holding power in Serbia undisturbed until the 2027 presidential elections. The victory of the opposition in the capital and some bigger cities such as Niš or Novi Sad, regardless of the unfair conditions, would present a significant boost for the democratic opposition in Serbia.