



Keeping Focus: Reporting developments in Serbia

# Hot Summer in Serbia as Protests Take Place Throughout the Country and Pressure Mounts on the Government to Hold Snap Elections

## Key points:

- ⊕ Large protest of 140 000 citizens held on the Slavija Square in Belgrade on 28 June, some of the speeches create controversy due to nationalist comments
- ⊕ Protests and blockades take place throughout Serbia after 28 June, followed by increased police brutality and mass arrests
- ⊕ Polls show the government lagging significantly behind the student list and the opposition parties, but a unified opposition front remains distant

## Protest on 28 June briefly raises the issue of nationalism within the student movement

A large protest – [estimated](#) to have gathered 140 000 citizens – was organized in the Belgrade Slavija Square by the student movement on 28 June 2025, which is marked as the Saint Vitus Day (Vidovdan) by the Serbian Orthodox Church. The holiday carries a lot of symbolic weight as it is associated with the 14th century battle of Kosovo, a centerpiece of the modern Serbian national identity. Several speeches at the protest were marked with nationalist rhetoric, because of which they were criticized by multiple liberal and pro-EU commentators, politicians and journalists. Claims that “nationalism has taken over the student protest” could be heard.

However, this rhetoric did not repeat in the following weeks, which were instead marked by a new round of protests and instances of police brutality. Some commentators pointed out that the nationalist elements, alongside liberal ones, have been present within the student movement from the start and that the protests have consisted of a broad and ideologically heterogeneous coalition. According to [one interpretation](#), in a country where, thanks in part to the strong anti-Western propaganda by the media close to the government, trust in the EU is less than 40%, an ideologically consistent alternative to the regime cannot be expected.

## Another wave of civil disobedience met with police brutality

At the end of the protest on 28 June, the students gave a symbolic green light to the citizens to start with civil disobedience, with a request for early parliamentary elections. The students requested early elections in May and announced that they would nominate a parliamentary list led by independent public figures. The list has not yet been unveiled.

On the night of 28 June, there were limited clashes between a smaller group of citizens who attended the student-organized protest and the police. The group of protesters attempted to approach the square in front of the National Assembly, where a camp of the ruling party supporters, set up in March, is located, but the police prevented them from doing so.

Police brutality and arrests on 28 June triggered large-scale blockades of streets, intersections and motorways across the country the following night, with a participation of thousands of citizens. This started a wave of daily blockades, which was the most intense during the first two weeks of July, after which the intensity decreased, though smaller-scale protests continue to take place as of late July.

The first weeks of July were marked by cases of police brutality. Disproportionate use of force was especially present during the night of 2-3 July, when the police [injured](#) multiple peaceful students in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. The case of one student, who was seriously injured by the police and then [handcuffed](#) to a hospital bed according to testimonies, caused public outrage. The disproportionate use of force was [criticized](#) by several international organizations, including the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, OSCE as well as European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos.

Thousands of people participating in the blockades were identified by the police and dozens were detained, though most were released shortly thereafter. A detention of seven citizens of Užice in Western Serbia for blocking a motorway triggered several large protests in the city which lasted until mid-July. On 14 July, the [court](#) ordered house arrest for two out of seven citizens and released the other five.

## The government refuses snap elections as polls show a drop in popularity

Despite repeated calls by the protesters for early parliamentary elections since the beginning of May, the ruling party has rejected the proposal, claiming that it is currently not in the “interest of the state”. This situation

has been widely interpreted as a sign of political weakness for President Aleksandar Vučić, who used to frequently call tactical snap elections in previous years, while he was certain that he could win them. Vučić was offering snap elections to the protesters until early March, when he stopped doing so.

A [poll](#) conducted by an independent agency *Sprint Insight* in June and July confirmed that early elections would be risky for the ruling party. According to this poll, in a hypothetical head-to-head matchup, the list nominated by students would beat the ruling coalition by 55% to 42%. If a separate list of opposition parties was nominated as well, it would win around 10%, while the student list would still finish first with 45%. The poll also showed rising dissatisfaction with the government, President Vučić personally and the direction of the country.

The poll has revealed unresolved relationship between the student movement and opposition parties, which are currently much less popular among the electorate. In their original demand for parliamentary elections, the students asked that no other party runs in the election, and that a transitional government elected by the student list would enable subsequent fair elections in which everybody could participate. A majority of the opposition parties remains vary about this idea, with the Democratic Party (DS) endorsing it and vowing to support the students.

The next national election does not need to take place until April 2027, when the presidential election (in which Vučić cannot run due to the constitutional term limits) is scheduled, while the parliamentary election could theoretically be postponed until the end of 2027. However, speculations that there might be an earlier poll are widespread, given the tense situation in the society.

## No progress in EU-related reforms

As of the second half of July, there has been no session of parliament for more than a month. At the last session, the parliament adopted a set of revised media laws, which is one of the three informal preconditions for Serbia to advance further on its EU accession path. The adoption of these laws was the least controversial of the three reform steps, the other two being a revision of the electoral roll and the election of new Council of the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM).

Election of the new media regulator, an institution perceived as one of the main levers of power of the ruling party for the past ten years, has been controversial from the start, and the first process, which began in November 2024, was cancelled in April. Critics accuse the ruling party of wanting to maintain a majority of loyal members in the REM Council, violating procedural steps for nominations in the process. The process reached an impasse in June when

16 candidates withdrew. Multiple opposition parties have announced they would not participate in the next plenary session of the parliament, on the invitation of the students, in order to put pressure on the ruling party to call snap elections.

The final measure the Government of Serbia pledged to last year is the adoption of the revised Law on Single Electoral Roll, which is supposed to address the lack of trust in the voter registry. This trust deteriorated significantly following the December 2023 elections, marked by accusations of organized voter migrations carried out by the ruling party to influence election results. A parliamentary working group established to draft the new version of the law fell apart in January 2025 after a majority of opposition and civil society representatives withdrew, citing procedural violations and lack of political will of the ruling parties to implement genuine reforms. With the Speaker of the parliament announcing that the revised law will be put on the agenda in July, disputes over its content continue. In its opinion, OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) assessed that some of its recommendations remain unaddressed.

## IMPRESSUM

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### Author

Centre for Contemporary Politics  
Makedonska 21, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

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