



MEDIA LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS - SERBIA



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ARTICLE19

Media landscape analysis – Serbia

This fact sheet analyses the media landscape in Serbia. It complements ARTICLE 19's [Global Expression Report](#) (GxR), which examines trends in the right to freedom of expression and information globally, regionally, and nationally. The report is unique in that it provides a concrete measure and quantifiable perspective on expression: from posting online to protesting, investigating, and accessing the information needed to keep leaders accountable. In this fact sheet, we examine seven indicators¹ informing the media landscape. All the indicators are used in the GxR and are developed based on the annual responses of experts on the topic who provide ratings for the country. The below information provides context on Serbia from 2023. Scores are ordered from highest to lowest to produce country rankings. Countries that do not have the minimum number of raters are excluded from the ranked list. The figures below (expressed as X/149) show Serbia's ranking (X) out of 149 countries for each indicator.

1. The indicators in this briefing have been extracted from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) [2024 Codebook](#) to explore aspects of freedom and democracy worldwide. To address variation in coder ratings, V-Dem works closely with leading social science research methodologies and has developed a Bayesian measurement model that, to the extent possible, addresses coder error and issues of comparability across countries over time. V-Dem has advised against using point estimates for indicator years where a country has 3 or fewer raters. In those cases, countries are excluded from the analysis.



Importance of media landscape indicators

Media bias and corruption: These are critical as they directly affect the credibility and independence of the media. The three indicators in this section (each measured for all 149 countries) are:

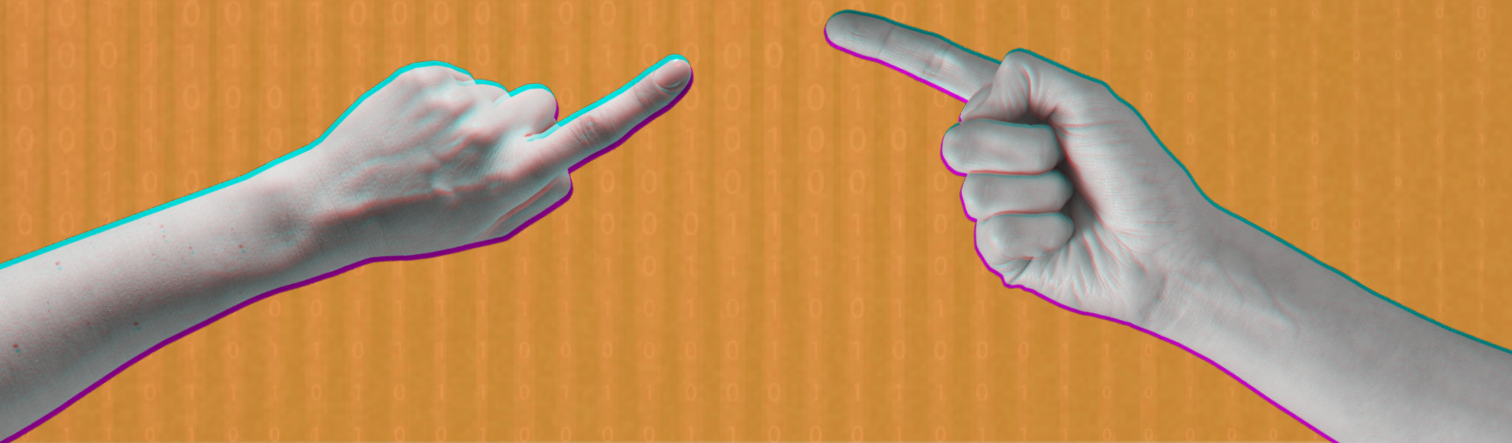
- ⋮ 1. freedom from media bias against opposition parties
- { ⋮ 2. lack of self-censorship among journalists when reporting on issues that the government considers politically sensitive
- ⋮ 3. freedom from media corruption, avoiding the change of payments for altering news coverage

Internet and government censorship: Vital for ensuring a free and open information environment. The two indicators in this section (each measured for all 149 countries) are:

- ⋮ 1. freedom from government attempts to censor information on the internet
- { ⋮ 2. freedom from government attempts to censor print or broadcast media

Media perspectives and criticism: Essential for a democratic society, allowing for diverse views and accountability. The two indicators in this section (each measured for all 149 countries) are:

- { ⋮ 1. print and broadcast media represent a wide range of political perspectives
- ⋮ 2. print and broadcast outlets routinely criticise the government



Country profile: Serbia

Serbia's media landscape presents a complex and challenging environment, heavily influenced by political pressures, economic dependencies, and external disinformation campaigns. The country's media system is characterised by significant issues related to media bias, government control, and corruption, all of which contribute to difficulties in establishing a free and independent press.

Media bias and corruption



Serbia ranks **122/149** for *freedom from media bias*, highlighting the severity of this issue in the country. Many media outlets in Serbia are closely connected to the government or political elites, leading to content that aligns with the ruling party's interests. For instance, the national public broadcaster, Radio Television of Serbia, and Pink TV are frequently accused of promoting government narratives and providing limited airtime for opposition voices.

The Serbian government exerts influence over the media through direct ownership and indirect financial control. State-owned companies and public enterprises are major advertisers, and they tend to place ads only with media outlets that offer favourable coverage, reinforcing the dependence of the press on political elites. This creates a heavily polarised media environment where independent journalism struggles to survive, contributing to public mistrust in the media.

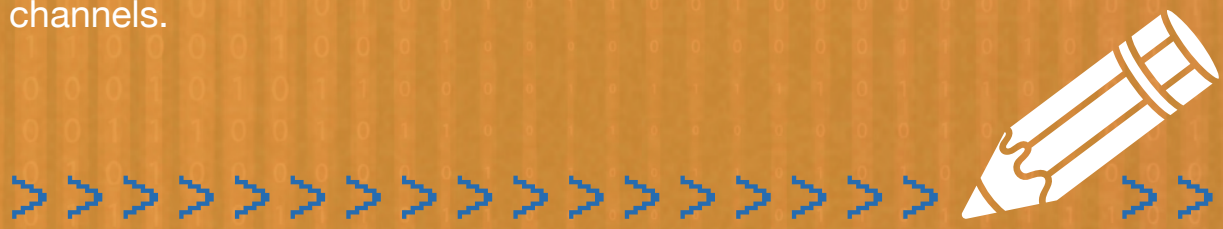
Self-censorship is also rampant in Serbia, where the country ranks **116/149** in this category. Journalists frequently refrain from investigating corruption or criticising the government due to fear of retaliation. For instance, [journalists at the investigative outlet KRIK](#) have reported facing lawsuits, threats, and smear campaigns after publishing reports exposing high-level corruption. A climate of fear makes journalists reluctant to engage in critical reporting, and many avoid sensitive topics to protect themselves and their jobs.

Media corruption is severe in Serbia, with the country ranked **125/149** in this category. Journalists often face acute economic pressures that leave them susceptible to bribery and other forms of corruption. Media outlets dependent on government advertising contracts are less likely to criticise public officials. This system gives the government economic leverage over the media, with state- funded advertising disproportionately serving outlets that offer favourable coverage. Consequently, Serbia ranks 119/149 for *print/broadcast outlets routinely criticise the government*, reflecting significant challenges for journalists who try to call out the ruling elite.

Internet and government censorship > > > > > > > > >

Serbia ranks **48/149** for *freedom from internet censorship efforts*, performing better in digital media than in traditional outlets. However, the government has increasingly sought to control digital content, using various mechanisms to suppress dissent. A notable example occurred in 2020 when the [government ordered the arrest of a journalist](#) who published an online article about inadequate conditions in a hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her arrest raised concerns about online censorship and freedom of speech, as it highlighted the state’s efforts to silence critical voices in the digital space.

In traditional media, Serbia ranks **135/149** for *freedom from government censorship efforts*, signifying a high level of governmental interference in editorial decisions. Independent outlets, such as N1 TV and Nova.rs, [have faced frequent pressures aimed at limiting their operations](#). The Serbian Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), which is responsible for overseeing broadcast content, [has been accused of bias](#) and failing to enforce laws in a manner that prevents the dominance of pro-government channels.



Media perspectives and criticism

Serbia ranks **114/149** for *range of print/broadcast media perspectives*, reflecting a limited diversity of viewpoints. The media landscape is dominated by a few major outlets that are closely tied to political and business elites, restricting the range of opinions available to the public. The major media conglomerate [Pink Media Group](#), which controls several television channels and print publications, is known for its close relationship with the Serbian government and its tendency to promote pro-government narratives. This consolidation of media ownership limits the space for alternative viewpoints and undermines democratic discourse.

Serbia ranks low at **119/149** for *print/broadcast outlets routinely criticise the government*. Investigative journalism faces considerable challenges in Serbia, where independent journalists are often targeted for their work. Despite their efforts, the lack of financial support and the risks associated with exposing corruption make investigative journalism a dangerous profession in Serbia. These challenges stifle critical reports, limiting the media's role in holding the government accountable.



Annex: Indicator rank comparison

Media bias and corruption

1) Freedom from media bias against opposition parties

122/149

Analysis: Serbia ranks among the lowest globally, indicating severe issues with biased reporting that undermine public trust in the media.

Regional comparisons:
Montenegro ranks **60**
Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **91**
Kosovo ranks **99**

2) Lack of self-censorship among journalists when reporting on issues that the government considers politically sensitive

116/149

Analysis: High levels of self-censorship due to political pressures stifle critical and investigative journalism, limiting the media's ability to hold power to account.

Regional comparisons:
Kosovo ranks **38**
Montenegro ranks **66**
Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **99**

3) Freedom from media corruption, avoiding the change of payments for altering news coverage

125/149

Analysis: Serbia is one of the worst-performing countries in the region, with widespread corruption severely compromising journalistic integrity.

Regional comparisons:
Kosovo ranks **30**
Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **86**
Montenegro ranks **90**

Internet and government censorship

1) Freedom from government attempts to censor information on the internet

48/149

- : **Analysis:** While Serbia
- : performs better in this area
- : compared to traditional media,
- : the overall environment
- : remains restrictive, with
- : significant government control
- : over online content.

Regional comparisons:

Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **20**

Kosovo ranks **38**

Montenegro ranks **73**

2) Freedom from government attempts to censor print or broadcast media

135/149

- : **Analysis:** Serbia ranks
- : near the bottom globally,
- : reflecting extensive
- : government interference in
- : media content, particularly
- : in traditional media.

Regional comparisons:

Kosovo ranks **20**

Montenegro ranks **22**

Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **80**

Media perspectives and criticism

1) Print and broadcast media represent a wide range of political perspectives

114/149

- **Analysis:** The limited diversity in media content restricts the range of viewpoints available to the public, negatively impacting democratic discourse.

Regional comparisons:

Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **57**

Montenegro ranks **88**

Kosovo ranks **90**

2) Print and broadcast outlets routinely criticise the government

119/149

- **Analysis:** Serbia's low ranking indicates significant challenges for journalists attempting to criticise the government, often leading to censorship and retaliation.

Regional comparisons:

Kosovo ranks **33**

Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks **65**

Montenegro ranks **94**





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