



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Serbia

Early Parliamentary, Provincial, and Partial Local Elections

December 17, 2023

Europe & Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Publication Date: December 13, 2023

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Election Snapshot

- **Election Day:** December 17, 2023
- **Registered voters:** 6,500,165¹
- **Polling stations:** 8273
- **Seats:** 250 in the National Assembly
- **Candidate lists:** 18²
- **Campaign expenditure and donation limits:** Not to exceed 10 average monthly salaries for individuals or 30 average monthly salaries for legal entities; no expenditure limit

When is Election Day?

The Republic of Serbia will hold early parliamentary and local elections on Sunday, December 17, 2023. Parliamentary elections will take place nationally, while local elections will be held in 65 of the country's 166 municipalities and in the Vojvodina region for the Province Assembly. Voting will take place from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m.³ in 8273 polling stations across the country and for a 13-hour period ending no later than 8 p.m. Serbia time at 81 sites abroad. As a rule, out-of-country voting will take place in diplomatic and consular missions of Serbia.⁴ Voters in military installations and detention facilities will be permitted to vote onsite, as special voter lists are compiled for members of the military and voters in prisons and detention facilities based on information provided by these institutions.⁵

Why are these elections important?

Originally scheduled for 2026, early elections were called by the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, after the National Assembly was dissolved on November 1, 2023. Mayors in 65 municipalities, including the City of Belgrade, resigned from their positions at the same time, paving the way for early local elections in these municipalities.⁶

Preparations for these elections are taking place within a timeframe of just over six weeks. The elections are being held amid deep political and social polarization as well as domestic and regional tensions. Two mass shootings in Serbia earlier this year sparked widespread public protests against the government. In the aftermath of the incidents, the Minister of Education resigned.⁷ Simultaneously, escalating tensions between the Serbian government and Kosovo were exacerbated by a violent attack in village Banjska, in a northern municipality of Zvečan in Kosovo, on September 24, in which a Kosovo police officer was killed.⁸

¹ [33. sednica Republičke izborne komisije \(parlament.gov.rs\)](https://parlament.gov.rs/33-sednica-republike-izborne-komisije)

² [32. sednica Republičke izborne komisije \(parlament.gov.rs\)](https://parlament.gov.rs/32-sednica-republike-izborne-komisije)

³ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 91.

⁴ Pillai, G. (2023, November 27). [Serbia unveils overseas voting centers amidst political unrest](#). BNN Breaking.

⁵ Law on Elections of Members of Parliament, Article 56.

⁶ Stojanovic, M. (2023, November 1). [Serbia schedules early elections for December 17](#). Balkan Insight.

⁷ Sekularac, I. (2023, May 7). [Serbia's education minister resigns over school shooting](#). Reuters.

⁸ Stojanovic, D. (2023, September 26). [Serbia calls on NATO to take over policing of northern Kosovo after a deadly shootout](#). PBS NewsHour.

Serbia holds European Union (EU) candidate status and has been negotiating for EU accession since 2013. The EU Commission recently released its annual country report on Serbia, which outlines the reforms and steps needed for Serbia to continue toward EU accession. While the report discusses judicial reforms and policies on fighting organized crime as important steps, it outlines the “urgent” need for Serbia to align with EU foreign and security policy — in particular, the need to commit to normalizing relations with Kosovo and imposing sanctions on Russia.⁹

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

For the December 17, 2023, elections, all 250 seats of the National Assembly will be open. There will be 18 candidate lists for the parliamentary elections. Citizens in the 65 municipalities holding early local elections will vote for their municipal assemblies. At the same time, citizens in Vojvodina region will elect 120 representatives to the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

What is the electoral system?

The 250 members of the National Assembly are elected for four-year mandates.¹⁰ Those members represent a single nationwide constituency, are elected through a closed list, and are awarded seats through a proportional system.¹¹ The threshold for candidate lists to participate in the distribution of mandates is 3 percent of votes cast.¹² Lists representing national minorities are exempted from this threshold requirement.¹³

The D’Hondt method¹⁴ is used to translate the proportional number of votes into whole seats in the National Assembly. If the quotient calculated for two or more electoral lists is equal, the final seat is allocated to the list that receives the largest number of votes overall. When seats are allocated by applying the highest quotient system, the quotients of national minority electoral lists that won less than 3 percent of the votes cast are increased by 35 percent.¹⁵

In Serbia, local elections also award seats through a proportional representation system. Eligible voters cast ballots for electoral lists of registered candidates that political parties, coalitions of parties, or citizens’ groups can submit.¹⁶

⁹ European Commission. [Serbia 2023 Report](#). (2023).

¹⁰ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 1.

¹¹ OSCE/ODIHR Serbia Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections: Needs Assessment Mission Report. (2021).

¹² [Technical Election Assessment Mission in Serbia](#). IFES. March 2021.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The D’Hondt method is used to determine seat allocation in party list proportional representation. The total number of votes cast for each party in the electoral district (in the case of Serbia, throughout the country) is divided iteratively, first by one, then by two, then by three, and so on until the maximum number calculated corresponds to the number of seats to be distributed.

¹⁵ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament (2022), Article 140.

¹⁶ [Law on Local Elections](#).(2022).

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

Elections are regulated by the 2006 Constitution,¹⁷ the 2022 Law on the Election of Members of Parliament,¹⁸ and the 2022 Law on Local Elections.¹⁹ Additionally, elements of the electoral process are governed by the Law on the Unified Electoral Roll,²⁰ the Law on Administrative Disputes,²¹ and the Law on Financing Political Activities (amended in 2022).²² The legal framework is supplemented by the Republic Electoral Commission's Rules of Procedures and other by-laws.²³ Serbia is party to major international and regional instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Any citizen who is eligible to vote can stand for parliamentary and local elections.²⁴ Lists of candidates for parliamentary elections must collect at least 10,000 notarized signatures of voters.²⁵ For local elections, the number of required signatures varies based on the number of eligible voters in the municipality. Three kinds of groups can submit lists: a political party that is on the Register of Political Parties, a coalition of political parties, or a group of citizens.²⁶ Electoral lists for national elections must be submitted directly to the Republic Election Commission (REC), both in writing and electronically, no later than 20 days before Election Day (for the upcoming elections, by November 26). Once a list is submitted with the required documentation, voters' signatures can be collected and notarized. Following submission of the list, the REC has 48 hours to certify it.²⁷

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

Parties are financed through donations, loans, membership fees, and state funding. Candidates can finance campaigns from their own funds and donations.²⁸ Donations are not permitted from foreign, state, public, or anonymous sources or from non-profit and charitable organizations or trade unions.²⁹ While there is no campaign expenditure cap, the maximum value of any annual donation to a political entity from an individual may not exceed 10 average monthly salaries, and the maximum value from a legal entity cannot be more than 30 average monthly salaries.³⁰ In September 2023, the average gross salaries and wages amounted to 85,066 RSD³¹ (approximately \$780).

¹⁷ [Constitution of the Republic of Serbia](#). (2006).

¹⁸ [Law on the Election of the President of the Republic](#). (2022).

¹⁹ [Law on Local Elections](#). (2022).

²⁰ [Law on the Unified Electoral Roll](#). (2022).

²¹ [Law on Administrative Disputes](#). (2022).

²² [Law on Financing Political Activities](#). (Amended in 2022).

²³ [Rules of Procedure of The Republic Electoral Commission](#). (2022).

²⁴ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 3.

²⁵ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 71(3).

²⁶ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 62.

²⁷ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Articles 70–72 and 74.

²⁸ Law on Financing Political Activities, Article 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Article 10.

³¹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, [Average salaries and wages per employee, September 2023](#). (2023).

Political entities may choose another method of private funding by borrowing from banks and financial organizations in accordance with Serbian law. These loans can cover daily operations as well as election campaign expenses.³²

Political parties can also collect membership fees as a regular source of income that they can use for campaign expenses. Members of the political party pay regular dues under conditions set by statute or general acts of the political party.³³

Political parties can also receive state funding from the Republic of Serbia, the autonomous province of Vojvodina, local governments, and organizations founded by them. The law provides for annual state funding to parties of up to 0.07 percent of the state budget, the autonomous province budget, and/or the local government budget, set aside as a lump sum for the entire campaign.³⁴ The 2023 state budget was adopted in December 2022, with expenditures at 2,107.4 billion RSD³⁵ (\$19.3 billion). For early elections, 20 percent of previously specified funds from the relevant budgets will be distributed equally to registered candidate lists that, at the time of submission, submitted statement they would use funds from public sources to cover election campaign costs. The remaining 80% of funds is allocated to submitters of election lists pro rata to the number of won seats, regardless of whether the funds from public sources were used to cover election campaign costs.³⁶

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The Republic Election Commission (REC) is the national-level election management body (EMB) in Serbia. The REC, Local Election Commissions (LECs), and Polling Boards have both standing and expanded compositions.³⁷ In its standing composition, the REC is comprised of a chairperson, 16 members, and a deputy for each member.³⁸ The REC also has members without voting power — a secretary, deputy secretary, and two representatives of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.³⁹ In its expanded composition, the REC's composition includes one representative of each submitter of the accepted candidate lists, each of whom has a deputy.

General responsibilities of the REC in elections include ensuring that the national elections run effectively and within the law, organizing and delivering election materials and instructions for lower-level EMBs, conducting training for all levels of election administration, defining the locations of polling stations, approving electoral lists, and leading voter information efforts. The REC oversees the electoral process at the national level, and LECs provide oversight at the Local Self-Government level.

³² Law on Financing Political Activities, Article 7.

³³ Law on Financing Political Activities, Article 8.

³⁴ Law on Financing Political Activities, Article 20.

³⁵ Vasovic, A. (2022, December 9). [Serbia's Parliament adopts 2023 budget, sets growth at 2.5%, deficit at 3.3%](#). Reuters.

³⁶ Law on Financing Political Activities, Article 20 and 21.

³⁷ Law on Local Elections, Article 6.

³⁸ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 21.

Polling Board members are appointed 10 days before Election Day.⁴⁰ The number of Polling Board members in national elections is determined by a parliamentary group's representation in the National Assembly on the day of the decision.⁴¹ In its standing composition, each Polling Board has a president and two members, plus a deputy for each. In its expanded composition, each certified candidate list may nominate one member and a corresponding deputy.

Who can vote in these elections, and how many registered voters are there?

The right to vote is granted to all citizens who are 18 years of age by Election Day and have a permanent residence in Serbia, except those whose legal capacity was revoked through a court decision.⁴² For these elections, the REC confirmed that there are 6,500,165 registered voters⁴³.

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

Serbian law requires a gender quota of at least 40 percent as a prerequisite for the registration of a list, with at least two of every five candidates on a list from the less represented sex.⁴⁴ The Republic Election Commission (REC) also is subject to a gender quota. If two individuals are nominated to the REC, there should be one member of each sex. If there are three nominees, two should be of one sex and one of the other. This formula continues for all nominees, regardless of the number.⁴⁵

Voters with disabilities may request mobile voting outside of polling stations if the relevant Local Election Commission is notified at least 72 hours before voting begins (by December 14), or the relevant Polling Board is informed no later than 11 a.m. on Election Day.⁴⁶ Individuals with disabilities who can reach and enter a polling station may request the help of an assistant of their choosing.⁴⁷ Polling Board members are required to report this assistance in the official polling station minutes.

Further, to allow for the equal participation of minorities, political parties of national minorities and coalitions consisting of the political parties of national minorities must collect 50 percent of the support signatures needed for a majority list. In the distribution of mandates, these parties also receive an increase of 35 percent if their share of votes is under the 3 percent threshold.⁴⁸ Ballots for voters from national minority groups will be printed in their language following the Serbian text if the relevant municipality recognizes that minority language.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ Ibid., Article 34.

⁴¹ Ibid., Article 36.

⁴² Law on the Election of the President of the Republic, Article 3 and Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 3.

⁴³ [sednica Republičke izborne komisije \(parlament.gov.rs\)](http://sednica.Republičke_izborne_komisije.parlament.gov.rs)

⁴⁴ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Article 19.

⁴⁶ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 96.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Article 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Article 140.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Article 44.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Serbian citizens residing abroad may vote in elections if they are included on the voters' list and file a request to vote at a diplomatic or consular mission abroad. A polling station can be established if at least 100 voters are registered with the relevant mission.⁵⁰ Registration for out-of-country voting was open from the day elections were called until 20 days before the election; the deadline was November 28. On Election Day, registered voters must cast their ballots in person at the diplomatic or consular mission where they are registered.⁵¹

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they be accredited?

Foreign and domestic observers can be accredited to observe election activities. There are separate application processes for domestic observers, foreign observers, and foreign states. Applications are due seven days before the election for domestic observers (December 9) and 10 days before the election for foreign observers or those representing foreign states (December 6).⁵² Authorizations are issued to observers within three days of applying and meeting the legal requirements.⁵³

Who is managing security on Election Day?

To ensure the security of electoral material, the Serbian police protect the printing of ballots and escort ballots from the printing office to Local Election Commissions (LECs). Every political party represented on the electoral list can nominate one person to be present during the printing, counting, and packing of ballots and to monitor the delivery of those materials to LECs.⁵⁴ Accredited election observers may also observe the process. The Republic Election Commission is obliged to provide timely notice to stakeholders of the time and location of the printing and handover of materials. Stakeholders generally perceive this process as transparent and sufficiently secure.⁵⁵

Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

Vote counting and tabulation are conducted at polling stations, led by members of the Polling Board.⁵⁶ Polling Board members are required to prepare polling station minutes that include the number of voters, valid and invalid ballots, and votes received per electoral list.⁵⁷ These materials are handed over to the relevant Local Election Commission no later than 12 hours after the polling station closes.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Law on the Unified Electoral Roll, Article 5.

⁵¹ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 56; Republic Electoral Commission: [Presidential Elections](#).

⁵² Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Articles 161–163

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Article 165.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 48.

⁵⁵ [Technical Election Assessment Mission in Serbia](#), IFES, March 2021.

⁵⁶ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 106.

When will official results be announced?

Within 96 hours after the close of polls, or by December 21, the Republic Election Commission will publish the general elections report for all polling stations. The report will list the number of voters entered on the electoral roll and the number who turned out; the number of ballot papers found in ballot boxes, the number of valid and invalid ballot papers, and the number of votes received by each candidate.⁵⁹ The deadline may be subject to change if the results of the election are disputed.

The results will be published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia.⁶⁰

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Election disputes are adjudicated by Local Election Commissions (LECs) in the first instance and the Republic Election Commission (REC) and Administrative Court of Serbia in the second and third instances of the process, respectively. Election participants and voters have three legal remedies to protect election rights. They may:

- Request the annulment of voting at a polling station;
- Enter an objection; or
- Lodge a complaint.

Any electoral list submitter or voter can file a request with the relevant LEC to annul voting results due to irregularities at a polling station. Election participants may only file requests at their registered polling places within 72 hours of the polling station's closing. The LEC must issue a decision on the request and publish it online within 72 hours of receipt.⁶¹ Appeals of an LEC decision to the REC and subsequent appeals of an REC decision to the Administrative Court can be filed within 72 hours of the respective decision. Both the REC and Administrative Court must issue a decision and publish it online within 72 hours of receipt of an appeal.⁶² Only election participants have the right to file an objection to or a complaint on the decision of the LEC or REC. The same deadlines apply for both types of legal remedies. If the REC upholds a complaint, the decision or act is annulled.⁶³ If it does not issue a decision within the specified timeline, the complaint is upheld. Irregularities identified in campaign finance, or the abuse of state resources are under the competence of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., Article 121.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Article 122.

⁶¹ Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Article 148.

⁶² Ibid., Articles 154–157.

⁶³ Ibid., Article 155.

⁶⁴ Law on Financing Political Activities, Section VI.

Resources

- [Constitution of the Republic of Serbia](#)
- [Law on the Election of Members of Parliament](#)
- [Law on Local Elections](#)
- [Law on the Unified Electoral Roll](#)
- [Law on Financing Political Activities](#)
- [Law on Administrative Disputes](#)
- [Republic Election Commission Website](#)
- [Instruction for Implementing the Law on the Unified Electoral Roll](#)
- [Rules of Procedure of the Republic Electoral Commission](#)
- [OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report](#)

About IFES in Serbia

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) began providing democratic assistance in Serbia in 1997 with the engagement of a number of key governmental actors and nongovernmental stakeholders to support efforts to reform and strengthen the electoral process. IFES currently implements a series of activities focused on supporting the professional development of election administration and anti-corruption oversight bodies in Serbia. Building the capacity of domestic institutions, IFES supports the Republic Election Commission to organize and conduct elections and the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption in Serbia to fulfill its election oversight mandate in accordance with the law and international standards. IFES also supports local civil society and media to build their capacity to monitor, report, and advocate on electoral corruption challenges and to deliver targeted voter education to empower marginalized communities to participate in the electoral process.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Republic Electoral Commission of the Republic of Serbia as of the publication date, December 13, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

These FAQs are made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The information herein is provided by the author(s) and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.