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Elections in Serbia

2020 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Serbian elections authorities as of June 18, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

Please note that these FAQs were originally published on June 16. They were updated on June 18 after more information about what Serbia's election management body is doing to safeguard the elections and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic became available.

When is Election Day?

The Republic of Serbia will hold parliamentary elections on Sunday, June 21, 2020, from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.¹ Voting will take place in 8,253 polling stations across the country staffed by 49,770 poll workers,² 90 polling stations in Kosovo and 43 polling stations across diplomatic consular missions around the world.³ Out-of-country voters must vote between June 20-21, 2020, depending on the country where they are voting.⁴ Once all polling stations close, poll workers and diplomatic consular mission representatives will begin the counting and tabulation process.⁵

What is at stake in these elections?

The 2020 parliamentary elections in Serbia are set to take place against a backdrop of deep political polarization, a boycott announced by a part of the opposition and accusations of democratic backsliding on the part of the executive branch. This has been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related state of emergency (SoE) that was in place from March 16-May 6, 2020, which postponed the original Election Day of April 26, 2020, and suspended the election campaign during the period of the SoE. Due to the split election campaign and the subsequent measures that have changed the nature of campaigning, this disrupted election cycle will be different than any in Serbia's recent history. Further, many countries are paying close attention to this election, as it is the first in Europe and Eurasia to be rescheduled and held following the waves of postponements and cancellations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is the electoral system?

Serbia has a unicameral National Assembly, whose 250 members are elected in a single nationwide constituency using a list proportional representation system. A registered political party, a citizens' group or a coalition of registered political parties may submit the electoral list.⁶ The electoral list submitted for registration must be supported by at least 10,000 notarized signatures.⁷ Prior to this election cycle, the threshold to enter the National Assembly was 5 percent of the total number of votes. In February 2020, the National Assembly approved a change in the law to lower the threshold to 3

¹ Article 56, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

² 133rd Session of the Republic Electoral Commission, May 25, 2020.

³ Supplementary Decision on Determining Polling Stations for Voting in the Elections for Members of the National Assembly, scheduled for June 21, 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 31, 2020.

⁴ Article 56, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

⁵ On the same day, local elections will be held in 133 out of 145 municipalities, while voters in the Vojvodina autonomous region will elect members of the Vojvodina Assembly.

⁶ Article 28, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

⁷ Article 43, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

percent.⁸ The exception is when a political party represents a coalition of ethnic minorities, in which case there is no threshold. Parliamentary seats are allocated in proportion to the number of votes won by each list, using the highest quotient system – known as the D'Hondt method.⁹ If the quotient calculated for two or more electoral lists is the same, the final seat is allocated to the list that received the largest number of votes overall.

What is the campaign timeline and expenditure and donation limits?

The campaign period began immediately after the official call of elections made by the president on March 4, 2020, and was set to continue until 48 hours before Election Day.¹⁰ However, as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 and the joint decision of the president, speaker of the Parliament and prime minister to declare the SoE, the elections were postponed and the election campaign suspended until the end of the SoE, with the campaign just 12 days in.

The SoE was formally lifted on May 6, 2020, and a meeting between the government and representatives of political parties yielded the new election date of June 21, 2020.¹¹ On May 11, 2020, the national election management body, the Republic Electoral Commission (REC), issued a revised election activities calendar.¹² Among other dates, the calendar updated the campaign timeline from where it left off prior to the SoE until the “silence” period, which will last from June 18, 2020, to the closing of polling stations on Election Day.¹³

The Law on the Finance of Political Activities governs political finance, including funding of the election campaign. Under this law, there is no limit on campaign spending.¹⁴ The standard donation limit equals 20 average monthly salaries for individuals and 10 times that for legal entities. For donations during an election year, limits are double the standard amount.¹⁵

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Any eligible voter in Serbia can stand in the election as long as his or her name is included in a submitted electoral list.¹⁶ No independent candidates are eligible to submit his or her name on an electoral list.

⁸ Snezana Bjelotomic, “Parliament agrees to 3% electoral threshold,” *Serbian Monitor*, February 10, 2020.

⁹ The D'Hondt method is used to determine seat allocation in party-list proportional representation. The total 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, etc., until the maximum numbers calculated corresponds to the number of seats that need to be distributed.

¹⁰ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 7.

¹¹ “An Unprecedented Election,” *Center for Free Elections and Democracy and Open Society Foundation, Serbia*, May 13, 2020, page 5.

¹² Calendar of Electoral Activities in the Process of Elections for MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 11, 2020.

¹³ Calendar of Electoral Activities in the Process of Elections for MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 11, 2020.

¹⁴ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 8.

¹⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 8.

¹⁶ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 7.

Electoral lists are not limited in the number of candidates included therein. The submission of electoral lists was due to the Republic Electoral Commission no later than June 5, 2020.¹⁷

A total of 3,419 candidates will be competing for the 250 seats in the National Assembly.

Who is eligible to vote and how many registered voters are there?

To be eligible to vote, one must be at least 18 years old on Election Day and a Serbian citizen. There will be a total of 6,583,665 eligible voters in this election, of which 13,529 are eligible as out-of-country voters.

Serbia's voter register – the Unified Voter Register (UVR) – is maintained by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (MDULS) and is updated continuously based on municipalities' records, state institutions' input and requests from voters.¹⁸ The UVR is used to establish the Single Electoral Roll. Eligible voters could register or modify their entry on the electoral roll until June 5, 2020. From June 6-June 17, 2020, any application to register or modify must be filed with MDULS. The final electoral roll will be published in the *Official Gazette*. Voters cannot be added to the list after June 20.¹⁹ Registered voters will need to bring valid identification to the polling station to vote. When voters receive the ballot, they will also be marked on the index finger by a special spray as a sign that they have completed voting.²⁰

Voters in custody or serving a prison sentence on Election Day can vote at a polling station inside the correctional facility where they are located.²¹ Voters serving in the military or temporary military duty or attending education programs in units or institutions of the Serbian Armed Forces can vote at polling stations nearest to the unit or institution where they are stationed or attending education programs.²²

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Serbian nationals living abroad can vote in parliamentary elections under certain conditions; out-of-country citizens of Serbia who have a permanent residence in Serbia and who are temporarily residing abroad are allowed to vote in person at Serbian diplomatic consular missions determined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²³ Out-of-country voters must have submitted their application to a

¹⁷ Calendar of Electoral Activities in the Process of Elections for MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 11, 2020.

¹⁸ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 6.

¹⁹ Calendar of Electoral Activities in the Process of Elections for MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 11, 2020.

²⁰ Article 68, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

²¹ Article 72b, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

²² Article 73, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

²³ Article 73a, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

designated diplomatic consular mission by May 30, 2020, at the latest.²⁴ They can then vote until June 20-21, 2020, in their designated diplomatic consular missions.²⁵

Will Kosovo Serbs be able to vote in the elections?

The Republic Electoral Commission (REC) designates polling stations in Kosovo in consultation with the Office for Kosovo and Metohija. The REC issued a decision on the designation of 90 polling stations on May 31, 2020.²⁶ The REC may also enact “special rules” in regard to the electoral bodies in Kosovo and delivery of election material to ensure safety in the conduct of elections.²⁷

What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities?

In December 2019, the Republic Electoral Commission (REC) passed a decision to require polling stations undergo accessibility assessments to encourage equal access for persons with disabilities.²⁸ All polling station proposals must either present the assessment reports or submit a completed questionnaire on their accessibility. These assessments will inform the REC’s decision to designate a polling station as fully accessible, partially accessible or inaccessible to persons using wheelchairs. Voters with disabilities, both in Serbia and abroad, are able to apply for or modify their entry on the electoral roll via stamps engraved with their signature.²⁹

On Election Day, voters with disabilities can bring a person to cast a vote in the manner determined by the voter.³⁰

What provisions are in place to promote the equal participation of women and minorities?

For equal participation of women to stand for election, submitters of the electoral list are required to include at least two names of the less-represented gender out of every sequential set of five names on the electoral list, a recent change passed by the Parliament in February 2020.³¹ Further, to allow for the equal participation of minorities, political parties of national minorities and coalitions consisting of political parties of national minorities are exempt from the required threshold of votes to obtain seats in

²⁴ Article 55, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

²⁵ Article 56, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

²⁶ Supplementary Decision on Determining Polling Stations for Voting in the Elections for Members of the National Assembly, scheduled for June 21, 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 31, 2020.

²⁷ Article 2, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

²⁸ Article 47, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

²⁹ Articles 54-55, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

³⁰ Article 72, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

³¹ “An Unprecedented Election,” *Center for Free Elections and Democracy and Open Society Foundation, Serbia*, May 13, 2020, page 2.

the National Assembly. They will also benefit from a recent amendment, which permits these parties to gain an additional 35 percent of mandates during the distribution of mandates.³² The law also states that ballot papers in municipalities where a minority language is in official use should be provided in the minority language.³³

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

Elections are administered by the Republic Electoral Commission (REC), an autonomous and independent body.³⁴ The REC consists of a chairperson and 16 members, who are appointed by the National Assembly for a period of four years. In the case of its enlarged composition, the REC includes one representative from each of the political entities that submitted an electoral list. Powers and responsibilities include organizing the technical organization and legal conduct of elections, determining the number and location of polling boards, confirming the electoral list, managing election materials and publishing the election results.³⁵

What is the election management body doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and counter foreign interference?

The Republic Electoral Commission (REC) is providing transparent information on its pre-election activities, including by livestreaming all sessions via YouTube and sharing highlights on both its website and Instagram account on a near-daily basis.³⁶ The REC is using these platforms to share accurate and timely information for voters, observers and government authorities, which mitigates information interference and emphasizes proactive measures to resist potential vulnerabilities.

What is the election management body doing to safeguard the elections and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Republic Electoral Commission is requesting that, on Election Day, all poll workers wear masks and gloves, disinfect their hands often, keep the polling stations well ventilated and maintain a distance of at least one meter (3.3 feet) from other poll workers, observers and voters. Poll workers will also monitor voters to ensure they wear masks and keep a distance of at least one meter between one another while queuing and voting. Observers and poll watchers will follow distancing practices. All polling stations across Serbia will display posters with instructions for poll workers and voters. A public service announcement video and radio message will also air in the days leading up to June 21 to inform voters of their responsibilities in protecting themselves and others against COVID-19.

³² Article 81, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

³³ Article 60, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

³⁴ Article 33, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

³⁵ Article 34, Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, Republic of Serbia.

³⁶ Find updates on the [REC's website](#) or find its Instagram @riksrbije.

A recent paper from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' *COVID-19 Briefing Series, Safeguarding Health and Elections*, details how to safely conduct elections during a pandemic and other public health emergencies.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Both foreign and domestic observers can be accredited by the Republic Electoral Commission (REC) to monitor electoral activities. Foreign observers must have applied by June 10, 2020, and domestic observers by June 15, 2020.³⁷ Domestic observers and representatives of foreign or international organizations will submit their applications to the REC. Representatives of foreign countries will submit their applications to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which will review and forward the application to the REC within three days of receipt.³⁸ Additional details can be found in Articles 89-94 of the Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

When will official results be announced?

The Republic Electoral Commission will publish the official results within 96 hours from when voting ends, on June 25, 2020, by 8:00 p.m. The results will be published in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*.³⁹

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Voters, candidates and electoral list submitters can file complaints against decisions and irregularities with the Republic Electoral Commission (REC), although the Administrative Court holds final jurisdiction.⁴⁰ Complaints must be filed within 24 hours of the decision or irregularity, and the REC must decide on a complaint within 48 hours. When a complaint is upheld by the REC, the decision or act is annulled. If the REC does not make a decision within the timeline, the complaint is upheld. Appeals to the REC decision must be filed with the Administrative Court within 48 hours of the decision. Irregularities identified in campaign finance or the abuse of state resources are filed with the Anti-Corruption Agency.⁴¹

³⁷ Articles 89 and 90, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020.

³⁸ Article 91, Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020, Republic Electoral Commission of Serbia.

³⁹ Calendar of Electoral Activities in the Process of Elections for MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020, Republic Electoral Commission, May 11, 2020.

⁴⁰ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 10.

⁴¹ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report, Parliamentary Elections in Serbia, 2020, page 10.

Resources

- [Constitution of the Republic of Serbia](#)
- [Law on the Elections of Members of Parliament, Serbia](#)
- [Instructions for Conducting the Elections for the MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020](#)
- [Calendar of Electoral Activities in the Process of Elections for MPs to the National Assembly, Called for 21 June 2020](#)
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [Needs Assessment Report, Parliamentary Elections 2020, Serbia](#)
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems [COVID-19 Briefing Series](#)