

# Freedom on the Net 2025 - Serbia



## Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Internet freedom in Serbia declined during the coverage period as the government cracked down on widespread protests that began after the September 2024 collapse of a train station canopy in Novi Sad killed 16 people. Authorities detained social media users, including students, for content related to the demonstrations, and online journalists who attempted to cover the story encountered increased violence and harassment, both online and in person. Activists and journalists continued to be targeted for surveillance with spyware, and media outlets faced a barrage of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). Despite these threats, Serbia still featured only limited website blocking and strong constitutional protections for journalists.

- In February 2025, Netherlands-based United Group sold subsidiary Serbia Broadband to e& PPF Telecom Group, a joint venture between companies based in Czechia and the United Arab Emirates; United Group also sold other Serbian media assets, including NetTV and TotalTV,<sup>1</sup> to state-owned Telekom Serbia (A4 and B6).<sup>2</sup>
- In February 2025, law enforcement officers launched a raid on four nongovernmental organizations, including the Center for Research Transparency and Accountability, which operates the fact-checking outlet Istinomer. Prosecutors claimed that the groups had laundered funds from the US Agency for International Development, but Reporters Without Borders decried the raid as a “political move” (B5, B6, and C7).<sup>3</sup>
- In April 2025, Stefan Radojičić, a student at the University of Belgrade, was detained after the progovernment outlet *The Informer* published a leaked video of a speech he gave at the university. During his detention, his phone was confiscated (B8 and C3).<sup>4</sup>
- A December 2024 Amnesty International report revealed that Serbian authorities routinely used NoviSpy, a unique spyware tool installed on victims’ devices while they were in police detention, and Cellebrite, a data extraction tool, to access the sensitive information of journalists and activists.<sup>5</sup> In February 2025, Cellebrite stopped offering services in Serbia in response to Amnesty International’s report (B8 and C5).<sup>6</sup>
- In March 2025, Amnesty International found that two journalists working for the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network had been targeted with Pegasus, a spyware tool produced by the Israeli cybersurveillance company NSO Group (C5).<sup>7</sup>
- Between January and May 2025, the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (NUNS) reported 15 physical attacks against journalists, including reporters who work online.<sup>8</sup> In March 2025, unidentified attackers vandalized the vehicle of Rijalda

Mujezinović, a Brodarevo-based journalist who had been supportive of the anticorruption protests and critical of the government on social media (C7).<sup>9</sup>

## Political Overview

Serbia is a parliamentary republic that holds multiparty elections, but over the past decade the ruling Serbian Progressive Party has steadily eroded political rights and civil liberties, putting legal and extralegal pressure on independent media, the political opposition, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens who express dissent.

*This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to [ongoing budget constraints](#). Please consider making a [donation](#) to support future editions of this vital resource.*

*For additional background information, see last year's [full report](#).*

## A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

<b>Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?</b>	<b>6 / 6</b>
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A2 0-3 pts

<b>Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?</b>	<b>2 / 3</b>
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A3 0-6 pts

<b>Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?</b>	<b>6 / 6</b>
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A4 0-6 pts

<b>Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?</b>	<b>3 / 6</b>
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A5 0-4 pts

<b>Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?</b>	<b>4 / 4</b>
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## B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

<b>Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?</b>	<b>6 / 6</b>
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**B2 0-4 pts**

**Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?** | 3 / 4

**B3 0-4 pts**

**Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?** | 3 / 4

**B4 0-4 pts**

**Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?** | 2 / 4

**B5 0-4 pts**

**Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?** | 1 / 4

**B6 0-3 pts**

**Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?** | 2 / 3

**B7 0-4 pts**

**Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?** | 3 / 4

**B8 0-6 pts**

**Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?** | 4 / 6

*Score Change: The score declined from 5 to 4 due to the authorities' efforts to intimidate people who organized online and the use of extraction technology against activists. 10*

## **C Violations of User Rights**

**C1 0-6 pts**

**Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?** | 4 / 6

**C2 0-4 pts**

**Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?** | 3 / 4

**C3 0-6 pts**

**Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?** | 4 / 6

*Score Change: The score declined from 5 to 4 because people were detained for online speech during the country's anticorruption protests.* <sup>11</sup>

**C4 0-4 pts**

**Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?** | 3 / 4

**C5 0-6 pts**

**Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?** | 2 / 6

**C6 0-6 pts**

**Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?** | 3 / 6

**C7 0-5 pts**

**Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?** | 2 / 5

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because of an uptick in harassment and physical attacks against online journalists.* <sup>12</sup>

**C8 0-3 pts**

**Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?** | 1 / 3

## Footnotes

- 1 e& and PPF Telecom Group, "e& PPF Telecom Group agrees 100% acquisition of Serbia Broadband (SBB)," February 11, 2025, <https://www.ppf.eu/en/press-release/e-ppf-telecom-group-agrees-100-acqu...>; United Group, "United Group agrees to sell SBB Serbia, as well as Net TV Plus business and its sports broadcasting rights for Western Balkans," February 12, 2025, <https://united.group/united-group-agrees-to-sell-sbb-serbia-as-well-as-...>; TELEKOM SRBIJA, "TELEKOM SRBIJA'S TAKEOVER OF NET TV AND TOTAL TV," April 2, 2025, <https://mts.rs/About-Telekom/Media-center/a125520-telekomsrbija-takeove...>
- 2 "United Group sells Serbia Broadband to e& PPF Telecom Group, disposes other assets," Reuters, February 12, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/united-group-sells-serbia-broadba...>
- 3 Reporters Without Borders, "Serbia: RSF calls on the EU to condemn a 28-hour police raid on an independent media outlet that received USAID," February 27, 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/serbia-rsf-calls-eu-condemn-28-hour-police-raid-inde...>
- 4 Sanja Sovrlić, "Student za N1: Priveli su me zbog snimka koji je objavljen na Informeru, oduzeli su mi telefon i laptop [Student for N1: I was detained because of the video that was published on Informer, my phone and laptop were taken away]," N1, April 8, 2025, <https://n1info.rs/vesti/privedeni-student-za-n1-priveli-su-me-zbog-snim...>; "Arrest on the street: Student Stefan Radojičić questioned by the police and

released,” Vreme, April 8, 2025, <https://vreme.com/en/vesti/priveden-student-saobracajnog-fakulteta-niko...>

- 5 Amnesty International, “Serbia: Authorities using spyware and Cellebrite forensic extraction tools to hack journalists and activists,” December 16, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/serbia-authorities-using...>
- 6 Amnesty International, “Serbia: Cellebrite halts product use in Serbia following Amnesty surveillance report,” February 26, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/cellebrite-halts-product...>
- 7 Amnesty International, “Serbia: Technical Briefing: Journalists targeted with Pegasus spyware,” March 27, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur70/9186/2025/en/>.
- 8 International Press Institute, “Serbia: War on journalists continues,” May 19, 2025, <https://ipi.media/serbia-war-on-journalists-continues/>.
- 9 “Razlupan automobil novinarki koja aktivno kritikuje režim u Srbiji [The broken car of a journalist who actively criticizes the regime in Serbia],” Cenzolovka, March 25, 2025, <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/razlupan-automobil-novinark...>
- 10 Amnesty International, “Serbia: Cellebrite zero-day exploit used to target phone of Serbian student activist,” February 28, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur70/9118/2025/en/>
- 11 Katarina Baletic, “Serbian Police Enter University Faculty, Detain Journalist, in Protest Clampdown,” Balkan Insight, April 11, 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/04/11/serbian-police-enter-university-fa...>
- 12 International Press Institute, “Serbia: War on journalists continues,” May 19, 2025, <https://ipi.media/serbia-war-on-journalists-continues/>; “Razlupan automobil novinarki koja aktivno kritikuje režim u Srbiji,” Cenzolovka, March 25, 2025, <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/razlupan-automobil-novinark...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Pro-government publisher attacks journalist Vuk Cvijić over investigative report,” June 5, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/06/pro-government-newspaper-publisher-attacks-jour...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Serbia politician physically attacks journalist Miloš Ljiljanić during municipal assembly meeting,” November 12, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/11/serbia-politician-physically-attacks-journalist...>; International Press Institute, “Serbia: Attacks on journalists reach unprecedented levels amidst ongoing anti-government protests,” August 22, 2025, <https://ipi.media/serbia-attacks-on-journalists-reach-unprecedented-lev...>