



#FactCheck

# THE POWER OF MEDIA & POLITICS

ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCE ON THE ELECTORAL  
PROCESSES IN MONTENEGRO



#Misinformation









#FactCheck

# THE POWER OF MEDIA & POLITICS

ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCE ON THE ELECTORAL  
PROCESSES IN MONTENEGRO



#Misinformation



CENTRE FOR MONITORING AND RESEARCH





**Publisher:**

Centre for Monitoring and Research (CeMI)

Tel/fax: +382 (0) 20 653 736

e-mail: [info@cemi.org.me](mailto:info@cemi.org.me)

[www.cemi.org.me](http://www.cemi.org.me)

**For the Publisher:**

Zlatko Vujović, PhD

**Authors:**

M.A. Teodora Gilić

Dr. Slaven Živković

Dr. Zlatko Vujović

**October, 2023**



# CONTENT

<b>I INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>II POLITICAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>III MEDIA SCENE IN MONTENEGRO</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.1. POLITICAL PARALLELISM AND POLITICIZED CIRCULATION-ORIENTED MEDIA</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.1.1. MEDIA CONTENT, EXTERNAL PLURALISM, AND POLITICIZED MEDIA</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.1.2. POLITICIZED PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE (RADIO AND TELEVISION OF MONTENEGRO - RTCG)</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1.3. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE READERSHIP AND MEDIA CHOICES</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.2. STRONG PENETRATION OF FOREIGN MEDIA</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3.2.1. THE OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE OF KEY MEDIA IN MONTENEGRO</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3.2.2. INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN ACTORS ON MEDIA REPORTING - VOTERS' PERCEPTION</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>IV POLARIZATION OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN MONTENEGRO</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>V COVERAGE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA DURING THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>VI SOCIAL NETWORKS AND DISINFORMATION IN THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>6.1. FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>6.2. EXAMPLES OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ONLINE PORTALS AND FACEBOOK PAGES</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>VII THE IMPACT OF CAMPAIGNS AND DISSEMINATED DISINFORMATION ON VOTERS' SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>7.1. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - CAMPAIGN AND MONITORING OF VOTERS' SENTIMENT</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>7.2. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VOTERS' SUPPORT OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND THE CHOICE OF MEDIA THEY FOLLOW</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>7.3. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS - CAMPAIGN AND MONITORING OF VOTERS' SENTIMENT</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>7.4. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE VOTERS' SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR CHOICE OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>7.5. THE SCOPE OF INFLUENCE OF DISSEMINATED DISINFORMATION</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>VIII CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>8.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS (PARLIAMENT, GOVERNMENT)</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>8.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>57</b>





## INTRODUCTION

## I

Elections constitute a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, providing citizens with an opportunity for active participation in democracy and the expression of their political preferences. However, the attempts by foreign (political) actors to influence political dynamics and electoral processes in Montenegro are very concerning. There are many ways in which foreign actors operate in Montenegro, and one of them certainly involves using media and social networks as channels through which disinformation and fake news are disseminated with the aim of discrediting certain political actors. Any intentional spread of information that is not true and is created with the goal of manipulating the public represents a serious threat to democratic processes, leading to a decline in public trust in the media and the electoral process.

Montenegrin society is deeply polarized and divided on a national and political basis. This polarization is also reflected in the media landscape of Montenegro. According to the opinions of media experts (Gilić, 2023:26), *there is not a single completely unbiased media outlet in Montenegro. Some are inclined to impartial reporting and professionalism, while others are more distant from this concept.* It is through biased reporting on socio-political events that the readership is directed toward a particular political stance, **contributing to citizens viewing the opposition perspective as less legitimate than it might otherwise be.** This media polarization contributes to the development of a divided society in which both sides remain closed to reading and engaging with different views and information that do not align with their beliefs.

## II POLITICAL CONTEXT

The period following the restoration of multi-party politics in Montenegro in 1990 was characterized by a thirty-year rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). The DPS governed Montenegro through a combination of winning an absolute majority in elections (1990, 1992, 1996) and forming pre-election and post-election coalitions (1997-2020).

The period of dominance by the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) was marked by its long duration and coincided with wars in the neighboring regions, a severe economic crisis, human rights violations, and widespread corruption. However, it also witnessed the restoration of independence, the avoidance of wars and conflicts on Montenegro's territory, extensive NATO bombings in Montenegro, entry into the NATO alliance, and the opening all negotiation chapters. Montenegro also gained the status of a frontrunner candidate for European integration in the Western Balkans under the leadership of the DPS.

The prolonged dominance of this party and the turbulent political period in the Western Balkans resulted in Montenegro being part of three federal-confederal state structures (SFRY, FR Yugoslavia, and State Union of Serbia and Montenegro). Afterward, Montenegro continued to function as an independent state. The influence of Serbia, its media, as well as religious and political structures, has always been significant and sometimes even dominant, even though the DPS was in power.

From being the least economically developed republic in the former Yugoslavia, Montenegro, despite hitting rock bottom with hyperinflation in the 1990s while part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, managed to position itself above other former Yugoslav republics in several economic indicators. It ranked significantly behind Slovenia and Croatia but ahead of the remaining former republics of the ex Yugoslavia.

During the period of the DPS's dominance, the party split into the DPS led by Milo Đukanović, who was the vice president of the party at that time, and the SNP led by the defeated former president of the unique DPS, Momir Bulatović. The key dividing line was the support or opposition to the unitary model of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially after unconstitutional changes to the federal constitution and the election of Milošević as its president in 1996., Opponents of Milošević gradually gathered around the DPS, while his supporters gathered around the SNP.

This division within the dominant party gradually aligned more with the split between supporters and opponents of the restoration of Montenegrin independence, as well as the pro-Western and pro-Russian future orientation of Montenegro. Consequently, numerous parties emerged from the SNP, some of which did not survive the tumultuous political landscape. Notably, the most influential parties that originated from the SNP were Democrats Montenegro (DCG), led by Aleksa Bečić, a former SNP candidate for the mayor of Podgorica, and the Democratic People's Party (DNP), one of the pillars of the former Democratic Front, led by the dissatisfied, at that time former president of the SNP, Predrag Bulatović.

From the numerous pro-Serbian parties formed through mergers and dissolutions of the People's Party of Novak Kilibarda and the Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj, the New Serbian Democracy (NOVA) gradually emerged, led by Andrija Mandić.

Of the parties that initially advocated for the restoration of independence during the early days of multi-party politics, such as the Liberal Alliance (LSCG) led by Slavko Perović and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) formed through the unification of several social democratic parties, only the SDP and the Social Democrats (SD) remained on the political scene. The SDP is a rare party that emerged through the integration of many parties. However, the integrated party also split into two separate entities – the SD, led by Ivan Brajović, which remained in various coalition arrangements with the DPS, and the SDP, led by Ranko Krivokapić, which, after 17 years of coalition with the DPS, moved into the opposition.

Dissatisfaction with the DPS with a specific part of the electoral public opened the door for creating new center-leaning parties of a political center with a sovereign orientation, such as the Movement for Changes (PzP), Positive Montenegro, and United Reform Action (URA). These parties have garnered varying levels of support from the electorate.

After 30 years of dominance, in 2020, the DPS moved into the opposition, even though the previous opposition achieved victory with a narrow margin of just one seat.

The formation of a new government has revealed the emergence of a new political player, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), which now dominates the political scene in Montenegro. This followed religious processions, known as "litije," organized in 2019 and 2020 with the support of the pro-Serbian opposition in Montenegro, along with open interference from Serbia and Russia.

Public expectations of the new government in 2020 were soon replaced by disappointment. The government led by Zdravko Krivokapić, supported by the Serbian Orthodox Church, lasted barely a year, and the subsequent minority government led by Dritan Abazović lasted around four months. Failing to form a third government led to expectations that the crisis would be resolved through presidential and early parliamentary elections.

In the presidential elections, the president of the DPS, Milo Đukanović, was defeated, and subsequently, he resigned from the position of party president. His departure prompted a change in generational leadership in almost all long-standing parties, so today's political scene in Montenegro is dominated by younger politicians. Hence, it is not surprising that there is an increased influence of external actors but also a dominance of populist approaches.

Forming a new government under the leadership of Milojko Spajić, the leader of the PES, raises numerous questions about Montenegro's future orientation, especially in foreign policy. This is due to the fact that, for the first time, representatives of pro-Russian parties will be part of the government. Additionally, it goes against the recommendations of Western partners who believe carries the risk of more substantial influence from Serbia and, particularly, Russia on the decisions Montenegro will make. They fear it could distance Montenegro from the EU and bring it closer to Russia and China.

### III MEDIA SCENE IN MONTENEGRO

In 2021, Montenegro recorded a media freedom index of 34.33, indicating a negative deviation compared to the previous year when this index was 33.83<sup>1</sup>. During this time frame, the overall media freedom index in Montenegro increased by 1.36 index points, indicating a worsening situation in the media sector. <sup>2</sup>Negative assessments have been coming from the European Commission for several years, warning about an extremely high degree of polarization, unbalanced and biased reporting, as well as extensive involvement of foreign media from the region, which was particularly evident during the election period.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the categorization of media systems by Hallin and Mancini (2004), Montenegro is classified into the *Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic model*, placing it in the same group as countries like Greece, Portugal, Italy, and Spain. As will be seen in the following study, Montenegro's media system exhibits characteristics of a polarized pluralistic model, considering that, like in the case of other countries, there are certain deviations from this ideal-typical model. What characterizes such media systems and applies to Montenegro's media system includes: (1) *a relatively high degree of political parallelism*<sup>4</sup> (*politically aligned circulation-oriented media and their use for political purposes, (politically influenced) broadcasting under government influence*); (2) *a low level of media professionalism*. In the following study, we will delve into some of these concepts.

#### 3.1. POLITICAL PARALLELISM AND POLITICIZED CIRCULATION-ORIENTED MEDIA

**Political parallelism** in Montenegro is prominently present, meaning its media scene reflects existing political divisions. Media in Montenegro are not exclusively aligned with one party; instead, they generally support specific policies and ideologies. Political parallelism has multiple components, each indicating the extent of its presence in a media system. Therefore, we highlight the first and fundamental indicator of political parallelism: (1) media content, through which we assess whether and to what extent media report in line with a particular policy, i.e., the extent of bias when reporting on current political events in the country. Other indicators used to assess the degree of political parallelism in a media system include: (2) how media treat the diversity of political loyalties and orientations, known as internal (the existence of pluralism within each individual media) and external pluralism (the existence of various media divided in terms of the political views they support); (3) politicized public service; (4) organizational links between media and political parties or organizations, such as the church, cooperatives, etc., which are often associated with political parties; (5) the tendency of media professionals (owners, editors, journalists, etc.) to be active in political life, often holding positions in parties or public institutions, or the tendency for a journalist's career to be shaped according to their political preferences; (6) the political orientation of the readership is linked to the choice of media they read; (7) the role and practice of journalists.

<sup>1</sup> The index provides a comprehensive overview of the state of media plurality and independence, as well as the safety and freedom of journalists in performing their duties. Lower ratings indicate a better situation for the media, while higher ratings indicate a worse situation.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1026495/montenegro-press-freedom-index/>

<sup>3</sup> The report of the European Commission, available at: [izvjestaj-evropske-komisije-o-napretku-crne-gore-za-2021-godinu-1.pdf](#)

<sup>4</sup> Political parallelism refers to the nature of the relationship between political actors and the media, indicating the degree to which media reflects political divisions.

Furthermore, we will explore some of these components in the context of the Montenegrin media scene to understand the level of political parallelism in Montenegro.

### **3.1.1. MEDIA CONTENT, EXTERNAL PLURALISM, AND POLITICIZED MEDIA**

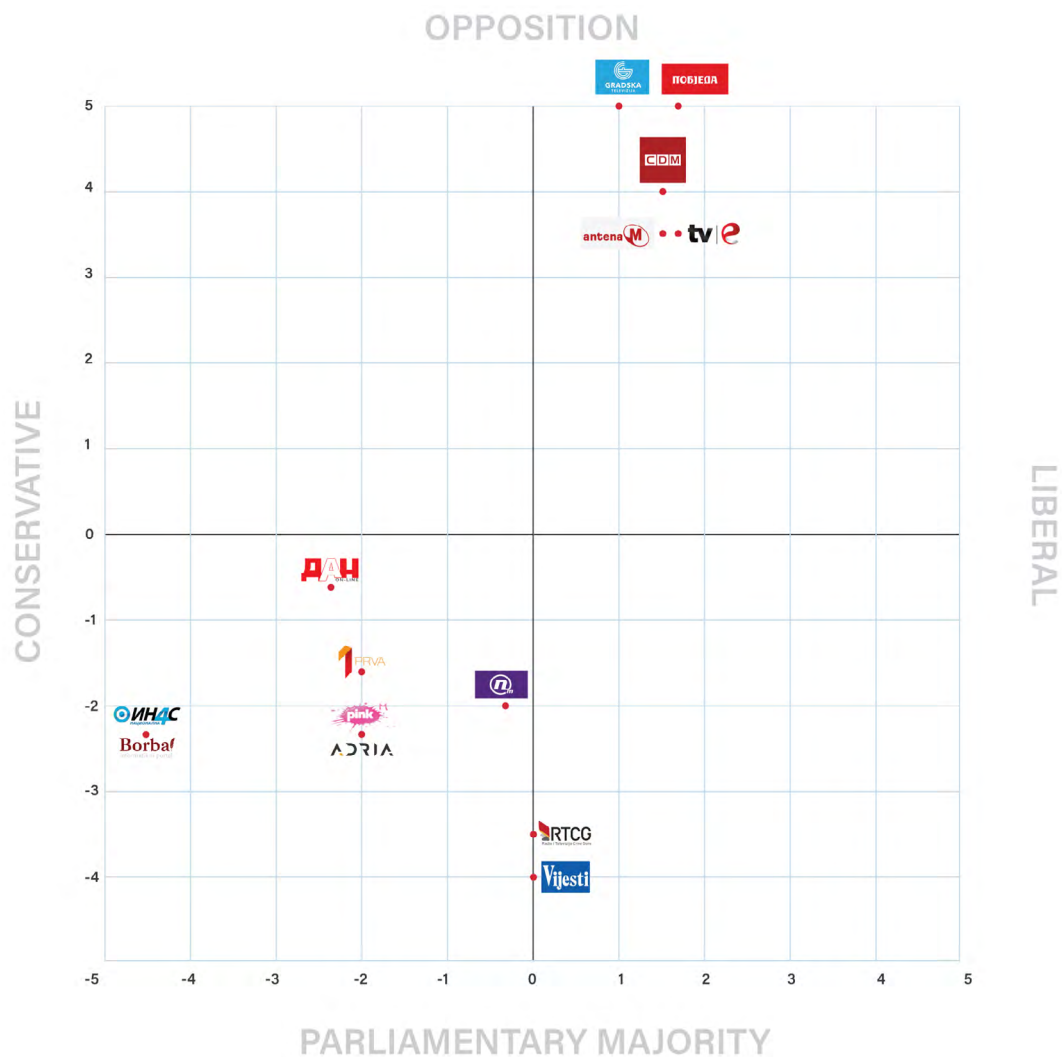
In the context of a country's media system, external pluralism refers to the existence of various media whose content is shaped by political and ideological preferences. While media pluralism is desirable for society and democracy, it is concerning that this type of pluralism leads to media polarization, further deepening polarization and divisions within society.

When it comes to Montenegro, as many as 88.9% of Montenegrin citizens believe that the media is biased to a greater or lesser extent. Of these, almost every third citizen (29.3%) completely agrees with this view, and nearly 60% partially agree (CeMI research, 2023). Five media experts in Montenegro also believe that the media is biased and inclined towards a particular politics and ideology. They have classified the media into two groups based on the politics each analyzed media supports and into two additional groups regarding the ideological values that the analyzed media promotes through their reporting.

Fourteen media outlets have been analyzed through which Montenegrin citizens primarily get informed about political events and electoral campaigns. The analysis concludes that Montenegro's media landscape is deeply polarized on party and ideological basis. Only three media outlets are recognized as positioned in the ideological center concerning their position on the liberal-conservative axis. Two of them (**RTCG and Vijesti**) are considered left-center, and one (**Nova M**) is considered right-center. However, according to experts, these three media outlets cannot maintain a centrist position regarding the government-opposition relationship. Media experts categorize them as supporting the parliamentary majority.

Based on the analysis of media experts, the media scene is divided as follows: media supporting the opposition, whose party programs are primarily aligned with liberal ideology, including **TV E, Antena M, CDM, Pobjeda, and Gradska**. On the other hand, media expressing inclination towards the policy of the parliamentary majority, with party programs aligned with conservative ideology, include **IN4S, Borba.me, Adria TV, Dan, Pink M, and Prva**.



*Graph 1: Ideological-political map of media in Montenegro*

Source: Gilić (2023:22) Research on the interconnection between biased media, social networks, and political polarization in Montenegro

In terms of media political division, on a scale from -5 to 5, a value of -5 represents the strongest media bias favoring the parliamentary majority, while a value of 5 indicates the strongest media bias favoring the opposition. Regarding ideological division in the media, a value of 5 suggests that, based on its reporting, the media often emphasizes information and opinions that focus on protecting and expanding individual rights and freedoms such as freedom of speech, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and civil liberties. On the other hand, a value of -5 indicates that the media supports a conservative ideology. Media rated as ideologically centrist are those displaying internal pluralism, meaning they report in a balanced manner.

### 3.1.2. POLITICIZED PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE (RADIO AND TELEVISION OF MONTENEGRO - RTCG)

Similar to other countries characterized by a polarized pluralistic media system, public broadcasting in Montenegro is susceptible to politicization and party influence, prominently emphasizing political dominance over editorial policies. The political influence on public broadcasting services is directly

linked to the structure of the RTCG Council. Past years show that political influence has almost always been present in the RTCG Council, where appointments generally followed party loyalty, jeopardizing the professional reporting and editing of this institution. Specifically, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) in Montenegro, during its 30-year rule until August 2020, demonstrated significant control over the editorial reporting of RTCG during this period, except for a brief interval in 2017. The control of the then-ruling majority over the public broadcasting service became particularly evident when members of the previous parliamentary majority from the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), Croatian Civic Initiative (HGI), Social Democratic Party (SD), and Bosniak Party (BS) in 2017 **decided to dismiss Goran Đurović from the RTCG Council**. Đurović was removed from the RTCG Council at the end of December 2017 on charges of violating the Law on the Prevention of Corruption for not timely reporting that he was the director of a vegetable production company during his tenure in the Council. Members of the ruling majority interpreted this violation as a conflict of interest, although the Agency for Prevention of Corruption (ASK) concluded in its decision that there was no conflict of interest related to his membership in the RTCG Council. After years of legal proceedings, the Council of Judges of the Higher Court in Podgorica, composed of Nenad Otašević, Mirjana Vlahović, and Dragiša Baletić, upheld the judgment of the judge of the Basic Court in Podgorica, Radovan Vlaović, who accepted Đurović's lawsuit for the second time and annulled the decision of the Parliament of Montenegro on his dismissal. He argued that the reason for his removal from the RTCG Council was not in line with the Law on the National Public Broadcaster RTCG, which was the only relevant Law (*lex specialis*) in this case.

The political pressure of the then-ruling party on the national public service continued with the unlawful dismissal of Andrijana Kadija in December 2017, the chief editor of Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG). The decision to dismiss her garnered significant attention and controversy because it followed her public criticism of the managerial and editorial policies of RTCG, emphasizing the lack of editorial independence and expressing concern about the perception of political influence on content creation and decision-making processes within public broadcasting. This case sparked protests, which began with a protest performance under the slogan **"Independent Public Broadcasting Service and Period"** organized by a group of non-governmental organizations, including CeMI, CGO, IA, and CRNVO, and later continued by the Media Center. The protests were supported by other civil society organizations, journalists, and the then-political opposition. Protesters considered Andrijana Kadija's dismissal from RTCG as a troubling indicator of political interference and the takeover of control over the public service by the DPS, posing a threat to media freedom and independence in Montenegro.

Unfortunately, despite the change of government in Montenegro in August 2020, there has been no noticeable improvement in the management of RTCG. The current administration has failed to implement significant reforms or measures to ensure the impartiality and autonomy of the public broadcasting service. **In August 2021, Boris Raonić was unlawfully appointed as the general director of RTCG**. According to the judgment of the Higher Court in Podgorica, this appointment is illegal and constitutes a violation of the Law on the National Public Broadcaster Radio and Television of Montenegro (Article 29, Paragraph 1, Point 5), where such appointments are treated as a conflict of interest, given Raonić's simultaneous position as a member of the Council of the Agency for Electronic Media. The appointment of Boris Raonić also violates the Law on the Prevention of Corruption (Article 15, Paragraph 2), which stipulates: "A public official shall not, within two years after the termination of public function, establish a working relationship or business cooperation with the legal person, entrepreneur or international or other organization that acquires gain based on the decisions of the authority in which a public official has exercised function; Since Boris Raonić was a public official and a member of the Council of the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) until August 13, 2021, his appointment as the general director of RTCG cannot be lawful within the next

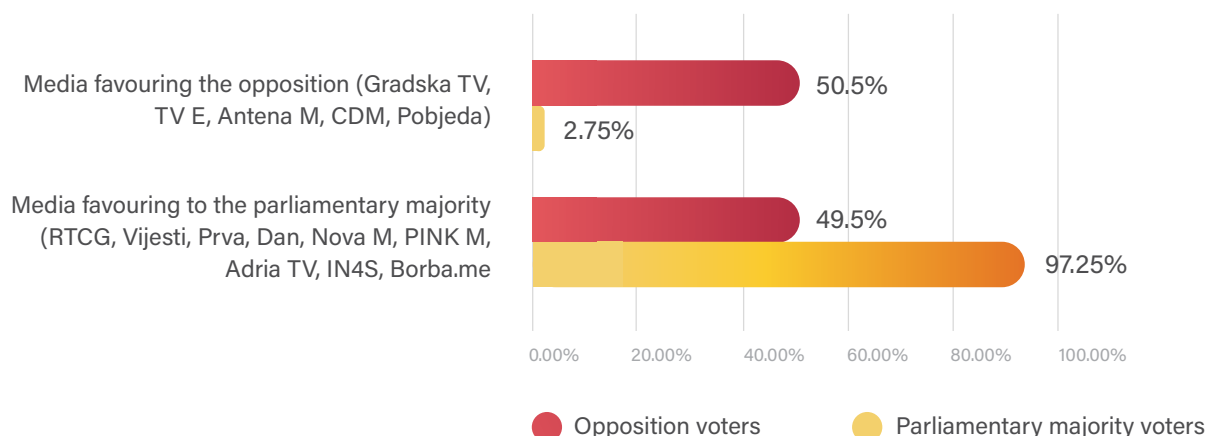
two years after the termination of his mandate in the AEM Council, which oversees the work of electronic media, including RTCG. However, despite the judgment of the Higher Court in Podgorica, which issued a final ruling on the illegality of Raonić's appointment, the RTCG Council, ignoring that court decision, re-elected him to the same position in May 2023. This decision has raised concerns about the rule of Law and further deepened societal tensions. Criminal charges have been filed against members of the RTCG Council, as well as the general director Boris Raonić, who has been questioned by the prosecution as a suspect.<sup>5</sup> The European Parliament has also expressed concern about these developments. In the Resolution of the European Parliament on Montenegro, adopted by an overwhelming majority of 529 votes, concerns were raised about the election of the general director of RTCG in contradiction to a final court decision.

### 3.1.3. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE READERSHIP AND MEDIA CHOICES

The research data indicate that citizens of Montenegro tend to follow and read media outlets that, in their opinion, support the same politics and ideology as they do. Namely, as much as **97.25% of voters in the parliamentary majority follow** media labeled by media experts as supporting the parliamentary majority (RTCG, Vijesti, Prva, Dan, Nova M, Pink M, Adria TV, IN4S, and Borba.me). On the other hand, only **2.75% of voters in the parliamentary majority follow** media outlets identified by media experts as supporting the opposition's policies (Gradska TV, TV E, Antena M, CDM, and Pobjeda). Such a significant difference in percentages clearly reflects polarized attitudes among both the public and the media, considering that polarization is also reflected in citizens' habits regarding the use and consumption of media (Gilić, 2023:51). In contrast to the significant contrast in the habits of voters in the parliamentary majority regarding media choices, **opposition voters tend to follow media from both groups: 50.5% of opposition voters follow media labeled as opposition, while 49.5% follow media labeled as supporting the parliamentary majority's policies.** The graph below visually represents the above data:

**Graph 2: Selective media following based on voters' political orientation**

#### SELECTIVE MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN RELATION TO THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF VOTERS



Source: Gilić, 2023:52

<sup>5</sup> Raonić will be interrogated on June 22 as suspects (vijesti.me)

If we focus solely on the percentages, we can conclude that voters of the parliamentary majority are much more polarized compared to opposition voters. However, it should be taken into consideration that two media (Vijesti and RTCG) are labeled in the group of media favoring the parliamentary majority. These two media entities have maintained a pervasive presence within the Montenegrin media landscape for decades, and the citizenry has developed ingrained patterns of consumption of these two media.

### **3.2. STRONG PENETRATION OF FOREIGN MEDIA**

#### **3.2.1. THE OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE OF KEY MEDIA IN MONTENEGRO**

In Montenegro, there are no laws addressing the issue of foreign ownership of media, meaning there is no law restricting the excessive concentration of foreign ownership of media. The absence of such laws is concerning as it increases the risk of foreign covert political or economic interests being pursued through the media.

Montenegro has five television stations with a national frequency. One is the public broadcaster RTCG, and the remaining four are commercial TV stations majority - or wholly owned by foreign entities.

The two currently most influential commercial television stations (Televizija Vijesti and Nova M) are majority-owned by the United Media Group, registered in Luxembourg. TV Vijesti is owned by this company directly, while Nova M is owned by this company indirectly through their subsidiary Direct Media, which is owned by Serbian citizens.

The remaining two commercial television stations are owned by Serbian businessmen. TV Prva is owned by Srđan Milovanović, and Adria TV is owned by Bratislav Stojiljković.

As for daily newspapers, two out of three are, in the majority, in foreign ownership. Vijesti (newspaper and portal) are mostly owned by the United Media group, which also owns TV Vijesti.

“Pobjeda” (newspaper and portal) is owned by Greek businessman Petros Stathis, while “Dan” (newspaper and portal) is owned by Montenegrin citizens Slavica Jovanović and Mladen Milutinović.

Similarly, both CDM and Portal Analitika are also in the majority ownership of Greek businessman Petros Stathis, who is the owner of the daily newspaper Pobjeda.

When it comes to Russian ownership, there are no media outlets registered in Montenegro owned by Russian individuals or legal entities. However, there are certain portals through which Russian influence is present in Montenegro. According to media experts, this influence dominates the portals In4S and Borba.me. Based on monitoring by Arhimed, conducted for the needs of CeMI, the reporting on the In4S portal is mostly negative when it comes to opposition parties.

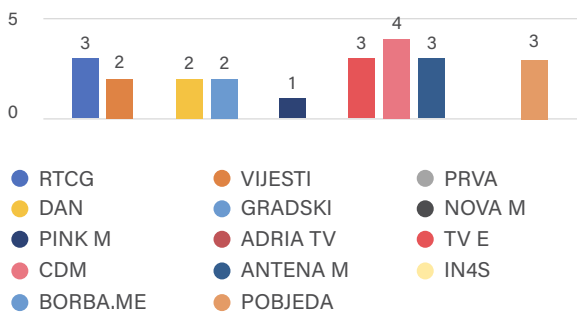
In Montenegro, the two most significant Russian media outlets operating outside Montenegro were Russia Today and Sputnik. By the decision of SAEM, the broadcasting of these two media outlets has been banned in Montenegro since April 2022. With this decision, Montenegro aligned itself with the foreign policy of the European Union (EU) regarding sanctions against Russia due to the invasion of Ukraine.

### 3.2.2. INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN ACTORS ON MEDIA REPORTING - VOTERS' PERCEPTION

In terms of foreign influence on the media, media experts assessed that the United States, the European Union (EU), Serbia, and Russia exert varying degrees of influence on the analyzed media. Specifically, four out of five experts mentioned that Serbia has the most significant influence on Nova M, while three out of five experts cited its influence on Dan, Prva, and Borba.me (Gilić, 2023:27). Concerning Russian influence, four out of five experts indicated that Russia has the most significant impact on IN4S, and three out of five mentioned its influence on Borba.me. Four out of five experts assessed that the EU's influence is most pronounced on TV E. In comparison, three out of five experts stated that EU influence is also present on RTCG, Antena M, and CDM. Four out of five experts believe that the influence of the United States is most pronounced on TV E and Antena M. Three out of five experts recognized the influence of CDM and Vijesti. The visual representation of foreign influence is depicted in the following four graphs:

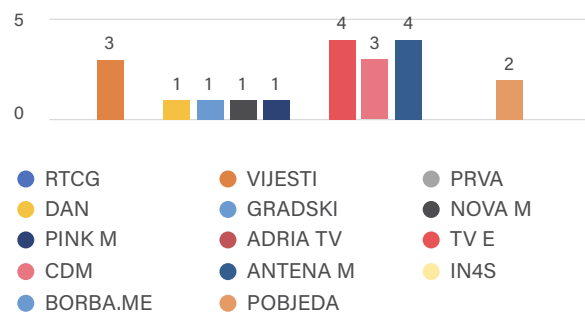
**GRAPHIC 3: THE IMPACT OF THE EU ON MEDIA**

#### EUROPE



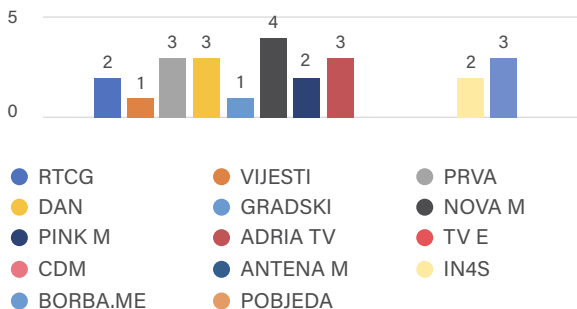
**GRAPHIC 4: THE INFLUENCE OF THE USA ON MEDIA**

#### USA



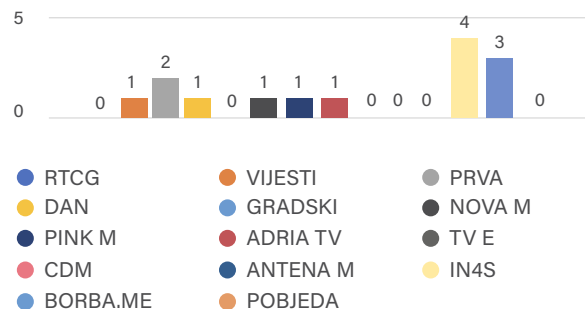
**GRAPHIC 5: THE INFLUENCE OF SERBIA ON MEDIA**

#### SERBIA



**GRAPHIC 6: THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIA ON MEDIA**

#### RUSSIA



Source for 4 Graphs: Gilić, 2023



Citizens' perceptions further confirm these findings. According to CeMI's research, citizens perceive the EU as the most significant influence on the media, as seen in the following media outlets: RTCG (48.9%); Vijesti (37.3%); Nova M (39.5%); Prva TV (39%); Antena M (38.8%); TV E and its portal M (41.1%); Gradska (42.7%); and CDM (46.3%). In contrast, Serbia is perceived as the country with the strongest influence on: IN4S (34.5%), Borba.me (35.1%), and Dan (32.7%).

It is important to acknowledge that EU has influence on the media landscape of Montenegro serves the purpose of aligning the country with the prerequisites for EU membership, especially considering Montenegro's status as a candidate since 2010. This influence is widely recognized as constructive, given that the majority of citizens (56%) believe that Montenegro should have the closest relations with the EU. In contrast, Russia and Serbia actively shape the political discourse in Montenegro through media platforms, aiming to influence the electoral process in Montenegro, strengthen ties, and ultimately unify Montenegro with Serbia.

## IV

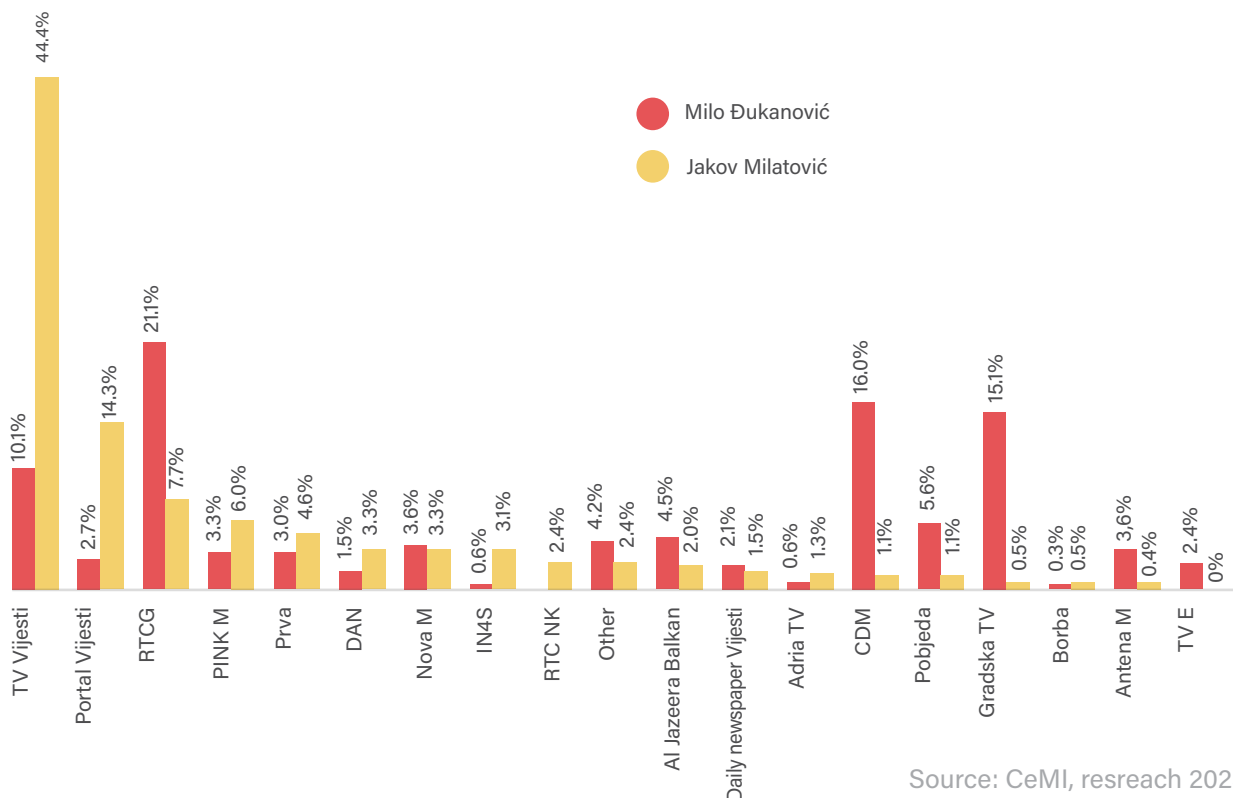
## POLARIZATION OF THE MEDIA SCENE IN MONTENEGRO

Empirical as well as anecdotal data indicate that the media scene in Montenegro is strongly polarized. Media polarization refers to a situation in which media outlets become increasingly divided along certain ideological, political, or social lines. In such an environment, media often cease to be neutral and become advocates for specific viewpoints, biases, or interests. Media polarization can result in the same news being presented in two completely different ways, depending on the ideological or political orientation of the media. Additionally, in a polarized media environment, there is often less room for nuanced, balanced, and objective reporting, which can lead to a reduction in the quality of information available to the public.

Media polarization can pose a serious threat to the health of democracy, as the increase in polarization undermines fundamental principles such as transparency, information dissemination, and pluralism of opinions. Citizens often receive distorted, biased, or incomplete information when media outlets become strongly polarized. This can reduce citizens' ability to make informed decisions in elections, which is a fundamental pillar of democracy. Moreover, when information is filtered through the prism of ideological or political biases, there is a risk of losing trust in the media.

The fact that supporters of the two candidates in the second round of the presidential elections significantly differ in terms of media consumption testifies to how polarized the media scene is in Montenegro. The chart below illustrates cross-referenced data regarding whom citizens voted for in the second round of the presidential elections and which media they most frequently follow.

**Graph 7: Most-watched/most-read media of the voters of the two presidential candidates – Đukanović and Milatović** Source: CeMI, research 2023



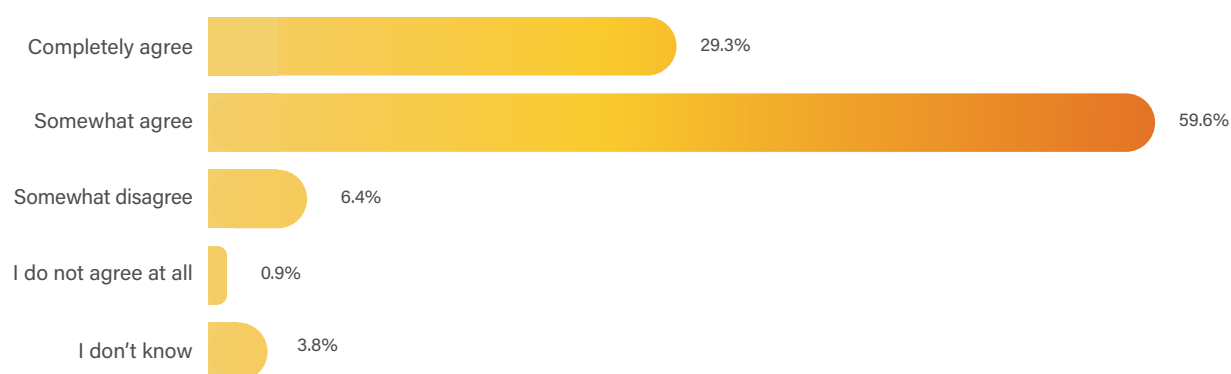
Source: CeMI, research 2023

The data shows significant differences between the two groups of voters. Of all Milatović's voters, 58.7% say they mostly follow TV Vijesti (44.1%) and the Vijesti portal (14.3%). On the other hand, only 12.8% of Đukanović's voters say they mostly follow Vijesti (either the television or the portal). Đukanović's voters are mostly grouped as those who follow CDM, Gradska TV, Pobjeda, Antena M, and TV E (a total of 42.7%). Among Milatović's voters, only 3% say they mostly follow these media.

These data show that Montenegrin voters are often exposed to different information that differs from what their fellow citizens see/read. This can result in a situation where different voters, depending on the media sources they follow, receive completely different, and even contradictory, information about the same political candidates or the same events in society. This can lead to the formation of firmly rooted and polarized views, where voters become less open to opposing information or perspectives.

The data show that the media scene is polarized. Montenegro's citizens themselves believe that the media in Montenegro are biased and report according to a certain ideology and political party.

**Graph 8: To what extent do you agree with the statement that the media in Montenegro are biased and report in accordance with a certain ideology and political party**



Source: CeMI, 2023

Nearly one-third of Montenegro's citizens fully agree with the view that the media are biased and report in accordance with a certain ideology and political party. Additionally, almost 60% are somewhat in agreement with this view, so a total of 88.9% of Montenegrin citizens to a greater or lesser extent share this opinion.

When voters feel that information is conveyed or manipulated with bias, they can become skeptical of all media sources, regardless of their actual objectivity or quality of work. Additionally, such a situation can deepen polarization and create so-called "echo chambers" – environments where individuals or groups frequently encounter information or opinions that only confirm their existing beliefs while being isolated from opposing views. This situation is conducive to the growth of polarization and divisions within society. Suppose the majority of people receive information only from sources that confirm their previous beliefs. In that case, there is a greater likelihood of developing firmer attitudes towards political issues that are not subject to any changes. This can lead to a reduction in dialogue among different political factions, making political processes unproductive and often conflict-ridden. In such an environment, voters may become less informed and more susceptible to disinformation or manipulation.

The presented data indicate which media citizens most frequently follow. However, it is realistic to assume that, in addition to the media citizens most frequently follow, they also receive information from other media outlets. Through three waves of research, we asked respondents which media they trust and to what extent – from not trusting them at all (rating 1) to trusting them completely (rating 5). The question was posed for the following Montenegrin media: RTCG, Vijesti, Prva, Gradska TV, Nova M, Pink M, Adria TV, TV E, RTV Nikšić, CDM, Antena M, IN4S, Borba, and Pobjeda.

We included all these variables in a factor analysis to understand better if there are specific patterns that distinguish profiles grouped around certain media outlets. Factor analysis is a statistical method used to identify the underlying basic “factors” behind a large number of variables. It helps us, instead of thinking about each media outlet separately, to summarize them into a few key factors or patterns.

When we conduct a factor analysis on trust in the media using data from three waves of research conducted on a nationally representative sample, we obtain two precise profiles, as shown in the following table.

**Table 1: Factor analysis – trust in the media in Montenegro**

	OPPOSITION	PRO - GOVERNMENT
RTCG	0.417	0.313
VIJESTI	0.073	0.729
PRVA	0.147	0.746
GRADSKA TV	0.678	0.181
NOVA M	0.689	0.305
PINK M	0.407	0.606
ADRIA TV	0.415	0.661
TV E	0.734	0.229
RTV NK	0.424	0.586
CDM	0.824	-0.020
ANTENA M	0.835	0.075
IN4S	0.019	0.820
BORBA	0.005	0.813
POBJEDA	0.767	0.047

Source: CeMI, 2023

The table shows that two precise profiles have been identified. Those grouped in one profile are citizens who have greater trust in the Gradska TV, Nova M, TV E, Pobjeda, as well as the CDM and Antena M portals. We labeled this profile as the opposition profile, given that these media outlets were mostly critical of the government led by Dritan Abazović. On the other hand, the second profile consists of citizens who express greater trust in the following media: Vijesti, Prva, Pink M, Adria TV, RTV Nikšić, and the IN4S and Borba portals. We labeled this profile as media close to the parliamentary majority, as these media outlets were more favorable towards the government led by Dritan Abazović. The only exception is the public broadcaster, RTCG, which could not be categorized into either profile, as the coefficient for this outlet did not exceed the 0.5 value for either of the two identified profiles.

The identified profiles help us better understand the complex media landscape in Montenegro, where many media outlets exist. Additionally, these profiles clearly demonstrate a tendency for certain citizens to trust one group of media, not just the ones they most frequently follow. Citizens who have confidence in a particular media outlet often rely on it as a source of information because they trust what they read or see on that media platform.



## COVERAGE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA DURING THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

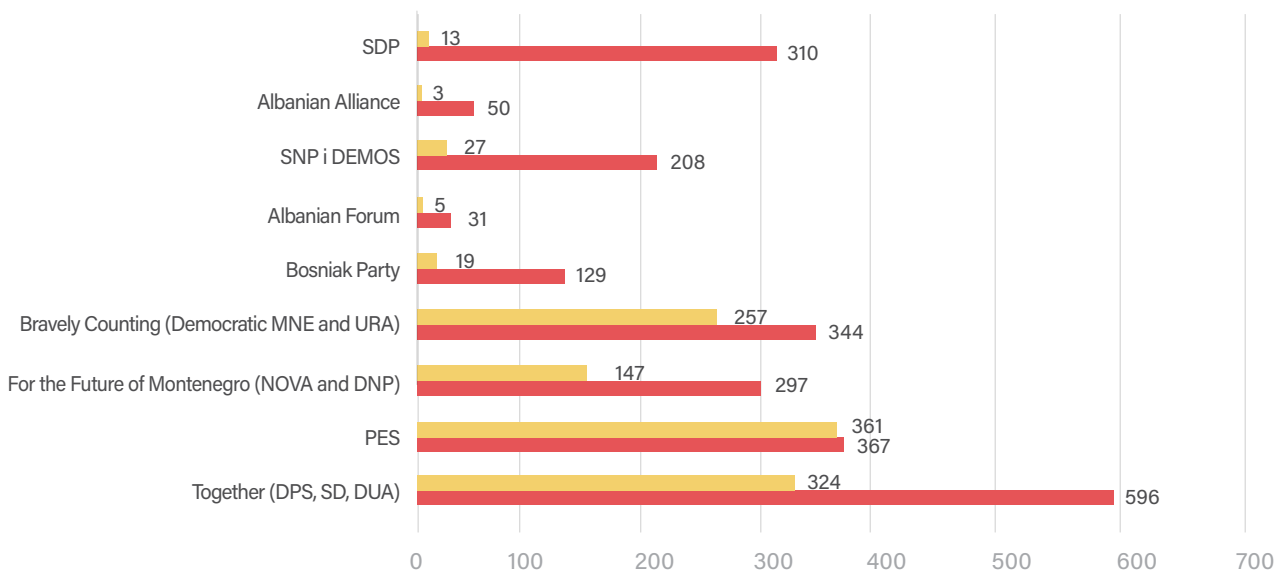
For the needs of CeMI, the Arhimed agency conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the reporting of a selected number of media in October 2023, specifically their reporting on the election lists during the pre-election parliamentary campaign in 2023. This study will present a small part of the findings, while a separate report on the conducted media monitoring will be published independently. For the purposes of this study, we use the data and findings on the coloration of media posts. Arhimed analysts assigned a tone (sentiment) to each previously identified post, relative to each electoral list individually.

**The tone of a post or the emotionally colored media post** is a parameter that essentially represents the potential sentiment or perception that an average, apolitical consumer of information will gain after reviewing the information contained in a media post in relation to the observed subject (in this case, the electoral lists that participated in the parliamentary elections in Montenegro on June 11, 2023).

The tone of a media post, i.e., the aggregate values by media in relation to specific lists, although informative regarding the media's approach to reporting on lists, **cannot necessarily be equated with the editorial approach of the media**. Namely, the coloration of media posts, especially during a pre-election campaign, is largely created by the attitudes of political actors, especially participants in parliamentary elections (political opposition, attack campaigns, etc.), and other actors. Therefore, the media, indirectly through the space they provide to political actors for disseminating political messages during the campaign, are "responsible" for the overall impression that consumers of their content will gain.

*Graph 9: Number of media posts with different tones about selected election lists (total - all monitored media)*

### NUMBER OF MEDIA POSTS WITH DIFFERENT TONES



Source: Prepared by CeMI based on the research by Arhimed Agency

The above graph shows the overall tone of posts from analyzed media reporting on the electoral lists during the parliamentary elections in June 2023. The graph represents the total number of positive and negative findings published in all monitored media during the election campaign.

This representation excludes neutral posts, while in the overall representation of the tone of all posts, the category of neutral posts is included.

The findings indicate that the highest number of positive media posts was directed towards the "Together" coalition (596), followed by the Movement Europe Now (367), the coalition "Courage Counts" (344), the "For the Future of Montenegro" coalition (297), and the SDP with 310 positive media posts.

Regarding negative media posts, the highest number was directed towards the Movement Europe Now (361) and the "Together" coalition (324). Following them, there is the "Courage Counts" coalition with 257 negative media posts and the "For the Future of Montenegro" coalition with 147 negative media posts.

The largest imbalance between negative and positive posts is observed for the SDP, meaning there are significantly more positive than negative media posts. A similar imbalance is noticeable for the "For You" coalition – SNP and Demos.

In the annex of the study, there is an overview of the number of media posts of different tones for the analyzed media and the electoral lists that participated in the parliamentary elections in Montenegro on June 11, 2023.

The primary focus of the research is counting the number of positive and negative media articles for each political list, while informative, only scratched the surface of media coverage analysis. Its findings are indicative but only partially representative. This approach has several inherent limitations that hinder a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in shaping public perception during the election campaign:

1. **Lack of qualitative analysis of media articles:** One of the key drawbacks of relying solely on quantitative data – counting positive and negative media articles – is the absence of qualitative content analysis. This means that the research fails to examine the actual essence of media reporting. Through this quantitative analysis of media content, we do not get answers to which specific topics and issues were covered positively or negatively, nor do we receive information about the type and gravity of the content of media articles, whether it's front-page news articles or brief texts. It's important to note that not all media texts carry the same weight – for example, news about the arrest of a representative of a certain party may have a much stronger negative impact than other information.
2. **Understanding the context:** Isolated sentiment analysis, i.e., the tone of media articles, can be misleading if the context of reporting is not understood, or why certain electoral lists were reported positively or negatively. Factors such as political opposition, negative campaigning, and media bias can significantly influence reporting. The lack of this information can impact the formation of conclusions about the role of the media in shaping the electoral narrative.

Despite the mentioned limitations of this approach, based on quantitative data, it can be concluded that critical texts (both positive and negative) were generally directed towards those parties/coalitions that dominate the political scene: (1) the "Together" coalition led by DPS, (2)

the "Movement Europe Now" , (3) the "Courage Counts" coalition, and (4) the "For the Future of Montenegro" coalition. Considering that the media landscape often reflects the political situation and relationships among parties, and that the media can simultaneously be used as a tool by different political actors to promote certain agendas, it is important to analyze which parties are present in media coverage and in what manner.

Namely, the significantly lower number of negative media articles directed towards minority parties, SDP, and the "For You" coalition consisting of SNP and Demos may suggest that there was no negative campaign against these electoral lists. They were possibly recognized as potentially acceptable coalition partners for the post-election government formation, unlike those whose results determined who would lead the government formation process. In the aggregate representation of all media, it can be noticed that the ratio of negative and positive media closely follows the affiliation of the media, that is, parties to certain sides in a polarized context.

## SOCIAL NETWORKS AND DISINFORMATION IN THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The ambiance of social networks, as part of the broader media landscape, is not immune to polarization, further contributing to divisions in society. Social networks have become battlefields where political actors and their supporters use confrontational rhetoric and *ad hominem* attacks to spread unverified, false, or misleading information, directing citizens to incorrect conclusions. The ability of individuals and other interest groups to rapidly disseminate information, whether accurate or not, has made it increasingly difficult for voters to distinguish accurate information from false. Such practices not only undermine the credibility of political discourse but also contribute to an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust, intensifying affective polarization in Montenegrin society.

### 6.1. FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

The monitoring findings have shown that the content created and shared by various Facebook accounts and pages is deeply polarized, with the goal of supporting certain political actors and conducting negative campaigns against others. The negative campaign involves spreading disinformation, unverified information, as well as releasing information and materials to the public that can discredit specific political figures.

CeMI has not identified any Facebook account/page or Facebook group that shares content in a balanced manner on Facebook, meaning content aimed at providing balanced information to the public. The content shared (link sharing from media or content created by the page administrators themselves) in most cases reflects the biased opinion of the post author. The stance on certain political topics, socio-political events, and political actors that the author conveys through the publication of such content may represent their personal opinion or may be part of an online strategy backed by certain political actors or entities seeking to influence the voting population.

As stated in section 3, CeMI cannot with certainty know who is behind certain Facebook accounts, i.e., whether specific pages have been created by political or other actors under fake names or not. However, through monitoring, the existence of a connection between the official pages of certain political parties, coalitions, and politicians and certain Facebook pages has been established.

The provided text discusses a specific example related to the Facebook page "Nikšić, ponosni srpski grad" (Nikšić, proud Serbian city). During the monitoring period, the content posted by this page indicated direct support for the presidential candidate in the first round of elections, Andrija Mandić, and the coalition "For the Future of Montenegro". This support was manifested in several ways: (1) sharing posts from the official page of "New Serbian Democracy"; (2) creating and publishing positive content about Andrija Mandić, encouraging citizens to vote for him; (3) discrediting political opponents of Andrija Mandić and spreading hate speech towards them; (4) disseminating disinformation that favored the candidate Andrija Mandić. It's important to note that expressing support for a particular candidate or political party and sharing opinions on social media are legitimate and in accordance with the right to freedom of expression (Constitution of Montenegro, Article 47)<sup>6</sup>. However, the problematic

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of Montenegro, Article 47: Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression by speech, writing, through picture, or in some other manner. The right to freedom of expression may be limited only by the rights of others to dignity, reputation, and honor, and if it threatens public morality or the security of Montenegro.

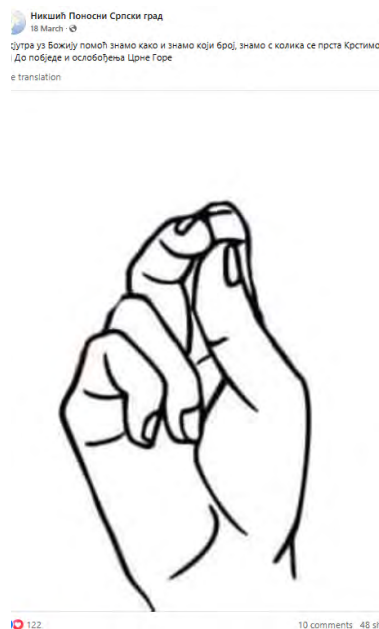
aspect that led to the analysis of the Facebook page Nikšić, *ponosni srpski grad* in this report is the specific posts discrediting political opponents of Mr. Andrija Mandić and spreading disinformation. The text then mentions that screenshots from the mentioned Facebook page are presented to confirm the previously stated claims.

## 1. EXAMPLES OF SHARING POSTS FROM THE FACEBOOK PAGE NOVA SRPSKA DEMOKRATIJA



Photos 1 and 2: Screenshots of sharing content from the official page of the New Serbian Democracy.

## 2. EXAMPLES OF CREATING AND PUBLISHING POSITIVE CONTENT ABOUT ANDRIJA MANDIĆ ENCOURAGING CITIZENS TO VOTE FOR HIM



Photos 3 and 4: Screenshots of content from the official page of the New Serbian Democracy (expressing support for Andrija Mandić).



### 3. EXAMPLES OF FACEBOOK POSTS DISCREDITING MR. MANDIĆ'S POLITICAL OPPONENTS



Photos 5 and 6: Screenshots of content from the official page of the New Serbian Democracy (discrediting and hate speech directed towards Mr. Mandić's political opponents).

### 4. EXAMPLES OF PUBLISHING DISINFORMATION THAT FAVORED THE CANDIDATE ANDRIJA MANDIĆ

The online portal "Glas javnosti" published an "exclusive" news on February 21 about the results of a public opinion poll conducted by the German Embassy in Podgorica. According to the poll, candidate Andrija Mandić would have a higher percentage of votes in the first round of elections compared to candidate Milo Đukanović. This news about the survey was then taken and published by the online portal "Borba.me".



Photos 7 and 8: Screenshots from the portal Glas Javnosti and Borba.me regarding the so-called public opinion poll of the German Embassy in Podgorica.

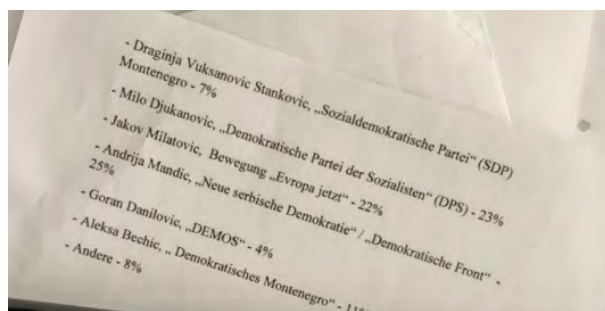
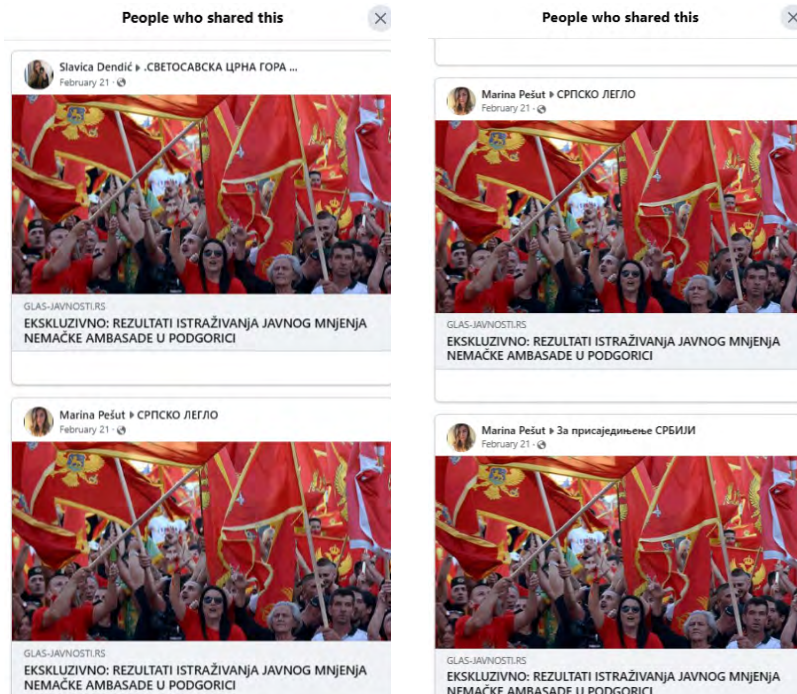


Photo 9: The photo published by the portal "Glas javnosti" presenting the results of the alleged survey by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Podgorica.

On the same day, February 21, 2023, the Facebook page “Nikšić ponosni srpski grad” shared this news from the portal “Najnovije vesti | Glas javnosti” (glas-javnosti.rs). The post from this Facebook page was further shared in several different Facebook groups (“Srpsko leglo,” “Za prisajedinjenje Srbiji,” etc.) within a short period of time.

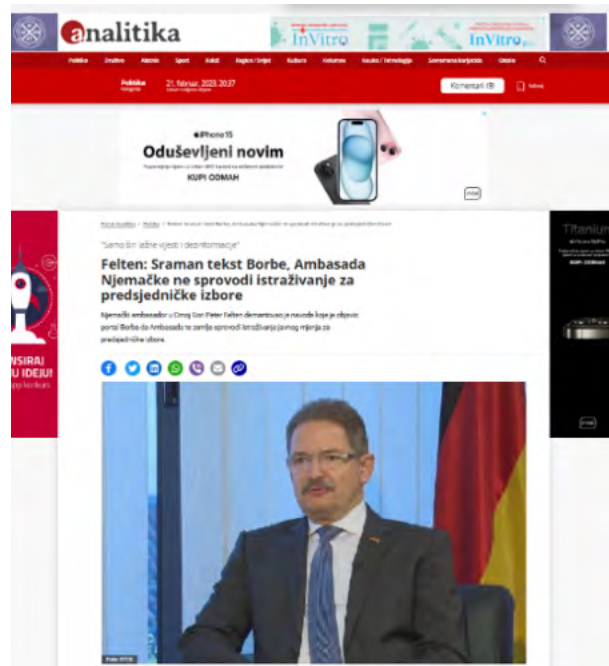


Photos 10 and 11: Screenshots showing coordinated sharing of fake news about a conducted public opinion poll by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Podgorica.

Given that the German Embassy in Podgorica does not conduct a public opinion poll, and thus, this is fake news, the German Ambassador H.E. Peter Felten has refuted this information through his official Twitter (X) profile. Numerous media outlets in Montenegro, such as Vijesti, Aktuelno, Analitika, and others, reported on the issued statement. Despite the embassy's denial, the news about the fake survey continued to circulate on social media. The Facebook pages and groups where this news was published did not subsequently share information about the false nature of the survey. In this way, citizens could have formed a mistaken perception of the support presidential candidates enjoyed, which could potentially influence their political choices regarding the new president of Montenegro.



Photos 12: Screenshots of the Twitter (X) post by German Ambassador H.E. Peter Felten refuting that the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany conducted public opinion poll on the presidential elections in Montenegro.



Photos 13, 14, and 15: Screenshots of statements from three media outlets (Vijesti, Aktuelno, and Portal Analitika) that published news about the denial by the German Ambassador.

In addition to this survey, on the Facebook page "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad," on March 13, 2023, a photo presenting the results of a public opinion poll was posted without specifying the source. The post received a total of 18 comments (including responses from the "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad" page), 78 different Facebook reactions (like, love, laugh, and astonishment), and 39 shares. What is particularly concerning is that none of these comments indicated that this could be a potentially fake survey since the source was not disclosed. The comments reflected trust in these results, further confirmed by the fact that this post was shared 39 times on various Facebook pages whose names reflect Serbian national affiliation (e.g., Srpsko leglo, Za prisajedinjenje Srbiji, etc.).

The reactions of Facebook users to this post, which represents an example of fake news, indicate a low level of media literacy in Montenegro. This fact further facilitates the spread of such and similar fake information that can easily influence the perception of voters and their political choices.



Photo 16: Screenshot of the publication of public opinion poll results on the Facebook page "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad" (fake news).



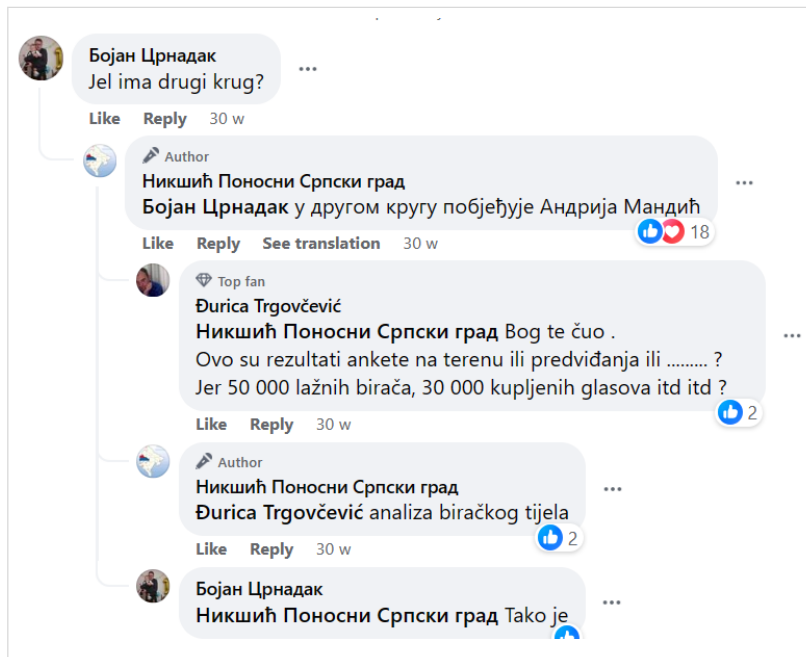


Photo 17: Screenshot of comments on the post 'Public opinion poll results' on the Facebook page 'Nikšić ponosni srpski grad' (fake news).

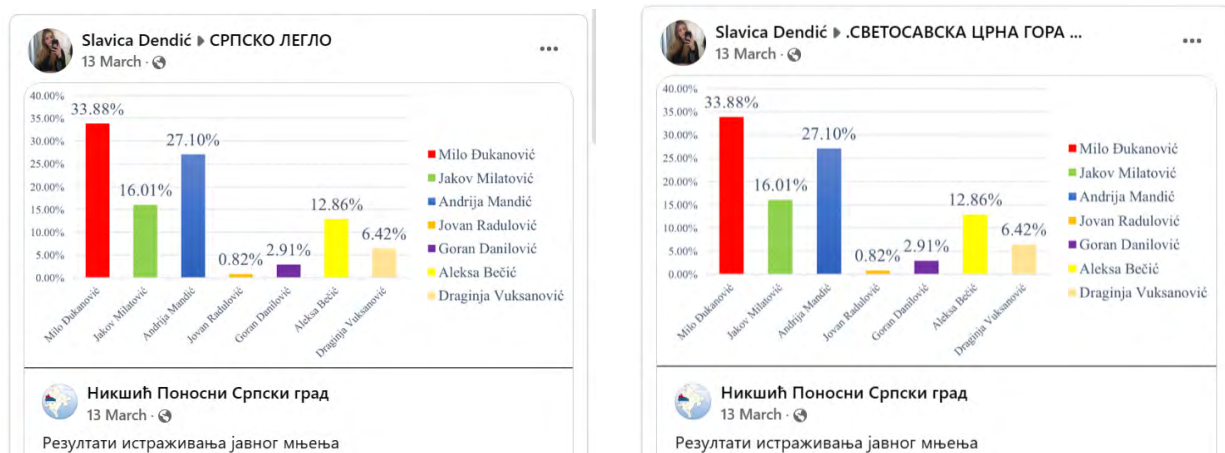


Photo 18: Screenshot of sharing the post 'Public opinion poll results' from the Facebook page 'Nikšić ponosni srpski grad' – sharing fake news.

## 6.2. EXAMPLES OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ONLINE PORTALS AND FACEBOOK PAGES

Through monitoring CeMI has identified the activities of the online portal "24inform" and its connection to the Facebook page "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad." During the presidential election cycle in Montenegro, this portal published information related to political and pre-election events. The last piece of information was published on June 11, 2023.

On March 17, 2023, two days before the first round of the presidential elections, an article titled "Miraš Dedeić from the so-called CPC: Thank you, Jakov Milatović, may God help him live long!" was published on the portal. The article claimed that the content was based on an audio conversation with Metropolitan Mihailo of the CPC, without specifying the other party involved in the conversation. The portal did not provide the audio recording of the conversation referred to in the article.

The statement concludes with the sentence: "The editorial board of the portal 24Inform.me possesses a recording of the audio conversation with the leader of the so-called CPC, Miraš Dedeić. If anyone doubts the authenticity of this statement, the audio recording of the conversation will be published." This article was also published on the portal Borba.me.

The day after the mentioned statement was published on online portals (March 18, 2023), the Facebook page "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad" released an audio recording based on which the statement on the portal "24inform" was prepared. The Crowd Tangle platform enabled CeMI to see that the audio recording *was not shared* from YouTube or any other platform but was directly published by the Facebook page "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad." The audio recording was then coordinatedly shared in several different Facebook groups and pages. CeMI was unable to locate this audio recording on the YouTube platform.



Photo 18: Screenshot of the post of the audio recording on the Facebook page 'Nikšić ponosni srpski grad'.

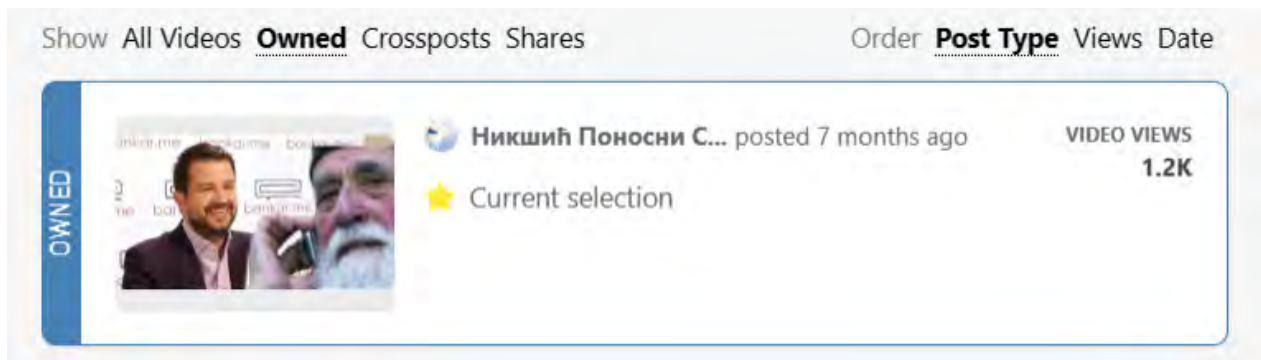
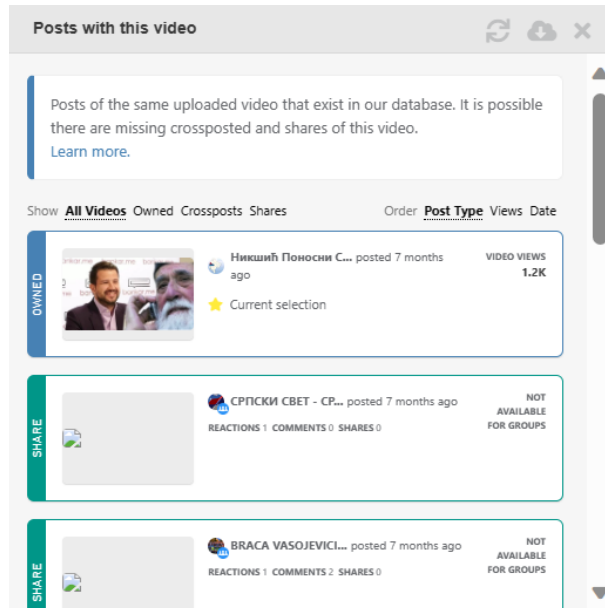
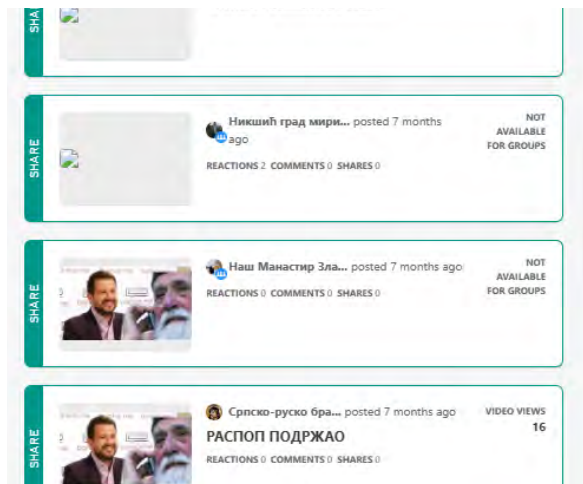
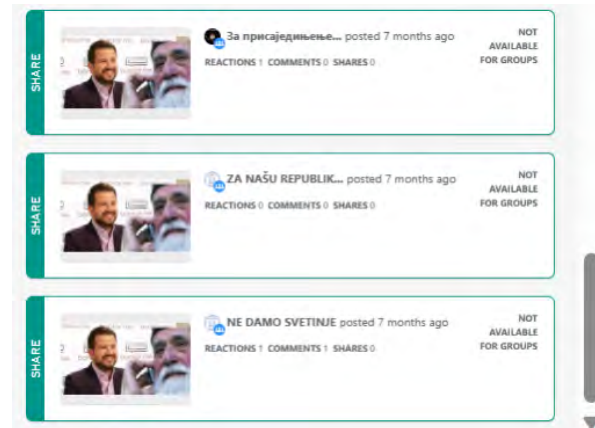


Photo 19: Screenshot from the Crowd Tangle platform.



Photos 20, 21, and 22: Screenshots from the Crowd Tangle platform showing that the post from the page Nikšić, proud Serbian city, was shared in several different Facebook groups and pages.



The publication of this audio recording represented an attempt to discredit presidential candidate Jakov Milatović. It is important to note that the presented data cannot definitively indicate a connection between the online portal "24inform" and the Facebook page "Nikšić ponosni srpski grad." However, considering that during the election campaign, the posts from this page were exclusively aimed at supporting presidential candidate Andrija Mandić, a clear connection and intention behind the release of this recording and the dissemination of disinformation become evident.

An interesting example that shows certain Facebook pages are created with a clear aim of influencing public opinion and the perception of voters are the Facebook pages *Neprijatni / Unlimited power*, *"Psalam 118"*, and *"Srbi u Crnoj Gori"*. Their posts on Facebook go beyond a satirical mode of communication and satirical representation of political actors and the political situation in Montenegro in general.

CeMI has noticed that the mentioned two pages have published an audio recording featuring a conversation between presidential candidate Draginja Vuksanović Stanković and her interlocutor.

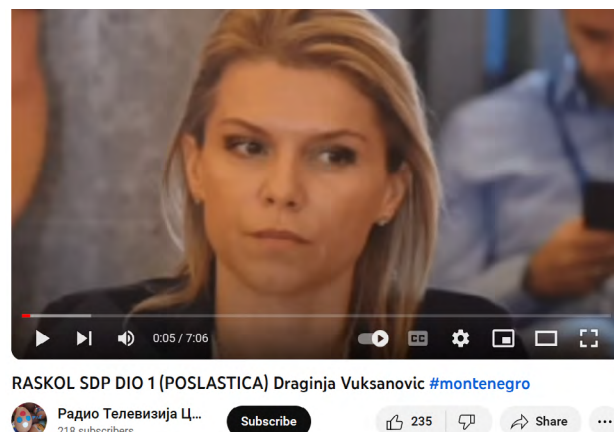


Photo 23: Screenshots of the audio recording posted on the YouTube platform.

This audio recording was published on the YouTube platform on March 18, 2023. The same video was shared on Facebook by several pages.

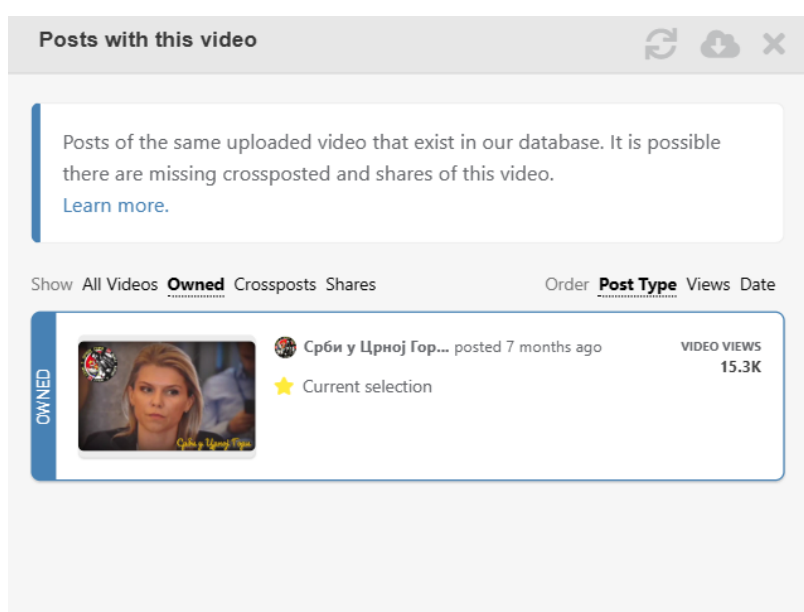
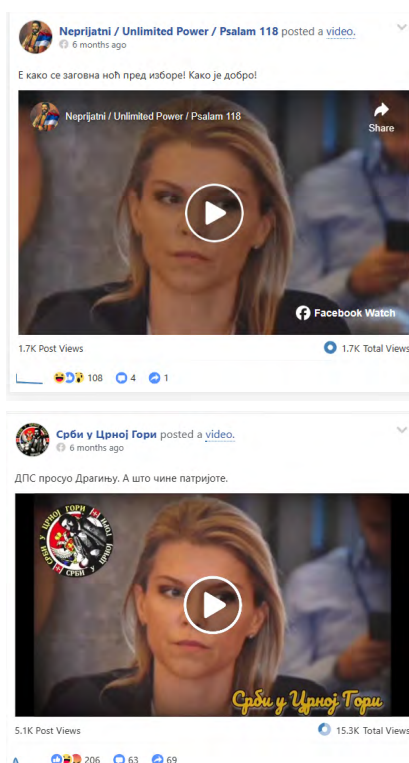


Photo 24: Screenshots of the audio recording published on the pages *Neprijatni / Unlimited Power / Psalm 118* and *Serbs in Montenegro*.

However, CeMI has documented that the same video was published on the pages *Neprijatni / Unlimited power / Psalm 118* and *Srbi u Crnoj Gori*, but not as a shared post from the YouTube platform. Instead, it was directly posted (Crowd Tangle has recorded these posts as owned by the administrators of these pages).

The mentioned examples emphasize the growing significance of social media as a powerful and indispensable tool in election campaigns. Therefore, it is important to highlight their positive and negative characteristics. On one hand, political actors use social media platforms for public engagement, allowing them to articulate their political agendas and seek voter support. Such use of social media is not only entirely permissible but has become a necessity in today's conduct of election campaigns and participation in public and political life in general.

In the context of Montenegro, it is important to note that a significant number of individuals use Facebook, emphasizing a compelling demand for the substantive presence of political actors on this platform to engage with public opinion. However, what is disturbing is the fact that social media is increasingly being misused for political and other purposes. The use of social media to spread fake news, disinformation, and misleading information is a direct consequence of the lack of comprehensive legal frameworks and regulations. Unfortunately, this issue transcends national borders and represents a global challenge that numerous international organizations and institutions have yet to address.

Examples presented in this study highlight the intentional creation and use of social media accounts for the explicit purpose of influencing public opinion. Information disseminated through Facebook accounts is often purposefully tailored to strengthen the positions of specific political actors and shape a particular narrative around political events, especially during election campaigns. It can be observed that, just as media outlets may biasedly report and favor certain political actors by supporting some while discrediting others, similar practices are evident on social media. Despite the potential exposure to diverse viewpoints on social networks, typically through sponsored or paid content or posts from Facebook friends, the algorithms used by Facebook tend to limit individuals' interaction with content that contradicts their political beliefs.



## VII THE IMPACT OF CAMPAIGNS AND DISSEMINATED DISINFORMATION ON VOTERS' SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES

### 7.1. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - CAMPAIGN AND MONITORING OF VOTERS' SENTIMENT

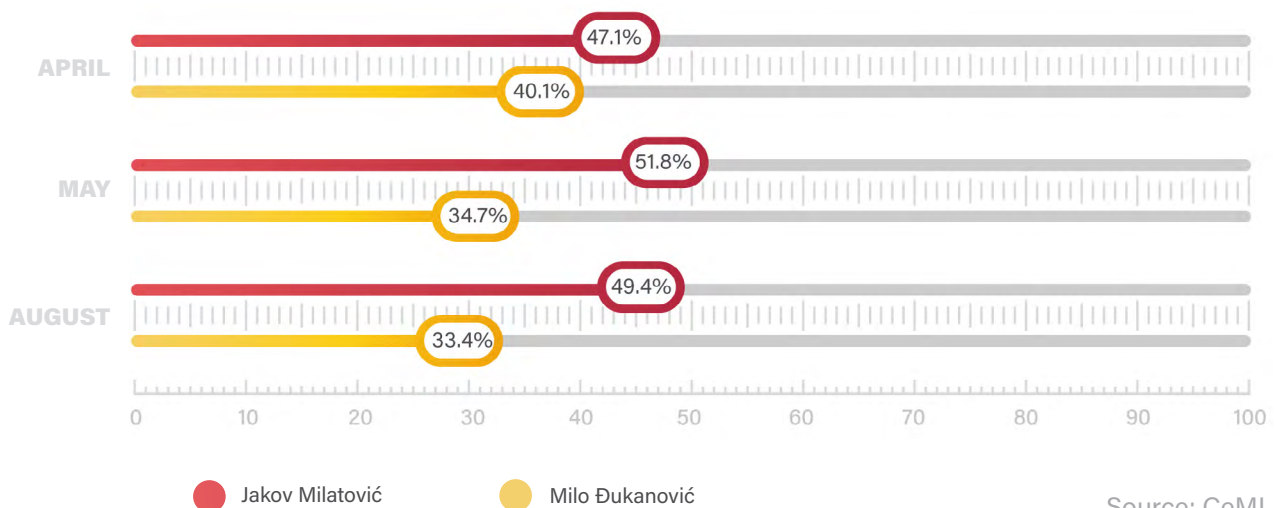
The collected data provide us with insight into the sentiment of the citizens of Montenegro towards the presidential candidates over time. The data allow us to see how this sentiment changes, which is interesting and relevant, especially considering that there has been a change in the elections, i.e., Montenegro has a new president.

For the purposes of this analysis, we rely on an instrument developed and commonly used in the American political context – the “feeling thermometer.” It is a research instrument used in public opinion research to measure positive and negative feelings towards specific subjects. The primary advantage is that it is a relatively simple and intuitive scale for respondents. On a scale from 0 to 100, respondents rate their feelings toward a person, group, or idea. On this scale, 0 represents very cold/negative feelings, and 100 represents very warm/positive feelings.

These types of research instruments provide nuanced information, which is often more useful than binary responses. While binary questions can give black-and-white answers, the feeling thermometer allows researchers to gain a deeper insight into the intensity and spectrum of feelings respondents have toward a specific subject. This can be particularly handy and help understand how feelings change over time or under the influence of different factors.

This can be illustrated by examining the data for two presidential candidates who competed in the second round of the presidential elections in Montenegro – Milo Đukanović and Jakov Milatović. The graph represents the average values of the feeling thermometers for the two candidates across three waves of research.

*Graph 10: Sentiment towards presidential candidates – Milo Đukanović and Jakov Milatović*



The data clearly indicate a phenomenon known throughout the democratic world. The popularity of the winning candidate usually experiences an increase after the elections, as there is a wave of expectations for positive changes commonly associated with new officials in the first wave. On the other hand, the popularity of the losing candidate is on the decline, which is also in line with expectations. Additionally, Đukanović quickly withdrew from politics after the presidential elections, which could also influence the citizens' sentiment towards him, showing a slight decline as citizens no longer have expectations from him in Montenegro's political life.

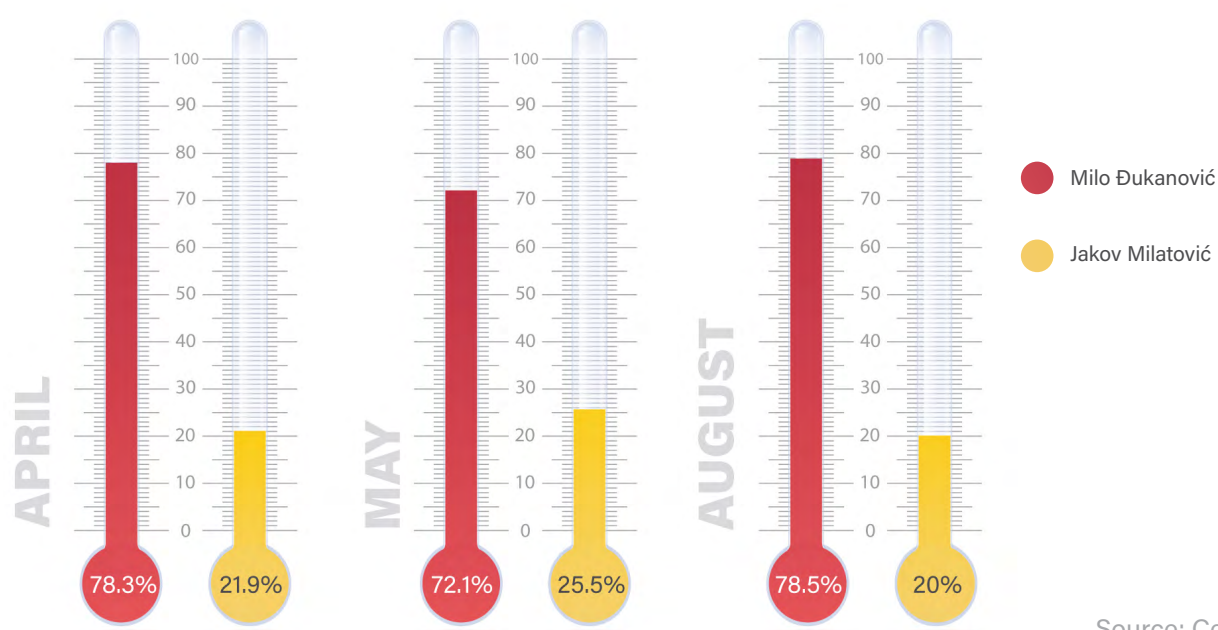
Traditionally, throughout almost his entire political career, citizens' assessments of Đukanović have been highly polarized, with people either rating him very high or very low. This pattern persisted in this case as well. Across the three surveys, a total of 70% of respondents gave Đukanović the lowest (0 to 10) or the highest rating (90 to 100). In contrast, for Milatović, only 49% of respondents gave him the highest or lowest rating.

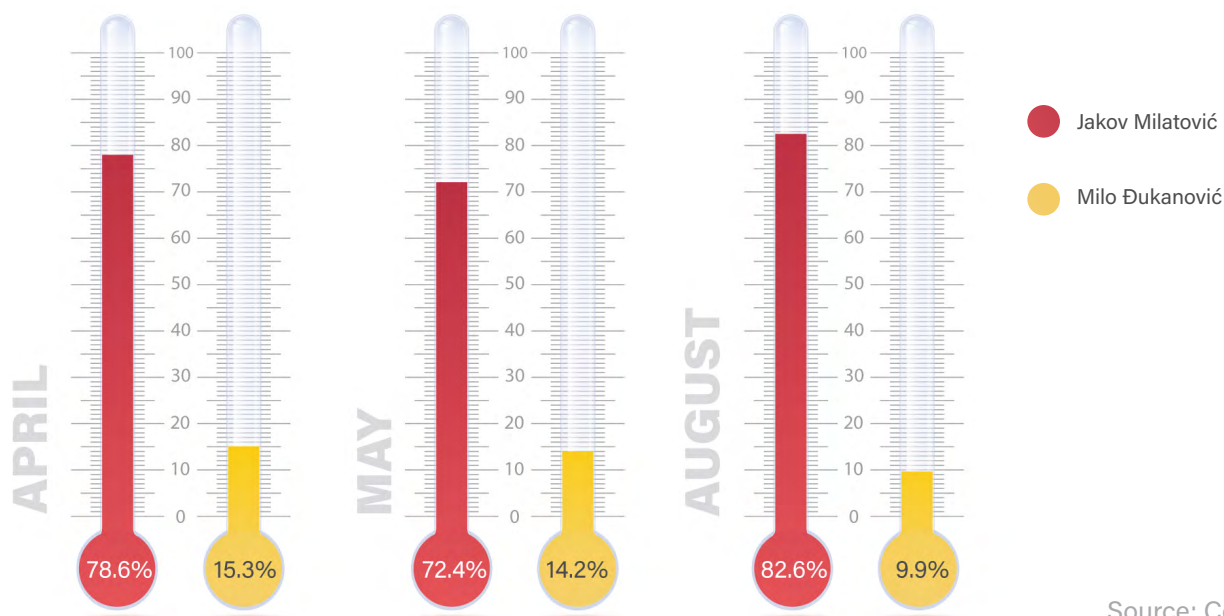
For Milatović, it is potentially interesting to note that in the August survey, the general sentiment of citizens toward him was slightly declining compared to May. This could potentially suggest the end of the so-called honeymoon period, referring to the initial period after a candidate wins the election. During this period, a newly elected leader often enjoys increased popularity, usually associated with the optimism of citizens for the hoped-for changes and the media's tendency to be less critical of the new leader in their early days in office. However, the period of increased popularity is not everlasting. As time passes, criticisms often grow, leading to a decrease in ratings. The next surveys should indicate whether the August data indeed show that the honeymoon period for Milatović has ended.

The polarization among presidential candidates in Montenegro is best illustrated by the data on how voters of one candidate view the opponent. The following graph shows that supporters of Đukanović rated the former president very highly while having a very cold perception of Milatović. The same pattern is observed among those who support Jakov Milatović.

**Graph 11: Feeling thermometer towards presidential candidates for Milo Đukanović's voters**

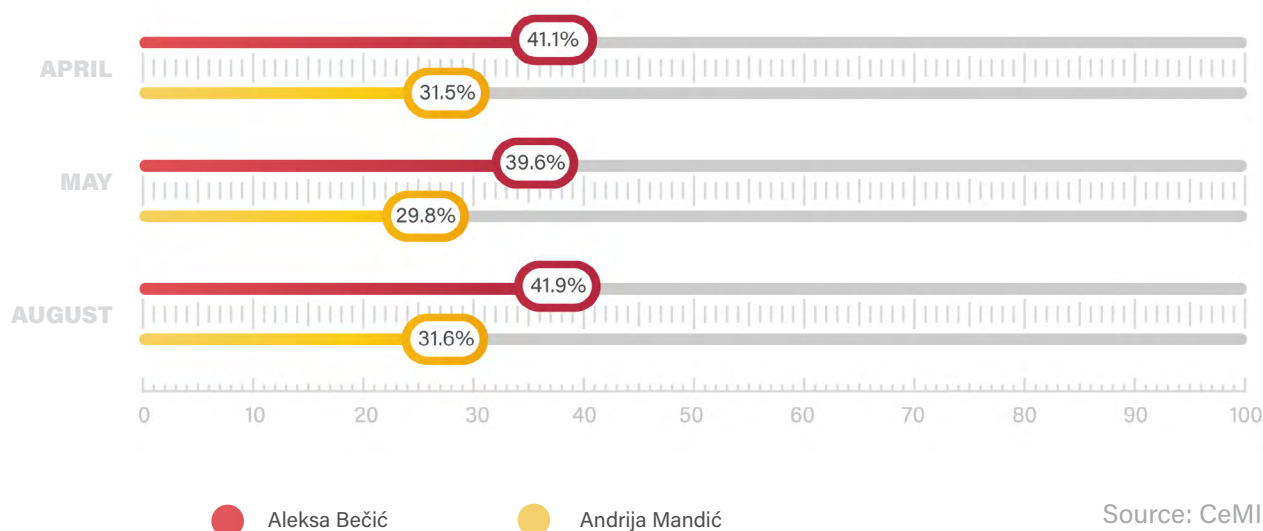
## MILO ĐUKANOVIĆ VOTERS



*Graph 12: Feeling thermometer towards presidential candidates for Jakov Milatović's voters***JAKOV MILATOVIĆ VOTERS**

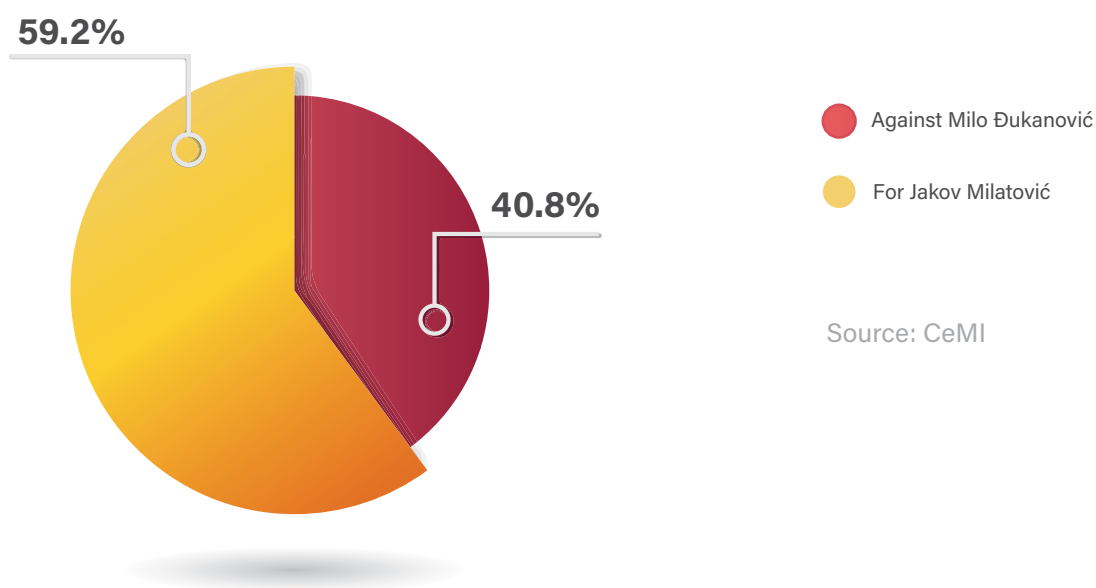
There is a large gap between the two candidates, indicating a high degree of political polarization, which speaks to a relatively low potential for cooperation between these two groups, at least in terms of the attitudes of their supporters. It is understandable and expected that there is a significant gap between the two candidates who competed in the second round of the presidential elections, during the campaign, and immediately around election day. However, the data show a further alarming trend when talking about political polarization in Montenegro. As time passes, and the further we move from election day (the second round of the Presidential elections), the difference in feeling thermometers for these two groups towards the two politicians becomes increasingly significant. The expectation would be that with the passage of time from the election, passions would diminish, and polarization would decrease. However, in the case of Đukanović and Milatović, the data show the opposite situation.

For other prominent candidates, there were almost no changes in citizens' attitudes towards them through the three waves of the research. Neither individually as presidential candidates nor the political parties they represent achieved particularly bad or good results in the 2023 elections that could potentially affect citizens' sentiments toward them. This is shown in the data in the following graph.

**Graph 13: Sentiment towards presidential candidates – Andrija Mandić and Aleksa Bečić**

Consistent ratings across three waves of research, both for Andrija Mandić and Aleksa Bečić, indicate that there haven't been significant changes in citizens' sentiments towards the two candidates over time.

In the case of these presidential candidates, there was almost no doubt about whom they would support in the second round of elections. This is another instance confirming that Đukanović is a politician that voters either strongly support or strongly oppose. The data show that almost all those who supported Mandić or Bečić in the first round voted for Jakov Milatović in the second round. More precisely, as confirmed by the data from the August survey, these voters cast their votes in the second round—against Milo Đukanović. Milatović significantly benefited in the second round precisely because of this sentiment that voters had towards his opposing candidate. For those who said they voted for Milatović in the second round, we asked an additional question: whether they primarily voted for him or against Đukanović. The data are shown in the following graph.

**Graph 14: What would you say, did you primarily vote for (N = 547)**

## 7.2. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VOTERS' SUPPORT OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND THE CHOICE OF MEDIA THEY FOLLOW

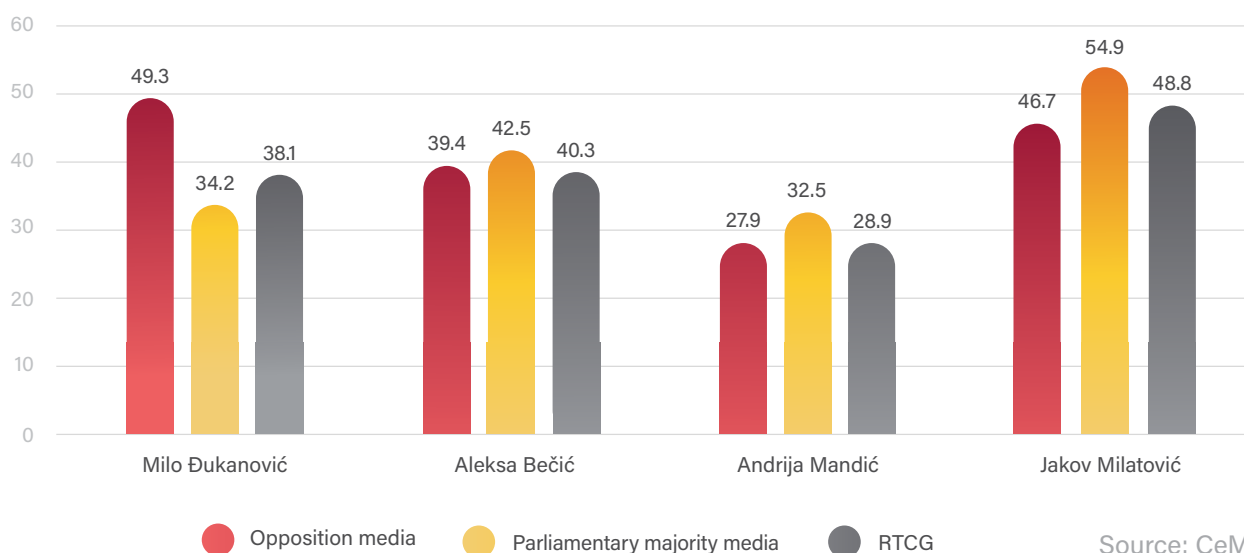
The media can play a crucial role in shaping citizens' perceptions of presidential candidates. The way the media reports on candidates can significantly influence their visibility and how the public perceives them. If the media frequently reports positively about a particular candidate, it can create an image of that candidate as popular and accepted. Conversely, if reports are negative or critical, the public may develop negative emotions toward the candidate.

Additionally, media can influence citizens' attitudes toward candidates through "agenda setting," which means setting the agenda. This implies that by choosing the topics they report on, the media indirectly affects which issues citizens consider important. For instance, if the media consistently emphasizes controversial statements or actions of a specific candidate, it can influence citizens to perceive that controversy as a crucial issue related to that candidate, shaping their perception and attitude toward them.

To analyze the differences in how citizens perceive certain candidates based on their trust in different media groups, we divided all media into three groups according to the presented factor analysis. The first group consists of respondents who say they trust opposition media, the second group consists of respondents who say they trust pro-government media, and the third group consists of respondents who say they trust RTCG.

For these three groups, we specifically analyzed the feeling thermometer for four candidates who received the most votes in the first round of the presidential elections. The data is presented in the following graph.

**Graph 15: Average ratings of presidential candidates among those who trust different media groups**



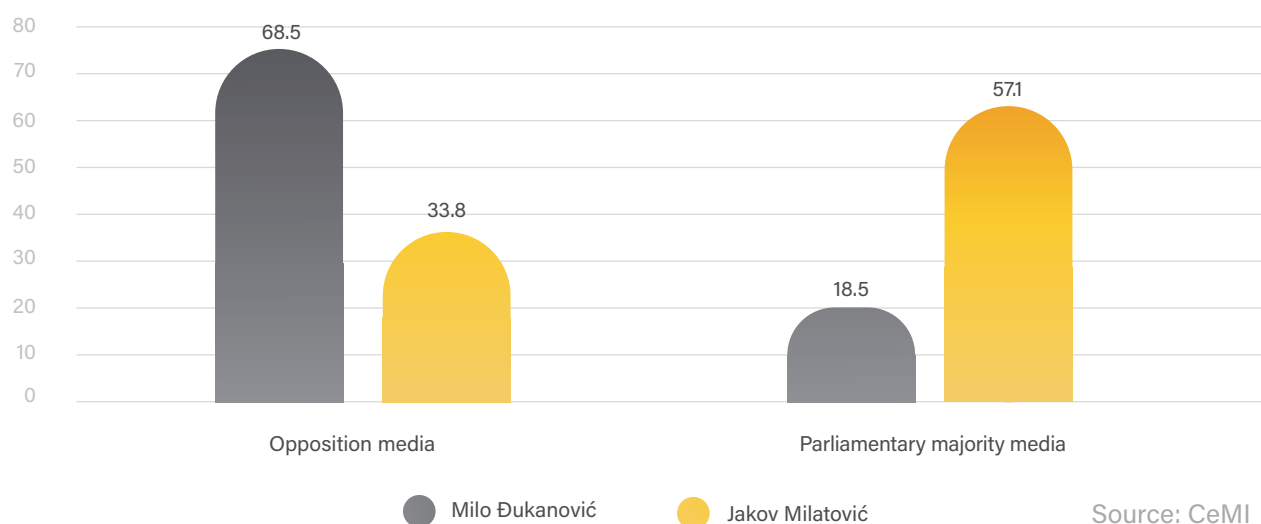
The data show clear differences among the candidates, especially when we talk about the candidates who were competitors in the second round of the presidential elections. Among citizens who say they trust opposition media, Milo Đukanović has the best average rating (49.3). On the other hand, among citizens who say they trust pro-government media, Jakov Milatović has the best average

rating (54.9). Overall, especially when it comes to these two candidates, there are noticeable differences in how citizens who trust the two media groups feel about them. The difference is particularly evident when we look at the data for Đukanović.

The average ratings of presidential candidates among those who say they trust RTCG are typically between the two extremes, in the middle of the average ratings that candidates received from respondents who trust opposition or pro-government media.

The effects of differences become even more visible when considering only the subset of respondents who say they completely trust a particular group of media. As expected, those who completely trust opposition media rate Đukanović significantly higher than Milatović. The same applies to those who say they completely trust pro-government media.

**Graph 16: Average ratings of presidential candidates for those who completely trust a certain media group**

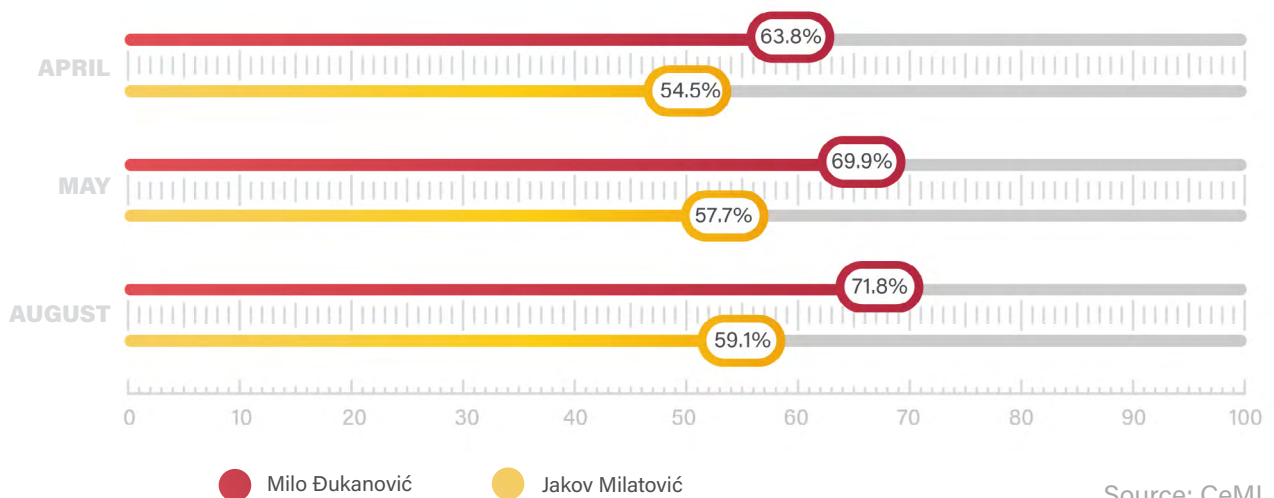


From the graph, we can see that as trust in one media group increases, the polarization in the perception of the two candidates who competed in the second round of the presidential elections also increases. Additionally, the analysis shows that the subset of respondents who say they have high trust in one media group also say they do not trust the other media group at all. According to the data, these respondents seem to live completely within their “echo chambers,” surrounded only by information that reinforces their existing views, as clearly seen in the data. Such isolation leads to increased polarization in society. When people constantly consume information that confirms their views, they become less tolerant of opposing opinions and less prone to compromises. This polarization can lead to more intense conflicts and misunderstandings between different social groups because each side perceives the other through the distorted lens of its own media. Ultimately, echo chambers can threaten democratic processes and values by fostering distrust and hostility among citizens with different political and social views.

The data unequivocally show how media polarization clearly reflects on political polarization. Additionally, for this group of respondents, there is neither the effect of victory nor disappointment due to defeat. The trust and sympathy they have for the candidates are further strengthened over time, as we can see in the following graph.



**Graph 17: Average Ratings for Presidential Candidates Over Time for Those Who Completely Trust a Certain Media Group**



The data for Đukanović is presented only for those respondents who say they have full trust in the opposition media group. On the other hand, the data for Milatović is presented for those respondents who express trust in the pro-government media. For both groups, we can see that sympathies for politicians grow over time as they are exposed to information from the media they say they have complete trust in.

Unfortunately, the research design only allows us to analyze the correlation between these phenomena but does not provide information on whether these respondents are more inclined towards Đukanović or Milatović because they trust a certain media group, or perhaps they trust a certain media group because they have sympathies towards Đukanović or Milatović. An experimental research design and/or tracking data over time with the same respondents (panel study) would be needed for a more reliable causal relationship.

### 7.3. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS - CAMPAIGN AND MONITORING OF VOTERS' SENTIMENT

Instead of traditional questions like 'Do you support this political party?', feeling thermometers ask respondents to express their feelings toward parties on a scale, usually from 0 to 100, where lower values are associated with negative feelings, and higher values with positive ones.

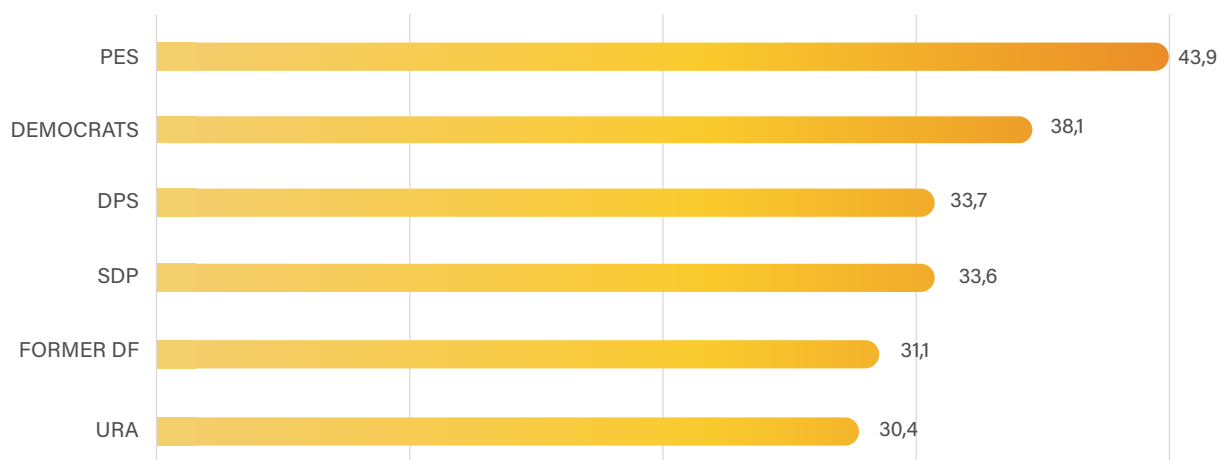
More traditional methods often indicate whether the respondent supports one party or political option and not others. On the other hand, using feeling thermometers, we can understand that even among other political options not supported by the respondent, there is nuance, and they don't feel the same about each. This allows researchers to gain a more nuanced insight into how citizens truly feel about political entities because people often have complex feelings that cannot be easily categorized as purely positive or negative.

Using feeling thermometers can contribute to a richer and more precise understanding of public opinion. Traditional methods often present respondents with binary (black-and-white) options that can force responses or do not allow the expression of moderate or conflicting feelings. Feeling thermometers, on the other hand, enable respondents to express their feelings towards parties on a broader spectrum, providing richer data.



In Montenegro, six political parties/alliances were covered across three waves of research. The overall average rating mostly reflects the expected order, as seen in the following graph.

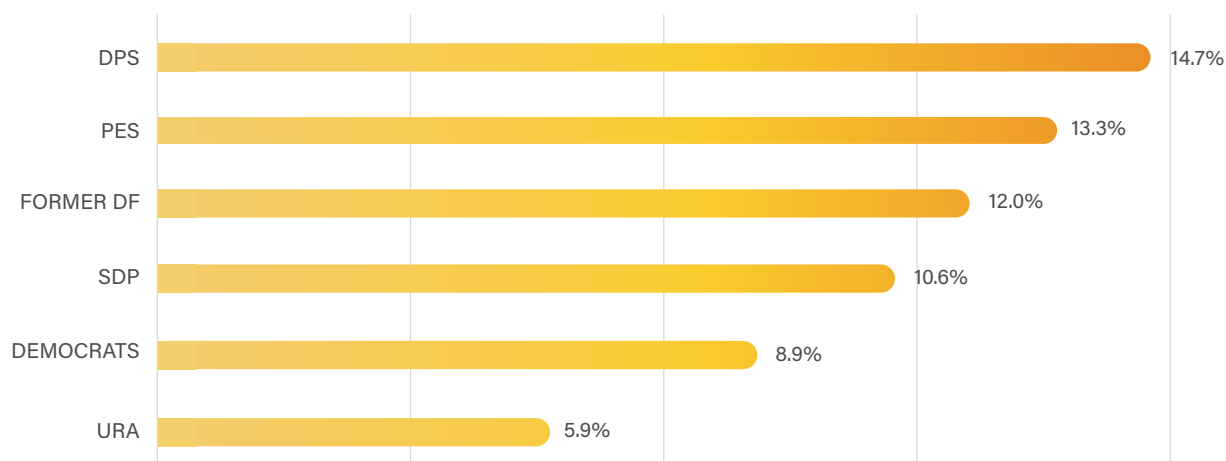
**Graph 18: Sentiments towards political parties**



Source: CeMI

The confirmation of how feeling thermometers provide a nuanced judgment of citizens towards parties can be seen in the following graph. Specifically, for the following data point, we have extracted the percentage of citizens for each of the listed political parties/alliances who gave that option the highest rating (90 or above). The arrangement of parties on this scale becomes significantly different.

**Graph 19: Percentage of citizens giving the highest rating (90 or above) to political parties/alliances**



Source: CeMI

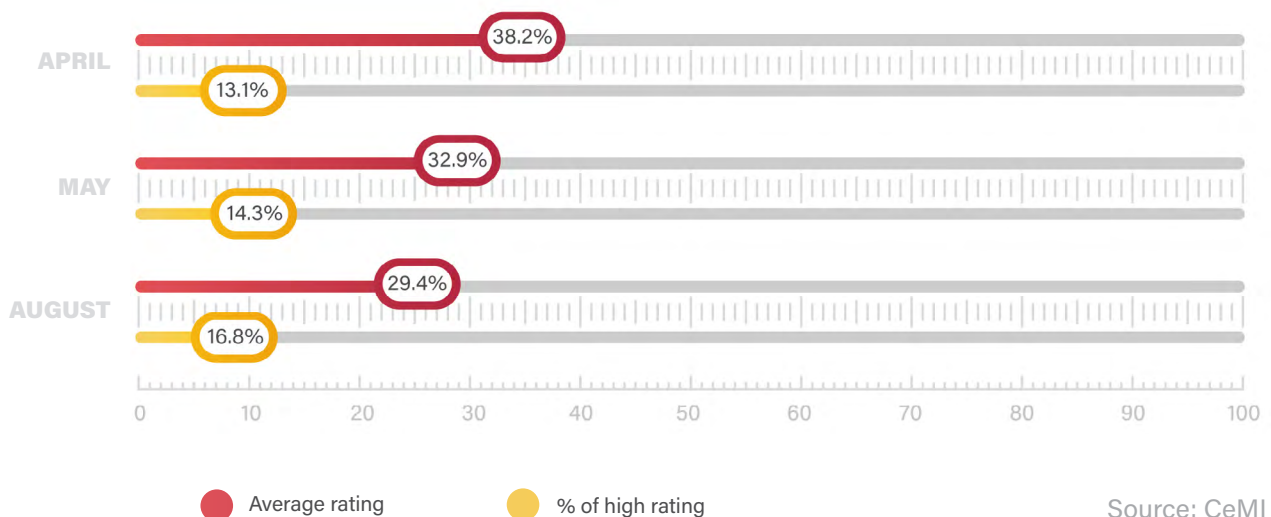
The average ratings can be a useful indicator when we want to get a general sense of how a specific group feels towards a political party or candidate. If the average rating is high, it may indicate a generally positive public opinion. On the other hand, a large number of high ratings may suggest the existence of a strong and loyal support base. Citizens almost certainly vote for those parties/candidates to which they give high ratings. Additionally, it is very rare for the same citizen to rate two political options with high ratings (90 or above).

However, if a large number of high ratings is combined with a large number of low ratings (resulting in a moderate average rating), it can indicate deep polarization in public opinion towards that subject.

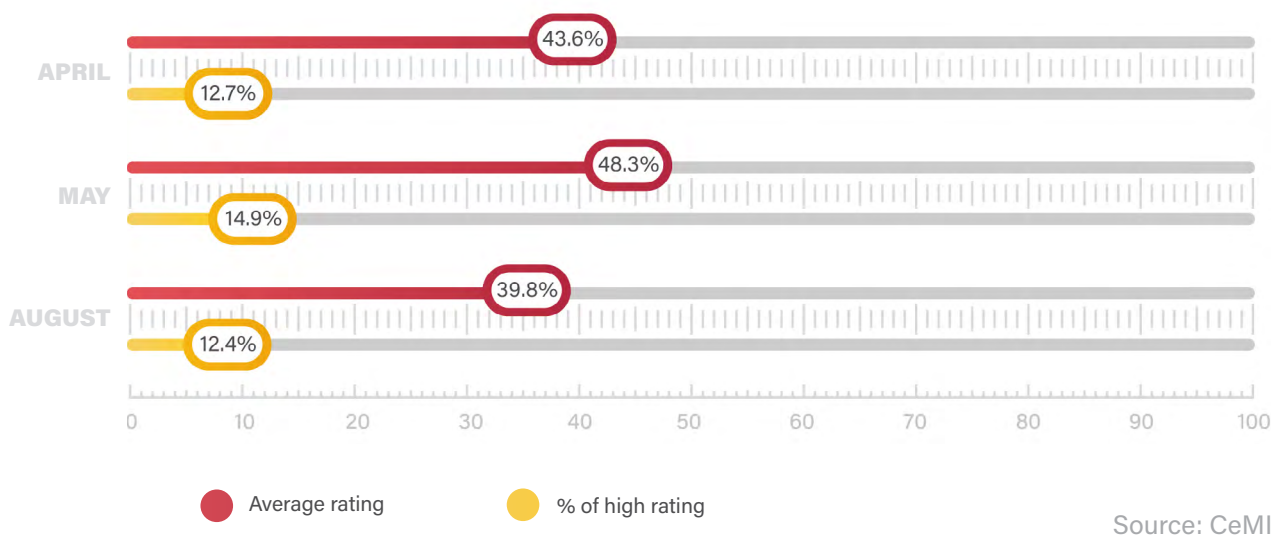
In such cases, while the existence of high ratings is promising, it is also important to pay attention to the group that gives low ratings. When the feeling thermometer shows high polarization (many high and many low ratings), it can indicate a risk for the given political subject. It may have a large base of loyal support but could also be very unpopular among other groups, making it challenging to form post-election coalitions for that political subject.

Using the feeling thermometer across multiple waves of research provides an opportunity to track dynamics and changes in public attitudes toward political parties over time. This can be crucial, especially during turbulent political periods or during electoral cycles when public opinion can quickly shift due to various events. A particularly illustrative example is the two largest political entities in the Montenegrin political scene. In the following graphs, especially for the Movement for Europe Now (PES) and the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), we analyze over time the average rating as well as the percentage of citizens who gave them a high rating (90 or above) in the respective waves of research.

**Graph 20: Data over time - overall sentiment and the percentage of those giving a high rating - DPS**



**Graph 21: Data over time - overall sentiment and the percentage of those giving a high rating - PES**  
Source: CeMI



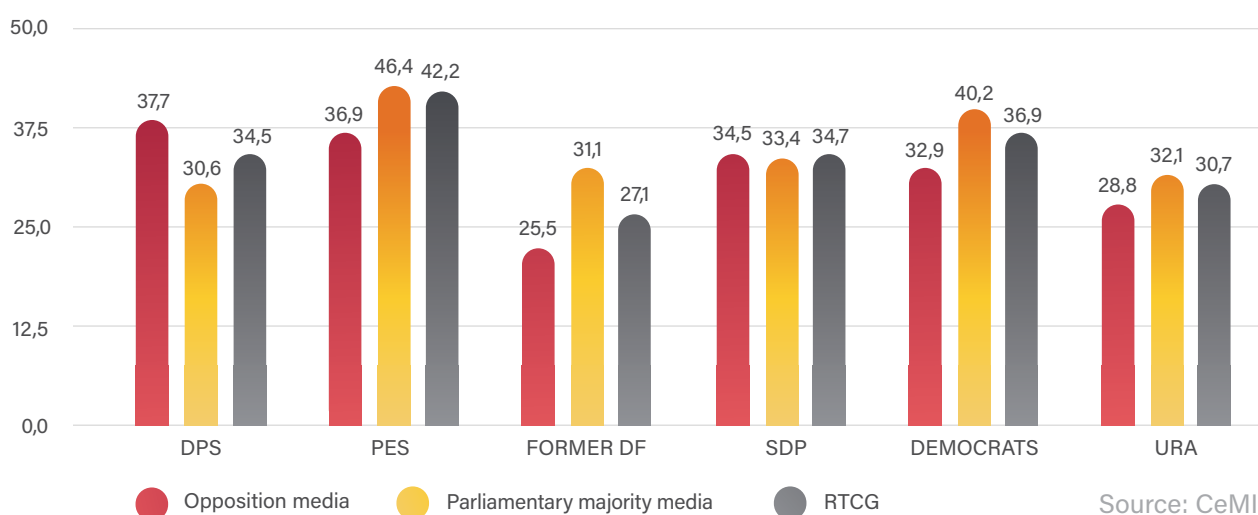
In the case of DPS, we observe a very interesting trend. Namely, the overall rating of citizens for that party is declined over the three waves of the research. However, the percentage of those giving a high rating to DPS is increased over the three waves of the survey. This suggests a high degree of polarization in public opinion towards DPS. The increase in the number of high ratings may indicate that the party is strengthening its base of loyal supporters. On the other hand, the trend suggests that the party may be losing moderate voters or those who were previously mildly favorable. This dynamic in DPS ratings can complicate their position when forming post-election coalitions with other parties. It is important to note, of course, that DPS has often been identified in lay and academic literature as a party that, over almost 30 years in power, created a clientelist relationship with voters. This is a relationship in which political parties or individuals offer material resources, services, or privileges to voters in exchange for their support or votes. Since they have not been in power for three years, it is possible that certain clientelist voters are leaving the party, which also results in this dynamic in ratings on the feeling thermometer.

On the other hand, PES consistently receives a high average rating on the feeling thermometer but does not record an increase in the number of those giving the party an extremely high rating. A consistently high average rating may suggest that the party has broad support among voters, which is certainly positive. There are many reasons for this, and potentially this political party is seen as the entity that successfully addresses issues that are important to a large part of the population and/or has built an image as a moderate, reliable, and consistent actor on the political scene. However, the fact that the number of those giving it an extremely high rating does not increase may suggest that, although the party is acceptable to the majority, it may still lack a strong core of loyal supporters who are deeply connected to the party, its program, or leadership. Such a situation suggests that, in addition to the desire to expand, the party must work diligently to deepen its connection with existing supporters and create a stronger support core.

#### 7.4. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE VOTERS' SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR CHOICE OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The collected data from three waves of public opinion research show that media and political polarization in Montenegro are closely interconnected. As with the presidential candidates, we analyzed citizens' sentiments toward political parties, using the feeling thermometer, specifically for three groups: those respondents who trust opposition media, those who trust pro-government media, and those who trust RTCG. Average ratings are presented in the following graph.

**Graph 22: Sentiment towards parties by the group of media trusted by respondents**



Analyzing the results of the feeling thermometer, it can be observed that there is variation in the perception of different political groups by the media. For example, DPS was rated at 37.7 in opposition media, while in pro-government media and RTCG, it had slightly lower ratings, with 30.6 and 34.5, respectively. On the other hand, the Movement for Europe Now shows the highest rating in pro-government media with 46.4, while in opposition media and RTCG, it was rated at 36.9 and 42.2.

The former DF and URA received similar ratings in all three media, while the Democrats and SDP had different results. SDP consistently received ratings around 34 in all media, while the Democrats had a higher rating in pro-government media with 40.2, compared to opposition media and RTCG, where among citizens who trust these media, they received ratings of 32.9 and 36.9.

These results suggest the existence of some polarization in the media and among the parties. When one party receives significantly higher or lower ratings in a particular media group compared to others, it may indicate bias or favoring by those media, or it may suggest that voters of that party in that media group find information that aligns with what they want to see and read.

For example, PES received significantly higher ratings in pro-government media than in opposition media, suggesting that pro-government media have a more favorable stance toward PES or that supporters of the Movement for Europe Now are more likely to find desired information in this type of media. Similarly, DPS has a higher rating in opposition media compared to pro-government media, which may indicate the opposite dynamic.

This polarization can have more profound implications for democracy and political discourse in society. When the media fails to provide objective and balanced information, citizens may be misinformed or develop strong biases towards certain political groups based on media coverage rather than actual facts or policies. This can lead to polarization among voters and a decrease in trust in the media and the political system as a whole.

It is interesting to observe the situation, especially concerning the media rather than media groups. In the following table, we analyzed which parties are their first and second choices for each media outlet, as well as the percentage of citizens supporting that party among those who most frequently follow the given media. The table provides responses for respondents who say they most frequently follow the specified media. Additionally, the question regarding political parties refers to the Parliamentary elections on June 11, 2023.

**Table 2: First and second choices in the 2023 Parliamentary elections for those who most frequently follow the given media**

	FIRST CHOICE	SECOND CHOICE
RTCG	DPS (38.7%)	PES (17.1%)
VIJESTI	PES (41.6%)	DEMOCRATS AND URA (23.8%)
PRVA	PES (25.7%)	DPS (22.9%)
GRADSKA TV	DPS (74.5%)	SDP (7.3%)
NOVA M	PES (26.8%)	DPS (26.7%)
PINK M	PES (36.7%)	ZBCG (22.4%)
ADRIA TV	ZBCG (33.4%)	DEMOCRATS AND URA (16.7%)
TV E	DPS (57.1%)	SDP (28.6%)
RTV NK	ZBCG (30.8%)	DEMOCRATS AND URA (28.4%)
CDM	DPS (61.7%)	BS (10.1%)
ANTENA M	DPS (53.8%)	SDP (30.8%)
IN4S	ZBCG (73.7%)	DEMOCRATS AND URA (7.7%)
BORBA	ZBCG (60%)	PES (20%)
POBJEDA	DPS (56.1%)	PES (12.9%)

Source: CeMI

The data also show that when analyzing party support at the level of individual media, there is a clear polarization, indicating that voters of specific parties/coalitions cluster around certain media outlets. However, this analysis reveals a slightly nuanced view, especially when examined separately for each media outlet. It is important to note that the effects are not the same for all media, meaning that 70% support among those who follow a smaller and less-watched media outlet may signify much less compared to 30% support for a media outlet followed by a significantly larger number of citizens.

And when it comes to political parties, it should be emphasized that based on the available data, it's not possible to determine what is the cause and what is the effect, whether voting or media consumption. Public opinion research, especially when conducted in several waves with different respondents, can provide valuable information about trends and changes in public opinion. However, there are certain challenges when trying to establish a cause-and-effect relationship based solely on such research. Even when we observe changes or trends in the data between waves, it is difficult to confidently say that one variable caused a change in another. For example, if we notice that support for a particular political party is increasing over time, there are many potential factors that could explain that change, such as economic conditions, political events, or changes in party leadership. Based solely on public opinion research data, without additional contextual information, it is difficult to rule out all possible alternative explanations.

Therefore, while public opinion research can be useful in identifying trends and changes in attitudes and opinions, additional research methods and approaches are needed to establish a clear cause-and-effect relationship. Experimental design, longitudinal studies with the same respondents, or qualitative approaches can help gain a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of identified trends.

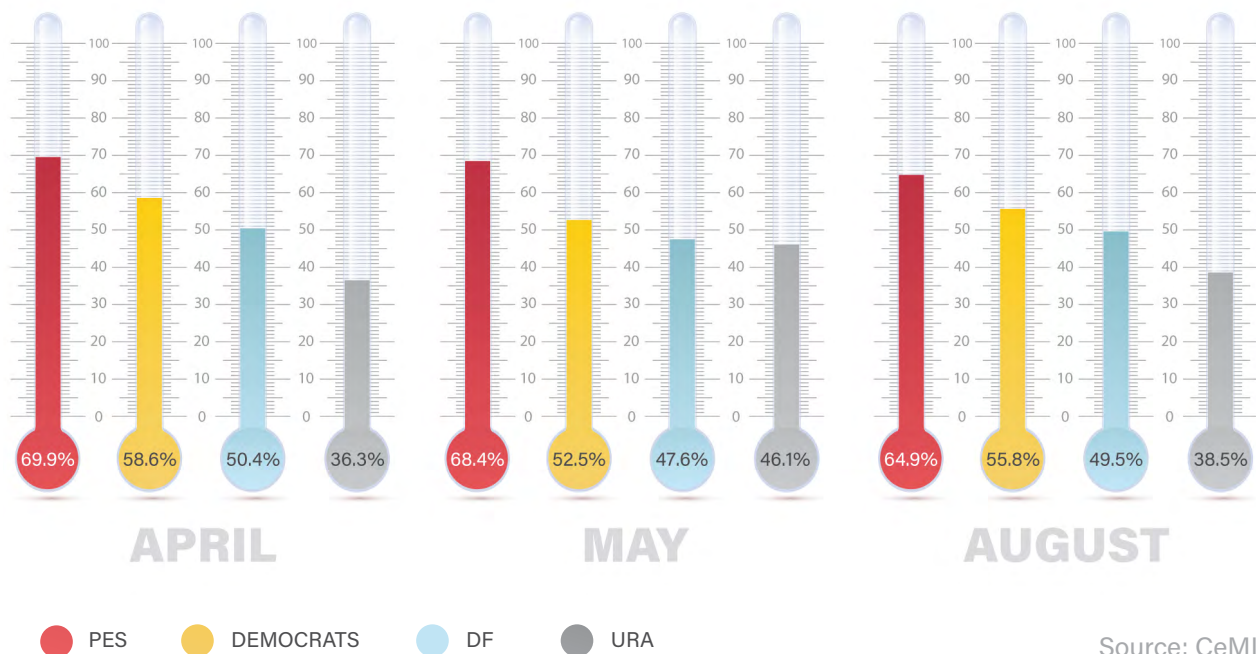
And when it comes to political parties, the emotional thermometers show a high degree of polarization. We observed parties in groups, indirectly confirming the existence of a social division in Montenegro,

one of the fundamental determinants of the Montenegrin political system. Understanding the relationship between the state and Montenegrin identity is crucial for understanding the basic social division in Montenegro. On one side, there is a strong sense of Montenegrin national consciousness. This feeling is based on the idea that Montenegrins are a separate people with their own cultural and historical heritage. In addition, supporters of this vision often emphasize the importance of Montenegro's independence, especially after the 2006 referendum when Montenegro regained its independence. On the other hand, there is a strong sense of connection to Serbian identity among some public members, where Montenegrins see themselves as an integral part of the broader Serbian people. In support of this, common belonging to Orthodoxy is often emphasized, or sometimes even more concretely to the Serbian Orthodox Church. This division in relation to the issues of statehood and national identity is not just a theoretical debate but has real consequences in people's daily lives, influencing political choices, social attitudes, and interpersonal relationships.

Two groups, supporters of the parliamentary majority parties (or those who support the parliamentary majority in crucial decisions), feel significantly different towards each other. This is evidenced by the following data. Each group of citizens thinks positively about "their own" on feeling thermometers, while they feel cold/negative towards "those on the other side of the political division." The data are presented separately for each group for clarity.

**Graph 23: Feeling thermometers for supporters of parties in the parliamentary majority towards "their" parties**

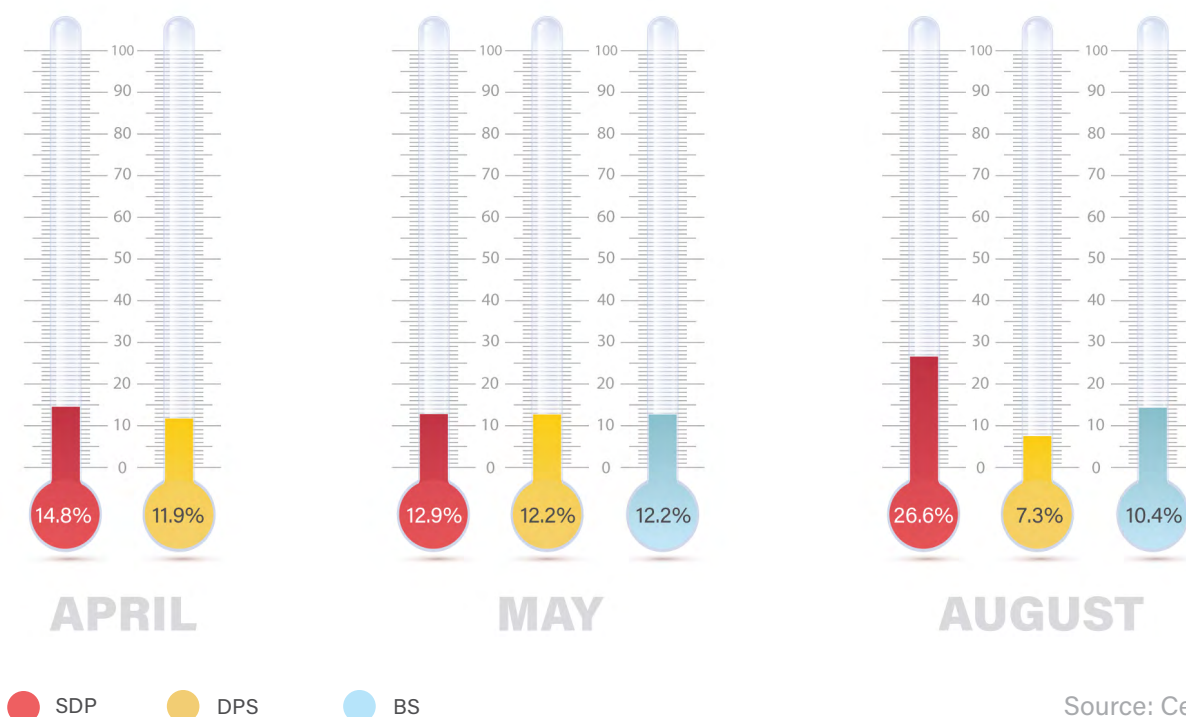
#### SUPPORTERS OF THE PARLAMENTARY MAJORITY PARTIES





**Graph 24: Feeling thermometers for supporters of parties in the parliamentary majority towards "opponents"**

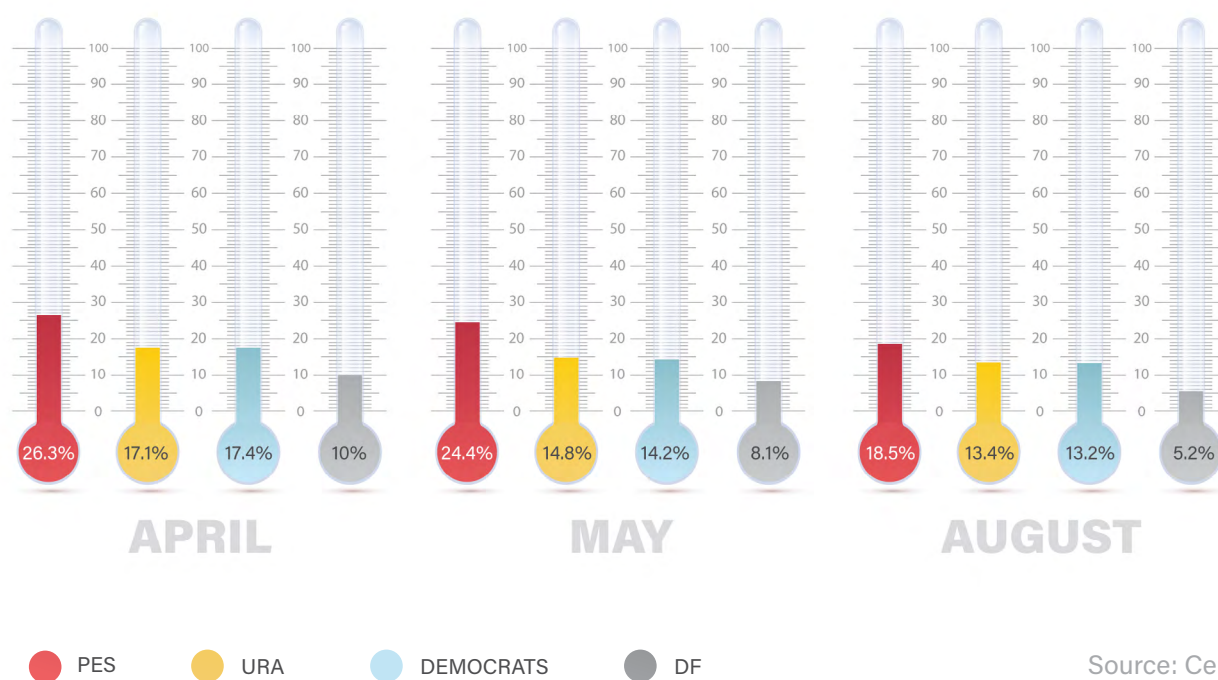
#### SUPPORTERS OF THE PARLAMENTARY MAJORITY PARTIES



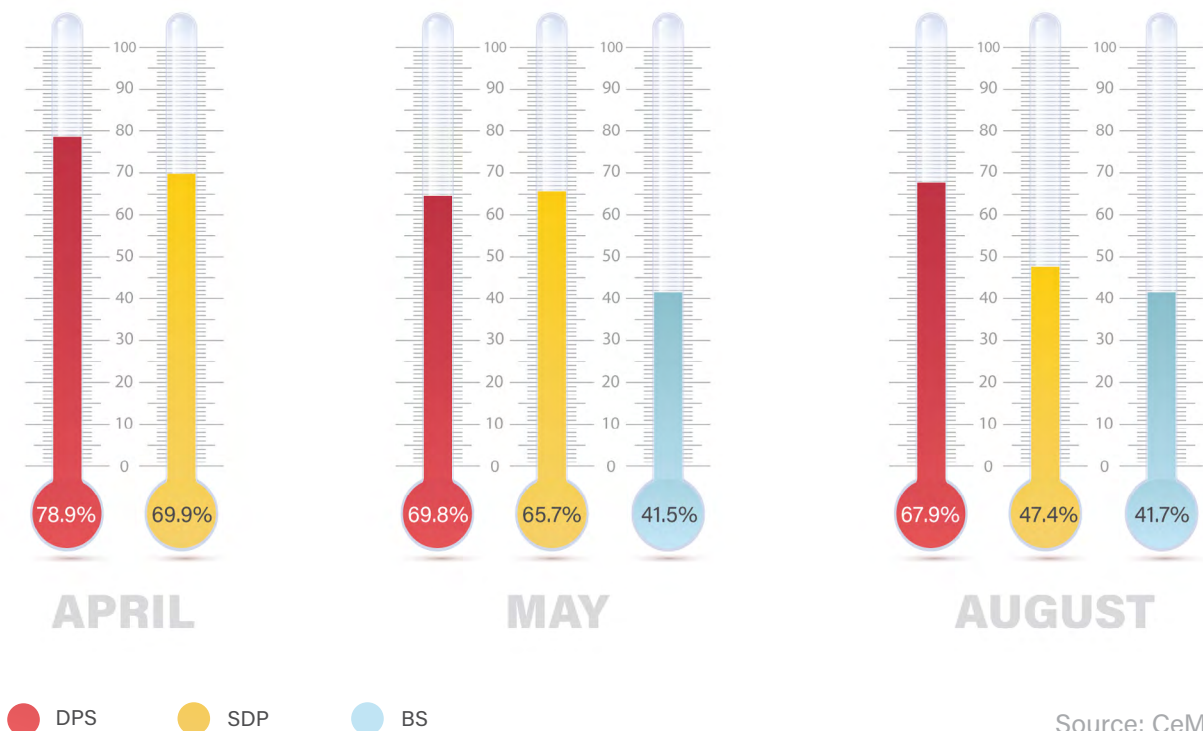
The pattern of opinion is identical among voters who support opposition parties.

**Graph 25: Feeling thermometers for supporters of opposition parties towards "opponents"**

#### SUPPORTERS OF OPPOSITION PARTIES





**Graph 26: Feeling thermometers for supporters of opposition parties towards "their" parties****SUPPORTERS OF OPPOSITION PARTIES**

The data from the four graphs above show how differently these two groups think about the parties. Interesting response patterns can be observed in the group supporting opposition parties. Among all opponents, this group has the greatest sympathy for the Movement Europe Now. For a while, opposition supporters thought that Europe Now might form a coalition with "pro-Montenegrin" parties. However, in the period after the parliamentary elections, it became clear that this would not happen, which may explain the cooling of attitudes toward this party seen in the data over time. Also, this group has a more negative view of the Bosniak Party, which remained in ministerial positions long after the vote of no confidence in the government of Dritan Abazović, unlike, for example, the SDP or HGI. This move was condemned by some of the public and undoubtedly contributed to the cooling of attitudes toward this party.

**7.5. THE SCOPE OF INFLUENCE OF DISSEMINATED DISINFORMATION**

Disinformation can have a significant impact on shaping attitudes toward presidential candidates. In the digital age, where disinformation spreads rapidly through social media and other online platforms, it can quickly become viral and influence public perception.

Disinformation can create or amplify negative perceptions of candidates, even when the information is not grounded in reality. This can result in reduced support for certain candidates among voters who have not critically examined or fact-checked the information. Disinformation can also intensify polarization, as people often seek information that confirms their existing beliefs, and this group is particularly susceptible to the spread of disinformation. If the disinformation aligns with someone's worldview, there is a higher likelihood that they will accept it without critical analysis.

In addition, disinformation serves other purposes. It can discourage voters from participating in the

elections altogether. If voters are influenced by fake information about all or the main candidates, they may become cynical or apathetic towards the electoral process, believing that all candidates are equally bad. This can reduce voter turnout and impact the outcome.

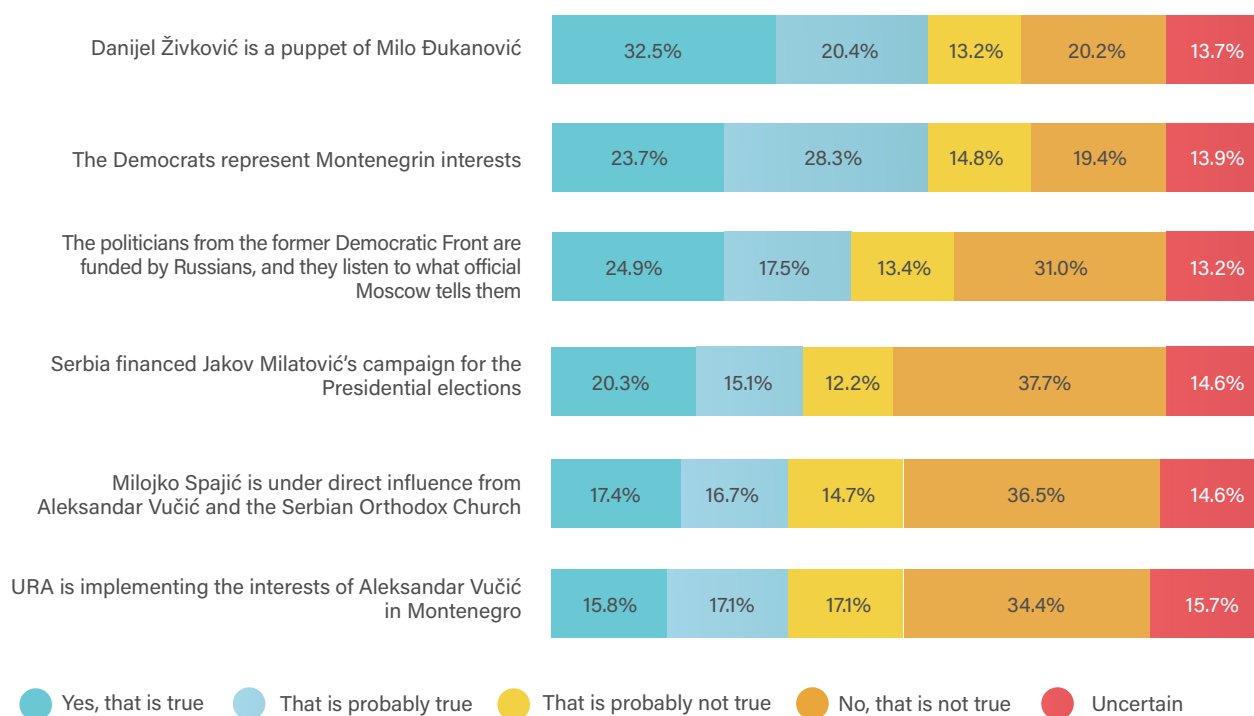
Disinformation undermines the democratic process by preventing voters from making informed decisions. It is crucial for citizens to be educated about ways to recognize disinformation, as this helps protect the integrity of the electoral process.

Considering the significant impact that media and social networks can have on shaping citizens' perceptions of socio-political issues, it is important to analyze which media outlets report and how, as well as which social media accounts are dominant in attempting to influence public opinion. In the analysis of social networks, it is crucial to draw parallels between the activities of official profiles of political actors in Montenegro and the activities of Facebook pages, groups, and other accounts that, under pseudonyms, spread disinformation, unverified information, and fake news about certain political actors, all with the aim of influencing the electoral results of political actors in Montenegro.

During three waves of research, we tested several attitudes that could periodically be found on social networks or sometimes even in some media. The idea was to test more general attitudes that were associated with certain politicians and/or parties and to see to what extent citizens believe in these attitudes. It is important to note that this research did not suggest that these attitudes are true or false, i.e., whether they are relevant information or disinformation.

Firstly, we analyze the extent to which citizens believe in the presented information. For each of the attitudes, citizens were asked to express their degree of agreement with the presented statement. The graph is designed so that at the top is the attitude in which cumulatively most citizens of Montenegro believe (the sum of those who say that the stated attitude is correct and those who say that the stated attitude is probably correct). The data are presented in the following graph

**Graph 27: Agreement with attitudes**



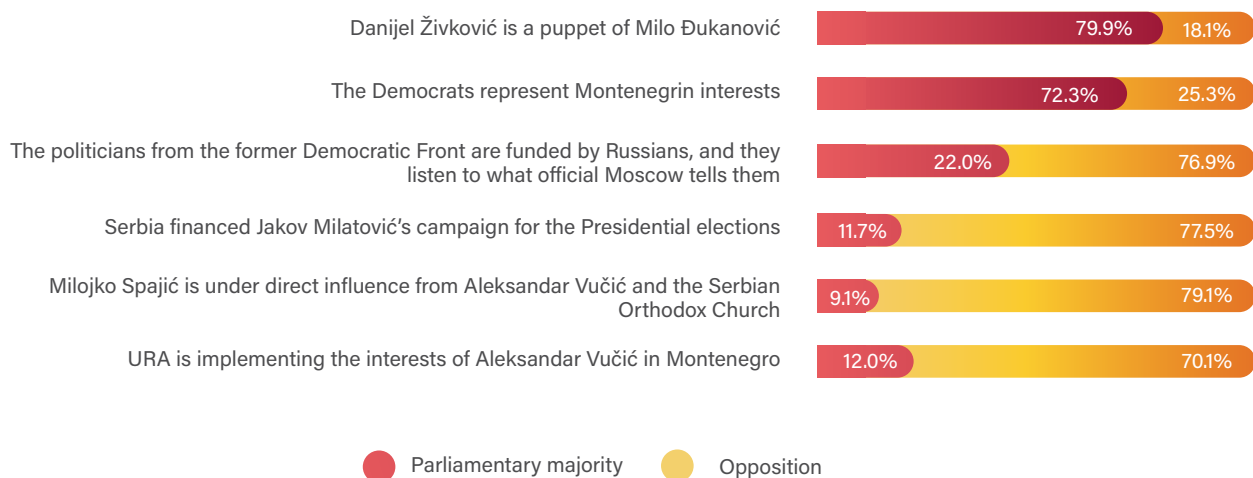
Source: CeMI

It is not surprising that the largest percentage of those who agree with a certain statement is precisely with the statement "Danijel Živković is a puppet of Milo Đukanović." DPS, as a party, traditionally polarizes public opinion in Montenegro, especially during the previous years when the base of those with a negative attitude toward this party increased. Therefore, it is not surprising that every other citizen of Montenegro agrees with the negative view of this party, that its acting president, Danijel Živković, is just a puppet of former president Milo Đukanović. Over 40% of citizens think that politicians from the former Democratic Front are financed by Russians and that they follow what official Moscow tells them. When it comes to the Movement Europe Now, there is a higher percentage of citizens who agree with a negative view of Jakov Milatović ("Serbia financed Jakov Milatović's campaign for the presidential elections") than those who agree with a negative view of Milojko Spajić ("Milojko Spajić is under the direct influence of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Orthodox Church").

However, the presented data conceal the picture of a high degree of polarization that exists in Montenegrin society, showing that "each side" believes in what it wants to believe and what is favorable of that side.

In the following chart, we can see the percentage of those who agree with the stated attitudes, in relation to the two dominant groups in society, citizens who support parties of the parliamentary majority and those who support opposition parties.

**Graph 28: Degree of agreement with the stated attitude for two groups in society**



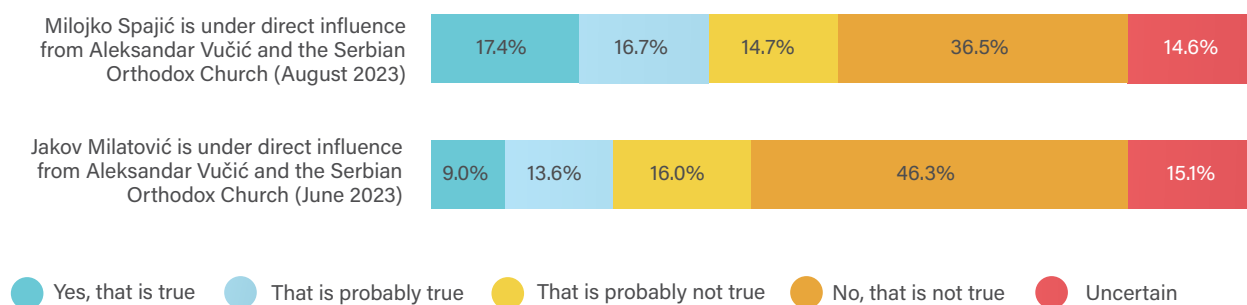
Source: CeMI

The data in the graph shows, among all voters in these two groups, how many say that the indicated attitude is accurate and how many say that the stated attitude is probably accurate. Therefore, the data does not need to add up to 100% but rather show the differences in beliefs between members of the two groups. For the negative attitude towards Danijel Živković and the DPS, almost 80% of voters in the parliamentary majority believe it to be true. On the other hand, only 18% of those who vote for opposition parties think this attitude is genuine. We see an identical pattern for all other parties. For example, only 9.1% of voters in the parliamentary majority believe that Milojko Spajić is under the direct influence of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Orthodox Church. For the same attitude, 79.1% of those who vote for opposition parties think it is true.

Through two waves of research, we aimed to analyze whether citizens perceive (dis)information about the two leaders of Movement Europe differently now. In the June survey, respondents were

asked to indicate whether they consider the statement "Jakov Milatović is under the direct influence of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Orthodox Church" to be true and to what extent. In the August survey, we presented the same statement, replacing Jakov Milatović with the president of the Movement for Europe, Milojko Spajić.

**Graph 29: Agreement with statements about the leaders of the Movement Europe Now**

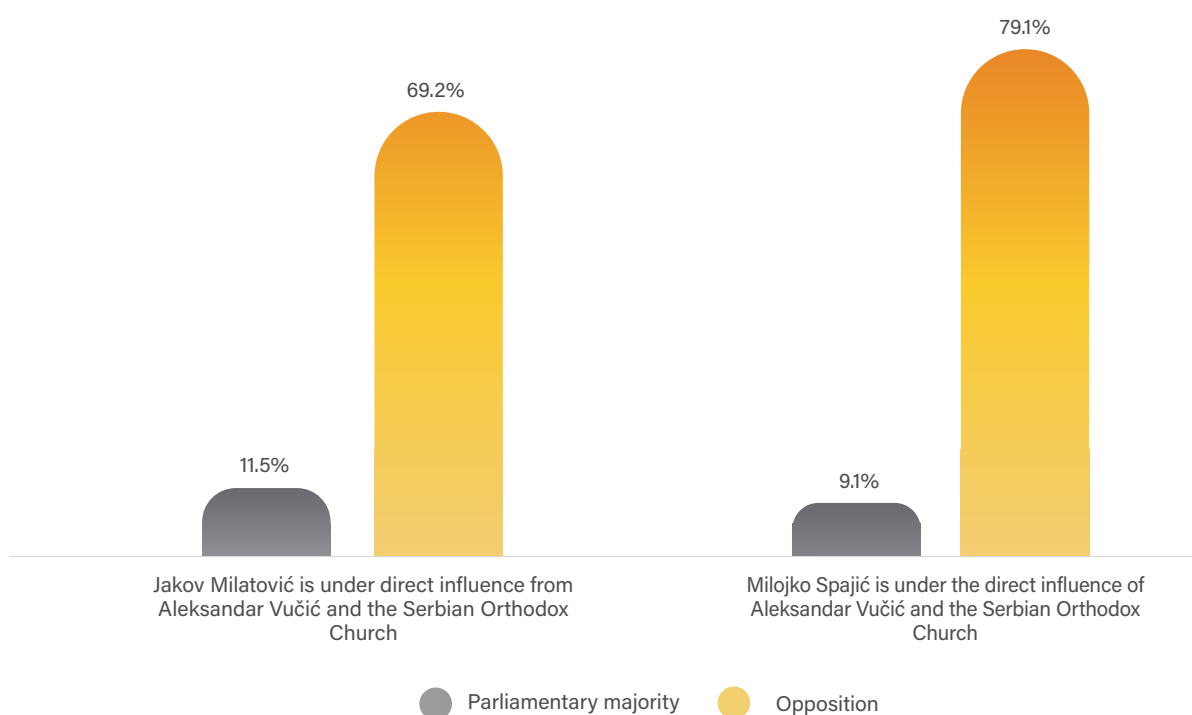


Source: CeMI

The graph shows that a higher percentage of people believe that Spajić is under the influence of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Orthodox Church (cumulative 34.1%), while in the June survey, for Milatović, cumulatively 22.6% thought this statement was true.

The difference becomes clearer when we observe the data over time, especially for the groups of voters supporting the parliamentary majority and the opposition.

**Graph 30: Agreement with attitudes about the leaders of the Movement Europe Now for two groups in society**



Source: CeMI

Although it may not seem like a significant difference at first glance, trend analysis indicates changes in perception among voters regarding attitudes toward the leaders of the Movement Europe Now (PES). While opposition voters show increasing agreement with this attitude, support among voters of parliamentary majority parties is declining.

One of the key questions that arises is: Why? Although currently available data do not provide a direct answer to this question, interpretation can involve consideration of some potential factors. One first and apparent reason may be associated with the leaders of the Movement Europe Now (PES) themselves. For example, in June, the primary focus was on Jakov Milatović, while in August, the attention shifted to Milojko Spajić. Perhaps opposition voters believe that Spajić has closer ties to Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) than Milatović. If this perception is accurate, it could mean that voters from the parliamentary majority parties believe the opposite – that Milatović is the one more directly influenced by factors from Serbia.

However, these results could also indicate something more profound and broader. Perhaps we are witnessing a growing polarization in Montenegrin society. Such trends may suggest that voters are increasingly clustering around their political beliefs and views, becoming less open to different perspectives.

This could mean that voters are becoming increasingly "closed" within their political "camps" less willing to compromise or understand the opposing side.

In any case, these findings provide an interesting insight into the political situation in Montenegro and indicate the need for further research to better understand the dynamics behind these changes.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Montenegro represents a deeply divided society in which the media closely align with these divisions. Profoundly divided societies are susceptible to the strong malignant influence that exploits existing societal rifts to deepen and advance their own interests. The role of external actors such as Serbia and Russia, along with their potent disinformation campaigns carried out through their significant media presence in the Montenegrin media landscape, is a cause for concern.

Citizens are deeply divided on political matters, and achieving consensus in society necessitates identifying topics that are not directly linked to political parties/politicians or day-to-day politics. Political topics further polarize society and split it into two parts. The divide between these two segments on numerous issues today is greater than before.

The media is also polarized. Efforts should be directed towards finding a way to make information from one media group visible to those who follow and trust another media group. In this regard, work should also focus on media literacy among citizens, as well as on ensuring that journalists do not contribute to further polarization in society.

Social media platforms have significant potential to deepen polarization in society as citizens are often enclosed within their own social media echo chambers. Consequently, raising awareness about misinformation on social media, how to recognize it, how harmful it can be, and why it is crucial for citizens to actively combat disinformation rather than accepting it if it aligns with their political beliefs, is essential.

### 8.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS (PARLIAMENT, GOVERNMENT)

1. Protection against ownership concentration: To diminish the potential foreign influence that may be contrary to Montenegro's interests, it is necessary to enact laws preventing excessive foreign ownership concentration in the media. This helps prevent a monopoly and ensures a plurality of opinions;
2. Regulation of foreign ownership should be aligned with international standards, setting limits on the maximum share of foreign ownership in domestic media;
3. It is necessary to regulate issues related to the transparency of foreign ownership. Transparency in the ownership structure of the media can help reduce the risk of hidden foreign political or economic interests;
4. Portals operating as media but not registered accordingly should be subject to legal sanctions. The Law on the Financing of Political Entities and Election Campaigns should be amended and supplemented to regulate the use of social media during campaigns.
5. The Law on the Financing of Political Entities and Election Campaigns should be amended and supplemented to regulate the use of social media during campaigns.



6. The Law on the Election of Councilors and MPs should be amended and supplemented to regulate behavior and the use of social media during the electoral silence period.
7. State institutions should adopt a multiparty approach - a collaborative approach (with the private sector and NGOs) and create legal and institutional mechanisms to protect internet users.
8. The communication plan of the Government of Montenegro, especially crisis communication, should be updated to prevent the spread of misinformation, false information, and hate speech in sensitive situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and elections.
9. Adopt clear guidelines that prohibit the use of state resources, including social media, for the promotion of political parties or candidates.
10. Work on promoting and strengthening partnerships between the government, civil society, and technology companies for joint monitoring and regulation of the online space in the context of elections.
11. Develop a National Strategy to Combat Hybrid Threats, which will include provisions related to disinformation, information influence operations, and coordinated inauthentic behavior.

## **8.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

1. Media should be provided with support through education on disinformation campaigns, especially during elections;
2. Media should establish cross-sector collaboration with civil society organizations to combat disinformation campaigns on the internet;
3. Media should act as impartial intermediaries in reporting on election campaigns, ensuring that all political actors are equally represented in their reports;
4. Civil society organizations should receive more extensive support in conducting media literacy campaigns among citizens, with a particular focus on working with younger populations aged 10-18 years.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Center for Monitoring and Research – CeMI (April 2023). Research *"How do the citizens of Montenegro obtain information on political circumstances and electoral campaign?" (Kako se građani Crne Gore informišu o političkim dešavanjima i izbornoj ponudi?)*. Available at: <https://cemi.org.me/me/post/tradicionalni-mediji-dominantno-oblikuju-politicka-uvjerenja-crnogorskih-gradana-1090>;
- Center for Monitoring and Research – CeMI (July-August 2023). *Research:*
- *Citizens' attitudes on disinformation influence and foreign influence on media (Stavovi građana o uticaju dezinformacija i spoljnom uticaju na medije)*. Available at:
- Gilić, T. (2023). Research on interconnection between biased media, social media and political polarization in Montenegro (*Istraživanje međusobne povezanosti između pristrasnih medija, društvenih mreža i političke polarizacije u Crnoj Gori*) London: University of Westminster;
- Hallin, D. C., i Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: three models of media and politics (Poređenje medijskih sistema: tri modela medija i politike)*. New York: Cambridge University Press;
- European Commission Report (2021). Available at: <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/0aef2dec-5785-497d-8dba-527932ac124c>;
- Statista Research Department. *Media freedom index in Montenegro 2013-2021 (Indeks slobode medija u Crnoj Gori 2013-2021)*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1026495/montenegro-press-freedom-index/> ;
- Law on National Public Broadcaster Radio i Televizija Crne Gore
- Law on Prevention of Corruption
- Law on National Public Broadcaster Radio i Televizija Crne Gore





