

MARCH

QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

2024

Petition for recall of the Mayors in the north: Who wants to know about it and what are they told about it?

Methodology

New Social Initiative is conducting online media and social media monitoring in cooperation with the Pikasa Analytics INC, a data analytics company specialized in development and implementation of tools, software and machine learning algorithms. The tool allows monitors to count the nominal number of articles on particular topics and see the level of audience engagement.

Engagements on websites are defined as news articles shared on Facebook from each outlet's website and the total number of likes, shares, and comments they have collected. Engagements on social media encompass likes, shares, and comments gathered from all social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn) for all posts, including photos, videos, and text. The assessment of engagement extends beyond the media outlets to encompass a variety of social media accounts, including those of politicians, and opinion makers.

The tool aggregates articles, and the NSI monitoring team reviews them to identify potential disinformation and other information disorders. However, there are several limitations to the methodology, designed to narrow down the monitoring objective. It is tailored, with each observed account being handpicked by Pikasa and NSI monitors. Consequently, the total number of posts and articles includes only the observed accounts, excluding other accounts that may also be posting news. Nonetheless, the calculation of engagement includes all shares, comments, and other interactions.

Moreover, private accounts can only be observed if officially designated as accounts of political leaders or fan pages. Consequently, some Facebook accounts of politicians may not be included in the analysis. Another limitation is related to access, as NSI can observe articles and posts published as far back as December 1, 2023.

	Media reporting in Albanian from Kosovo	Media reporting in Serbian from Kosovo	Media from Serbia
Approximate number of articles reviewed	1000	180	450

Observed media that report from Kosovo in Serbian language

Alternativna, Gračanica online, Radio Kontakt Plus, Kosovo Online, KoSSev, Medija Centar, TV Most, Radio Kim, Radio Mitrovica Sever, Radio Televizija Gračanica, and RTK2

Observed period:

1 December – 29 February

Number of online media observed:

126 media reporting in Albanian and in Serbian in Kosovo, 126 media reporting from Serbia and 24 international media outlets.

Topic observed:

Number, tone (positive, negative or neutral) and the narratives in articles related to the petition for the recall of Mayors in north Kosovo.

Background information about the topic of observation:

After the boycott of early local elections by Kosovo Serb political parties, Mayors of Albanian ethnicity secured seats in four Serb-majority municipalities, with a turnout of around 3%. The Quint countries have emphasized that new early local elections and the unconditional participation of Kosovo Serb political options in subsequent early elections are crucial steps to achieve de-escalation in the region.¹

Due to a lack of a developed legal framework, the Government of Kosovo issued a sub-legal act outlining how citizens can exercise their legally guaranteed right to request a vote to recall a Mayor. The petition to trigger the recall vote officially

¹ <https://www.kosovo-online.com/en/news/interviews/szynyog-eu-considers-mayors-resignations-faster-and-more-effective-way-forward>

began on January 17 in North Mitrovica and Leposavić/Leposaviq, and on January 19 in Zubin Potok and Zvečan/Zveçan. The signature collection period ended by January 22. The signatures were verified by late February, but the date for the recall vote has yet to be announced.

EU and the US have both urged Kosovo to facilitate the organization of early elections and for Kosovo Serbs to participate in these elections as a step towards their reintegration into Kosovo's institutions. However, progress on this matter, which requires significant political will from both parties, has been stalled since June 2023² when the EU officially made the request.

The fulfillment of the EU's request is also a precondition for lifting the restrictive measures that the Council of the EU imposed on Kosovo following the forceful entry of Kosovo police into municipal buildings in northern Kosovo and the subsequent violent attacks by Kosovo Serb protesters against KFOR soldiers.

Key findings

- The collection of signatures for the recall of Mayors in northern municipalities was one of the most prominent topics in media reporting in the Serbian language in Kosovo between December 2023 and February 2024, earning 3 out of 5 spots for the most engaging content. This occurred despite other major political developments during the reporting period, such as the end of the sticker regime, the operational shutdown of Commercial NLB Bank, and the cessation of the import of dinars, which became the most dominant topic in February 2024.
- The coverage of the topic in media reporting in the Albanian language heavily relied on statements from local officials and did not attract much attention from readers compared to other content related to Mayors and local institutional developments in northern Kosovo. For example, the Chairman of the municipal assembly of North Mitrovica is the main interlocutor in at least 40 out of around 200 articles in media reporting in Albanian about the petition.
- Despite the volume of coverage, the topic failed to capture substantial public interest in Serbia, considering the audience size. As a comparison, over 360 articles in the media in Serbia, which cater to an audience of several millions measured over 2.000 engagements, while the media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo, whose primary target audience is around 100.000 Kosovo Serbs measured over 1.000 engagements with 50% less articles. The media coverage surrounding the petition in Serbia revealed a trend of using manipulative clickbait titles, often containing offensive language. Information disorders related to the topic were primarily sourced from officials at both the

² See the press release of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/03/statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-kosovo-and-latest-developments/>

local and national levels in Kosovo and Serbia. Civil society representatives played a role in countering disinformation.

- High-level officials in Kosovo and in Serbia dedicated little attention to the topic.
- Manipulations sourced from Serbian-based tabloids were countered by local media reporting in the Serbian language in Kosovo. This local reporting garnered relatively high engagement.

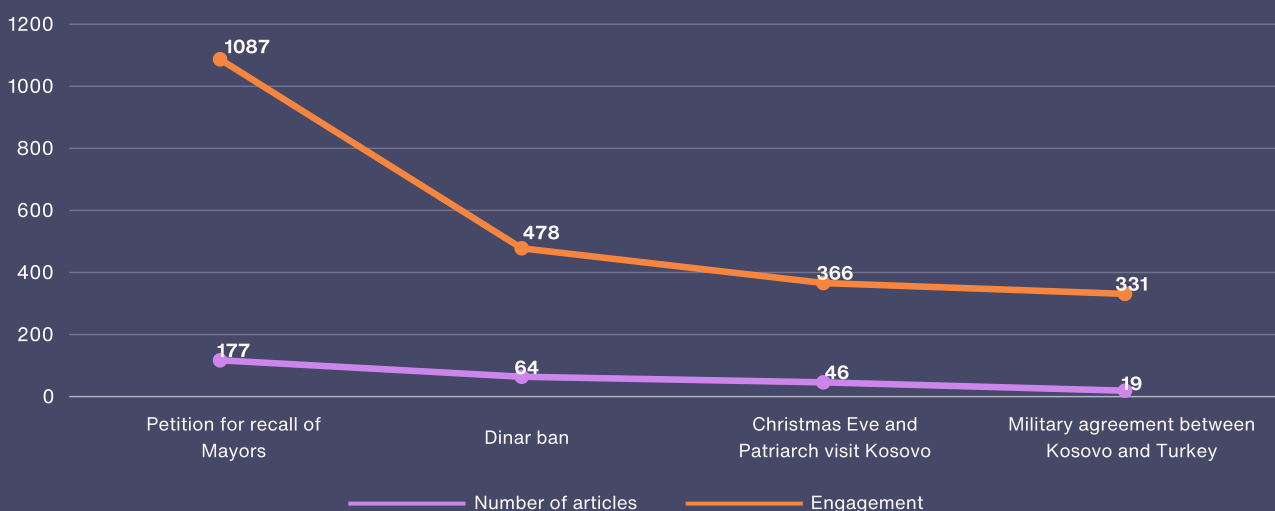
Monitoring results of Kosovo media

During the reporting, the most active media outlet was Kosovo Online, which published 7,574 articles with 77,122 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most the most engagement was KoSSev, with 123,857 engagements, despite being the fourth most prolific Serbian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with only 1,924 published articles.

When it comes to media based in Kosovo and reporting in the Serbian language, the petition for the recall of the Mayors in northern municipalities was one of the more prominent topics covered. In fact, three out of the five topics with the highest audience engagement on media websites reporting in Serbian were related to the signing of the petitions for the vote on the recall of the Mayors. Two cohorts of articles reported on the collection of signatures in North Mitrovica, and the third one reported on the collection of signatures in Zvečan/Zveçan

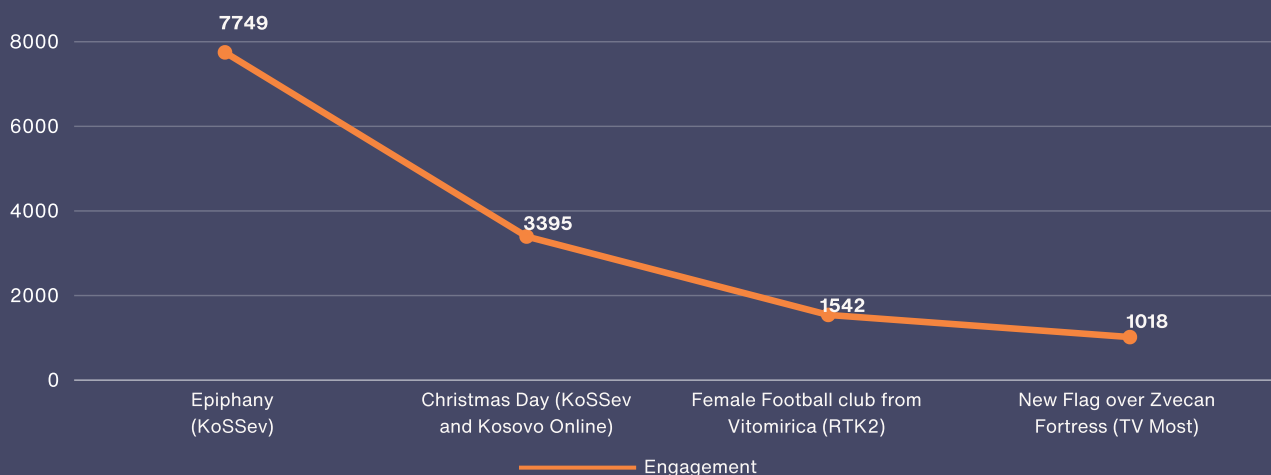
Simultaneously, this was the topic with the highest number of published articles in the Serbian language in Kosovo, totaling 177 articles.

Popular Topics and Engagment on Media Websites



While readers' reactions to links posted on Facebook from websites are notable, their preferences for different types of posts, including photos and videos, differ significantly. Social media engagements, particularly those related to more social topics such as the holiday season, are significantly higher than engagements with links from websites directly.

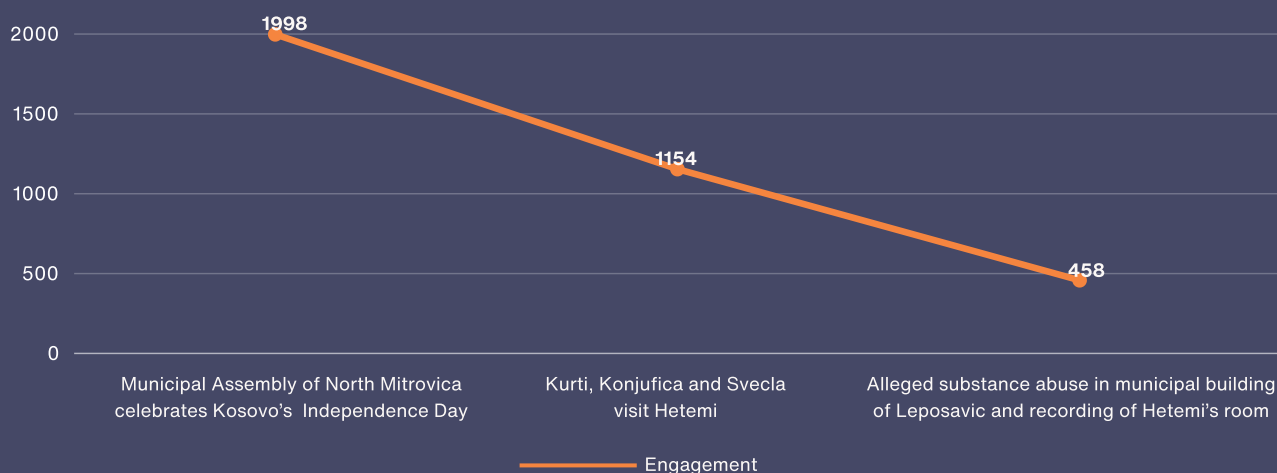
Reader engagement via Facebook accounts of media reporting in Serbian language



The overview of how topics related to the Mayors in northern Kosovo resonated with readers of content in Albanian language reveals a deep social divide between the communities. For example, the most reported-on and engaging articles related to north Kosovo in Albanian media were those reporting on the Government of Kosovo officials' visit to the house of Mayor of Leposavić/Leposaviq, Lulzim Hetemi, and the celebration of Independence Day by the municipal assembly of North Mitrovica.

Topics related to the petition for the recall of Mayors do not appear in the top 20 when it comes to engagement within Albanian readership.

Topics of the most engaging individual articles in Albanian language related to the Mayor of the municipalities in Northern Kosovo (top 20)



Top Kosovo officials spoke very sparingly about this topic during the reporting period. Out of over 400 articles in the media from Kosovo reporting Serbian language about the President Vjosa Osmani, only four mention this topic:

- A statement acknowledging the citizens' right to participate in such an instrument of participation in local affairs and a claim that no additional information about the initiation of the petition is available.
- A statement acknowledging the initiation of the signature collection and the citizens' right to participate in such an instrument of participation in local affairs.
- A statement made after meeting the President of the Central Election Commission (CEC) where she asked that the CEC respect the deadlines related to the petition.

The first statement, made on December 6, came a day after a group of citizens in four Serb-majority municipalities in the north attempted to submit a request for the initiation of the petition but were declined by local municipal representatives. This attempt was extensively covered by media reporting in Serbian. Some reports underlined that not all media were informed about the intended attempt to submit the official request to launch a petition and noted that it was unusual for civic initiatives in four different municipalities to try to submit the requests on the same dates.

The second statement by President Osmani became the subject of sensational reporting by Belgrade-based tabloids, but it also prompted debunking³ efforts by a network of the media reporting in Serbian from Kosovo. The debunk article about tabloid Alo's claim that Osmani „created chaos in Pristina and turned her back on Kurti“ because of the statement that participating in petitions is a civic right. This article was the 67th by engagement parameters of 400 articles involving Osmani in media reporting in Serbian.

Media based in Kosov and reporting in Serbian language had published 416 articles about Albin Kurti in the reporting period and 406 articles about Vjosa Osmani. Still, articles featuring Osmani recorded more than twice higher engagement (4634, compared to 1852). Kosovo Serb politicians, Igor Simić (20 articles) and Dalibor Jevtić (60 articles), also measured higher measurements than Kurti, with over 2000 engagements.

Likewise, in over 400 articles in Serbian language about Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, he never once mentioned the petition itself, and only mentioned early local elections in the north twice:

³ <https://kossev.info/kako-je-to-osmani-napravila-haos-u-pristini-i-okrenula-leafja-kurtiju-prema-beogradskom-tabloidu/>

- In a post about the meeting with EUSR Miroslav Lajčák where early elections were discussed.
- In an interview for Politico where the possibility of early local elections „in the coming months“ was mentioned.

A Kosovo official who was prominently featured in the media regarding this topic was Chairman of the municipal assembly of North Mitrovica, Nedžad Ugljanin, who was mentioned in at least 40 articles in Albanian language and at least 32 articles in Serbian language. Ugljanin played a key role as a common interlocutor, as his position was crucial for the connection between citizens and institutions in the signature collection process, which was organized for the first time in Kosovo. However, Ugljanin's statements, often contradictory, did not contribute to a clearer understanding of the process by the public.

In particular, over a course of few days, Ugljanin insisted that the request for petition was denied by him personally, even though the chairman does not hold such competency, as noted by CSO representatives.⁴ Likewise, Ugljanin communicated to the public that the Chairperson has competency to decide on the merit of the civic initiatives' reasoning for initiating the petition. Additionally, in multiple statements, Ugljanin questioned the democratic nature of the process of collecting signatures for the petition, alleging that the Srpska list party exerted pressure on citizens to sign the petition. Likewise, deputy minister of Administration and Local Government, Arbër Vokri, stated that citizens are pressured to sign the petition. EULEX Mission, which also observed the process, did not report similar impressions.⁵

On the other hand, Deputy Prime Minister, Besnik Bislimi, in an interview to Radio Goraždevac that reports in Serbian language claimed that non-governmental organization CASA from North Mitrovica was behind the petition. The statement prompted the reaction of this organization which denied⁶ any involvement in the process.

Following the submission of signatures supporting the petition, media reporting in Serbian published details about a meeting of four Mayors in Leposavić/Leposaviq quoting the Mayor of Zubin Potok, who claimed that he and his colleagues were discussing the ways to legally challenge the petition at the Constitutional Court. However, Zeqiri soon thereafter withdrew the statement,⁷ claiming a misunderstanding with the journalist.

Finally, in a statement conveyed by several media outlets, Mayor of Leposavić/Leposaviq, Lulzim Hetemi, claimed that the citizens who have signed the petition for his recall have been organized by people whom he labeled as "criminals."

⁴ <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/cakoli-ugljanin-prekrso-zakon-odbacivanje-zahteva-za-smenu-gradonacelnika-nije-u>

⁵ <https://ninfo.rs/english/news/eulex-monitoring-signing-of-petitions-for-dismissal-of-n-kosovo-mayors/>

⁶ <https://kossev.info/nvo-casa-demantovala-bisljimijeve-navode-da-ucestvuje-u-inicijativi-za-smenu-gradonacelnika-na-severu/>

⁷ <https://kossev.info/zeqiri-demantuje-ne-zamatra-podnosenje-zahteva-uputstvo-za-smenu-proglasi-neustavnim/>

National-level officials from Serbia also did not speak extensively about the topic. The only article with notable engagement on the topic was a statement by the director of the Serbian Government Office for Kosovo, in which he pointed out that by signing the petition, Kosovo Serbs "have answered the call of their country" and that the petition is one step closer to removing Albanian Mayors. Similarly, Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vucic, mentioned this topic only once, after the urgent session of the United Nations Security Council dedicated to the situation in Kosovo following the ban on the import of dinars.

Several cases of media misattributing photos⁸ from another petition signing in North Mitrovica to the petition for the recall of Mayors were observed.

BOTA SOT Hyrje Abonohu

Kërko...

BALLINA LAJME BOTA KOSOVA SHQIPËRIA MAqedonia SPORTI SHOWBIZ DIASPORA RUBRIKAT

AKTUALE

Hetemi e Uglanin thonë se peticioni për largimin e kryetarëve po bëhet me shantazhe e po ndikohet nga Lista Serbe

ME: 17 JANAR 2024 NË ORA: 22:44

MË TË LEXUARAT

Katër aksidente me fatalitet gjatë janarit, kërkohet vendosja e kamerave në rrugë

Ndryshon situata në Llugë të Podujevës, një pjesë e xhematit tani në përçarje të inamit të zgjedhur nga BIR-u

Faton Klinaku reagon për ndalimin e Lushakut

Shtatoret e Sali Çekajt e Mentor Tolaj nuk janë në ngasirën e Manastirit

PAPA RACI.COM Lajme PaFilter PaPardon Progres PaKufi PaDoreza PaKarton PaKablo PaTeklifv

17/01/2024

Hetemi e Uglanin thonë se peticioni për largimin e kryetarëve po bëhet me shantazhe e po ndikohet nga Lista Serbe

TË FUNDIT

PRESTIGJIOZJA HELVETE NZZ: 24 HEKTARËT E MANASTIRIT, IRONI E KURTIT

PO PËRDERHËN OFERTAT PËR RAMAZAN! ÇMIMET MA T'LIRA NË JANË!

TË TJERA

MBYLLIA E BON VIVANT, BASHA: BIZNESET I KANE DYPISHUAR FTMET PAS ARDHIJES TONË NË PUSHET

Blic E SHITUNË 16 MARS

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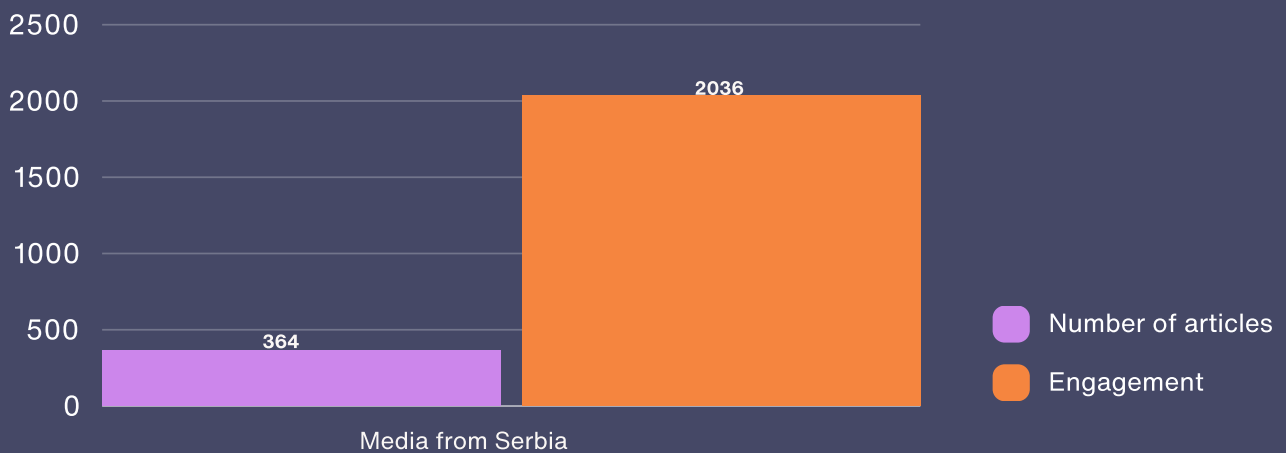
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8 <https://paparaci.com/398759/hetemi-e-uglanin-thone-se-peticioni-per-largimin-e-kryetarëve-po-behet-me-shantazhe-e-po-ndikohet-nga-lista-serbe/>, and <https://gazetablic.com/hetemi-e-uglanin-thone-se-peticioni-per-largimin-e-kryetarëve-po-behet-me-shantazhe-e-po-ndikohet-nga-lista-serbe/>, and <https://www.botasot.info/aktuale-lajme/2114813/hetemi-e-uglanin-thone-se-peticioni-per-largimin-e-kryetarëve-po-behet-me-shantazhe-e-po-ndikohet-nga-lista-serbe/>

Monitoring results of the media from Serbia

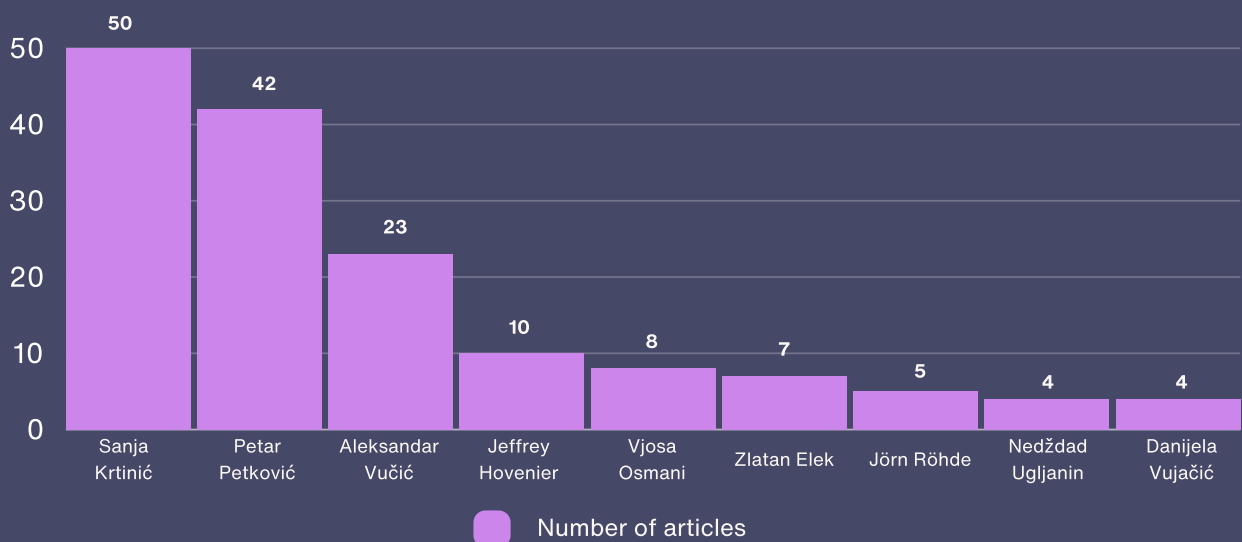
Petition for the recall of Mayors was also widely reported on in the media in Serbia. At least 364 articles were published, but only 63 articles measured some engagement. Overall, it can be said that these articles did not draw too much attention given the size of the audience in Serbia.

Petition for the recall in the media from Serbia



The most of the articles quote the one of the initiators of the petition in North Mitrovica, Sanja Krtinić, while Petar Petković is the most quoted Serbian official on this topic.

Statments by person



Most common information disorders are clickbait titles that commonly contain offensive language. When officials, such as Petković, or Srpska list President Zlatan Elek talk about this topic, they use term “false Mayors” to refer to the Albanian Mayors in northern Kosovo, unlike Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vučić who, in the reporting period, spoke about the Mayors only in the session of the Security Council where he resorts to more legalistic language referring to them as “illegitimate Mayors”. The adjective is commonly used also to describe Kurti “the false Prime Minister” and Kosovo, the “false state”. There were 12 titles with such denominations in the over 400 observed articles.

Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti had very few statements on the topic. Regardless, in the media in Serbia, he was mentioned 58 times in over 400 observed articles on the topic of Mayors in northern Kosovo and the petitions. He is mostly designated as the main conspirator behind the prolongations related to the submission of request⁹ for petition and subsequent verification of signatures.¹⁰ He is accused of having an “ideology of evil”, an “evil plan” aiming to cause “exodus and ethnic cleansing”, executing “terror”, of being “agent provocateur”, of orchestrating a “circus”, of wanting to “subdue” Kosovo Serbs. On the other hand, many analysts in Serbia suggest that Kurti has silent support of the international community or their parts which are labeled Kurti’s “Western whisperers”.

Among multitude of statements describing the situation in northern Kosovo as critical, the most extreme is the statement of the President of Srpska list, Zlatan Elek, who claims that only in Gaza¹¹ the situation can be worse than in northern Kosovo.

Danas

☰ Najnovije Vesti Kolumne Dijalog Svet Kultura Scena Sport Na lokalu City Magazine Život BBC

Početna Vesti Politika „Mislim da je trenutno gore samo u pojasu Gaze“: Predsednik Srpske liste kaže da Srbi sa Kosova očekuju međunarodnu reakciju zbog dinara

POLITIKA

„Mislim da je trenutno gore samo u pojasu Gaze“: Predsednik Srpske liste kaže da Srbi sa Kosova očekuju međunarodnu reakciju zbog dinara

Kosovo Online
13.02.2024. 11:28

7 komentara

NAJNOVIJE

Scena - danas 23:38
Preminuo Dragoljub Crnčević Crnke, poznati srpski blazer

Sport - danas 23:24
Atletik Bilbao hita ka Ligi šampiona, Dirona ne može da prati šampionski ritam Real Madrida

Svet - danas 23:14
Policiji se predao osumnjičeni za ubistvo tri osobe u Filadelfiji

KOLUMNNE

Teofil Pančić
Prevlast besramne strašnosti

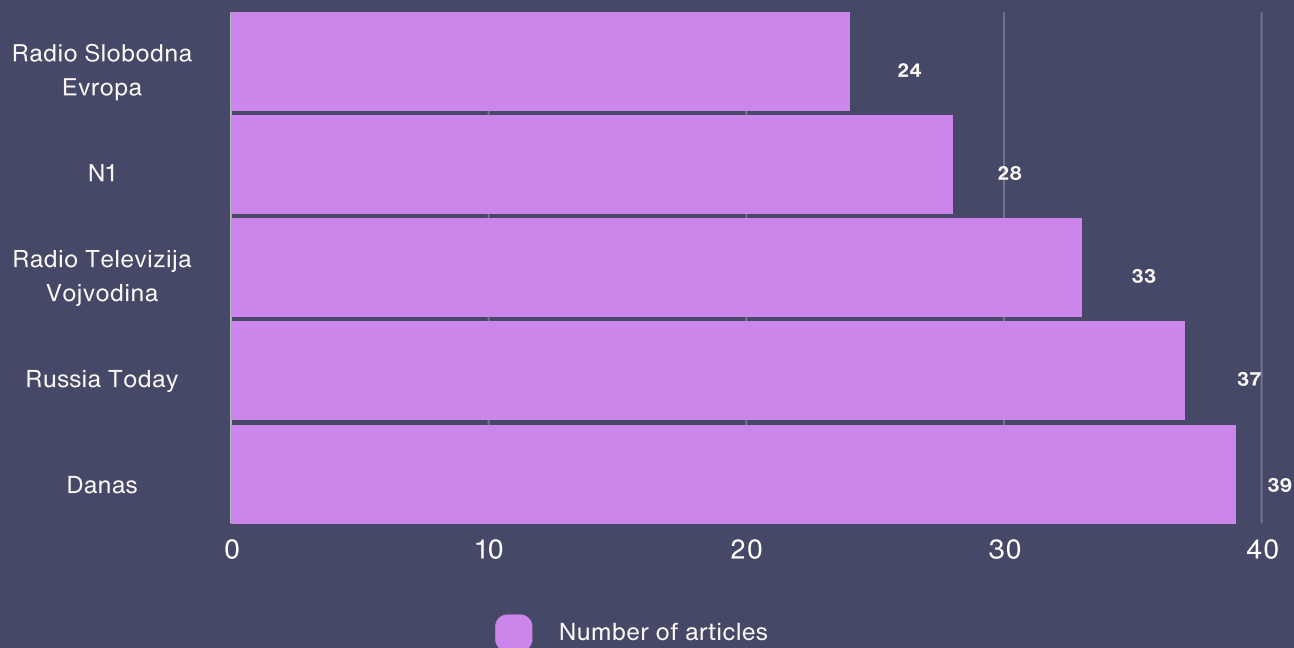
9 <https://happytv.rs/vesti/politika/nove-lazi-aljбина-kurtija-obmanama-zeli-do-novih-izbora-u-četiri-opštine/682850/>

10 <https://www.alo.rs/vesti/kim/865975/novi-kurtijev-manevar-eva-sta-je-sada-smislio-protiv-srba-jps-jedan-opasan-potez-bez-presedana/vest>

11 <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/predsednik-srpske-liste-kosovo-gaza/>

The media in Serbia that reported the most¹² about the Albanian Mayors in northern Kosovo and the petition for their recall are:

Which media reported about Albanian Majors in the northern Kosovo the most



¹² Due to access restrictions, "Russia Today" articles can only be viewed as headlines.

This report is prepared by New Social Initiative, a civil society organization from North Mitrovica to ultimately impact inclusiveness, trust-building, democratization processes and good governance in Kosovo. While doing so, NSI follows its vision of an inclusive society built on trust and appreciation among its communities, in which citizens from all ethnic groups actively participate in the society and its governance.