

## **Serbia: DOS Calls Leadership Poll to Buy Time**

**Author:** [Zeljko Cvijanovic](#)

The struggling ruling coalition seems to hope that latest bid to elect a president will give it some breathing space.

The Serbian government's decision last week to stage a third re-run of presidential elections later this year, without taking steps to ensure that this time they are declared valid, appears to be a cynical attempt to fend off its critics.

Officials, in all likelihood, know that the November 16 poll will, like the two previous leadership ballots, be annulled, but have chosen to go ahead because they want to divert public attention away from government corruption scandals and opposition demands for early parliamentary elections as well as undermine the post of president.

Recent market research suggests that voter apathy is now greater than it was for last year's two aborted presidential polls, in September and December, which were cancelled because the turn out was less than 50 per cent, the minimum required by law.

While disillusionment with Serbian politics clearly contributed to the cancellation of the ballots, Vojislav Kostunica, the leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Serbia, DSS, who won the highest number of votes in both contests, claimed that the main reason was that the ruling DOS coalition had failed to revise Milosevic-era registers of voters which had grossly inflated their number for electoral fraud purposes.

The fact that voting lists have not been updated and calls for the 50 per cent threshold to be lowered ignored suggests that the government has little interest in a valid poll this time around.

This is thought to have prompted Kostunica, the other main candidate, the current leader of the opposition G17 Plus party, Miroslav Labus, to turn their backs on the ballot. Even DOS's best presidential prospect, the popular defence minister Boris Tadic, has refused to throw his hat into the ring.

Analysts and opposition politicians believe that the government is counting on the election to give it some respite from a series of scandals - which have led to plunging opinion poll ratings - and its rivals' calls for next year's assembly elections to be brought forward.

Political analyst Dusan Pavlovic said the November ballot is an attempt "to divert attention away from the corruption scandals that been rocking the government for months now". G17 Plus spokeswoman Ksenija Milivojevic saw it as "yet another manipulation, to buy some time and avoid having to call [parliamentary] elections".

Indeed, some observers have suggested that DOS might be engineering the failure of the presidential ballots to undermine the post of president.

DOS has already made it clear that it wants the head of state chosen by parliament, where it still has a majority, not directly by the people - a move that would lessen the possibility of one of its rivals being elected.

If the elections fail again, parliamentary speaker Natasha Micic, who has been acting Serbian president since last December, will continue in the post, which clearly suits the ruling coalition as she's a DOS member.

The government denies there are hidden motives behind its call for a November poll, saying that it was its legal obligation. And the Serbian premier Zoran Zivkovic has sought to reassure the opposition and the public that it will be declared valid this time. As apparent proof of its sincerity, DOS nominated Dragoljub Micunovic, leader of the Democratic Centre party and speaker of the federal parliament, as its candidate for the ballot.

But those prepared to give the government the benefit of the doubt say that if the government really meant what it said it would have at the very least lowered the turnout threshold required for an election.

Zeljko Cvijanovic is a regular IWPR correspondent in Belgrade.

**Location:** [Serbia](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/serbia-dos-calls-leadership-poll-buy-time>