
Public Trust in Elections: Survey Results

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May 2026

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Executive Summary

The OSCE Mission to Montenegro commissioned a survey conducted by the Damar Institute from 24 November to 7 December 2025, with the aim of examining attitudes toward certain segments of electoral reform in Montenegro. The survey covered issues that are directly or indirectly related to the implementation of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights OSCE/ODIHR recommendations addressed to Montenegro, as well as recommendations from nongovernmental organizations monitoring electoral processes in Montenegro.

The topics covered by this survey included examining respondents' attitudes regarding:

- the work of the State Election Commission (**SEC**)
- the implementation of electoral processes in Montenegro;
- the electoral reform process in Montenegro;
- the role of the media in electoral processes, including respondents' views on social media and artificial intelligence in the electoral process.

The survey resulted in an analysis in which the findings were presented in a systematic manner, accompanied by an analytical commentary.

Research methodology:

The methodology applied to this survey involved the use of a random multi-stage sample of 1,200 adult respondents. The sample was stratified into six strata according to region (Northern, Central, and Southern) and type of settlement (urban and rural). The sample included 24 municipalities across Montenegro. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions, both closed ended and open ended. The time required to complete the questionnaire was approximately 12 minutes.

Key Findings of the Survey:

- A majority of respondents (65.1%) believe that elections in Montenegro are fully or partially free and fair. This represents a significant improvement compared to the 2023 survey, when 58.2% of respondents held this view.
- 42.9% of respondents believe that Montenegro should continue electoral reform, while 28.8% is of the opposite opinion. Citizens rated the work of the electoral reform committee at an average of 2.73 out of 5, slightly below the midpoint of the scale.
- A minority of respondents (42.4%) believe that the voters' register contains accurate data ("yes" 7.9% + "mostly yes" 34.5%), representing an improvement compared with 2023, when only 30.9% trusted the accuracy of the voters' register
- More than one third of respondents (36.7%) believe that there is third party interference in electoral processes in Montenegro. A large majority of eligible voters (83.1%) have voted in elections in Montenegro at least once. On the other hand, 16.9% have never voted. The largest share of respondents rate their experience as "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" (40.8%).
- More than half of citizens (51.5%) believe that the voting procedure is simple, while more than one third (36%) believe it is "partially" simple. A smaller share (9.4%) believe that the voting procedure is not simple.
- The results show that most respondents are well informed about voting procedures, with a significant decrease in the share of those who lack sufficient information about the voting process in Montenegro. A large majority believe they are well informed (66.3% in total).
- One quarter of respondents (26.6%) believe they are "somewhat informed" about voting procedures. This group should be an important target for additional educational and informational activities, especially ahead of the next general elections in 2027.
- Nearly one quarter of citizens (22.7%) still express distrust in the vote counting procedure, which is a major challenge for public confidence in electoral processes. 67.2% have some level of trust that votes are counted accurately.

65.1%

believe elections are free and fair

66.3%

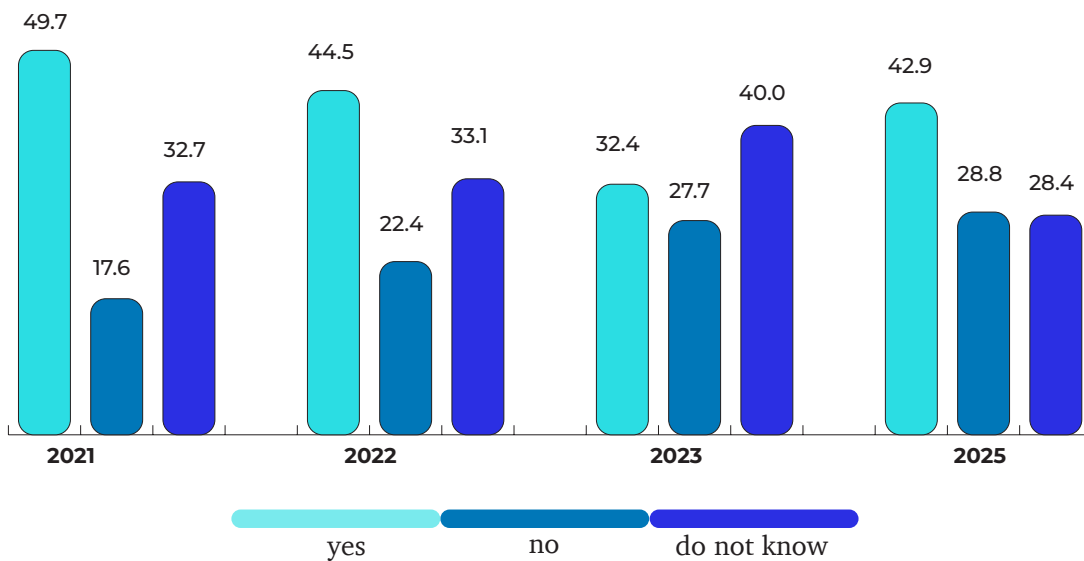
believe they are well informed about voting procedures

- 30.5% of respondents stated that more information about political parties could improve their voting experience (23.2% in 2021). This year’s results also show a strong increase in interest in digital voting models. Regarding online voting, 22.3% of respondents expressed a positive view.
- Almost one third of respondents say they do not remember whether they have been exposed to information about SEC over the past year. In particular, it should be noted that more than half of young voters (18 to 24 and 25 to 34) have not heard or read any information about SEC in the past year.
- The average rating of SEC is 2.92, a slight increase compared to 2023 (2.89). Respondents most often describe SEC as an important institution (30.7%), transparent (19.3%), and professional (14.9%).
- Only one fifth of respondents (20.2%) report having watched at least one SEC session online, while the remaining 79.8% have not.
- The quality of SEC’s work affects the decision to vote for more than half of respondents (58.1%), while 41.8% state that this factor does not influence their decision to vote. More than half of voters believe that the functioning of SEC affects the democratic nature of, and trust in, the electoral process.
- Only 9.4% of respondents report having filed a formal complaint or appeal at least once with a competent election body, DIK, or the Constitutional Court.
- A total of 41.3% of respondents believe that media reporting during the pre-election period is not impartial. At the same time, perceptions of journalists’ freedom to report on elections have improved: 28.6% of respondents fully agree that journalists in Montenegro are free to report on elections, the highest share recorded so far. This suggests that respondents distinguish between freedom to report and impartiality of reporting.
- The dominant perception of the influence of social media on information dissemination during the election campaign remains negative: 55.3% believe that social media do not contribute to accurate and clear information.
- The results show strong public support for requiring political campaigns to clearly label AI generated content.

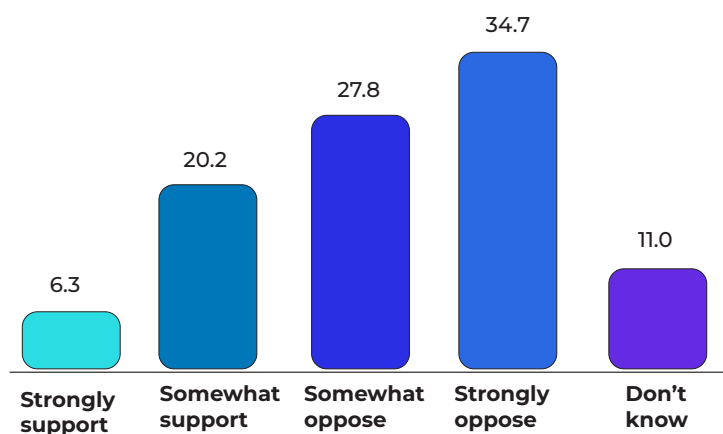
“55.3% believe that social media do not contribute to accurate and clear information.”

PART 1: Respondents' Attitudes Toward Electoral Reform

The Parliament's electoral reform committee was a key actor in the electoral reform process, in which representatives of political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and the academic community participated. Within this survey, we sought to determine the average assessment of the Committee's work by asking how citizens evaluate the performance of this body. Citizens gave this parliamentary body an average score of 2.73 out of 5, placing it slightly below the midpoint of the scale. Applying a comparative method with the results of the 2022 and 2023 surveys is more difficult because, in the previous two surveys, respondents were offered a four-point response scale (very good, good, poor, very poor). To the question of whether Montenegro needs the continuation of electoral reform, 42.9% of respondents answered positively (2023: 32.4%), while 28.8% answered negatively (2023:27.7%).

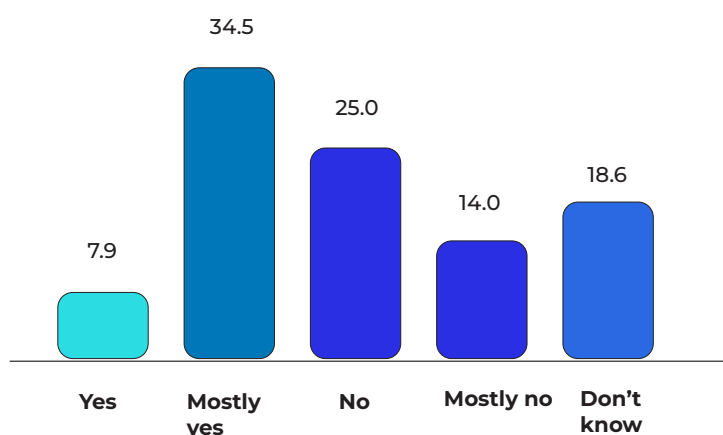


One of the questions we asked respondents concerned a possible topic for the next phase of electoral reform. Specifically, we sought to examine respondents' views on lowering the minimum age for voting rights in Montenegro from 18 to 16 or 17. As many as 62.5% of respondents oppose the introduction of this measure. More than one third of respondents (34.7%) are completely opposed, while 27.8% are mostly opposed. On the other hand, slightly more than one quarter of respondents (26.5%) agree with this possible change. It is noteworthy that only 6.3% of respondents fully support lowering the voting age in Montenegro. 11% of respondents were unable to answer this question.



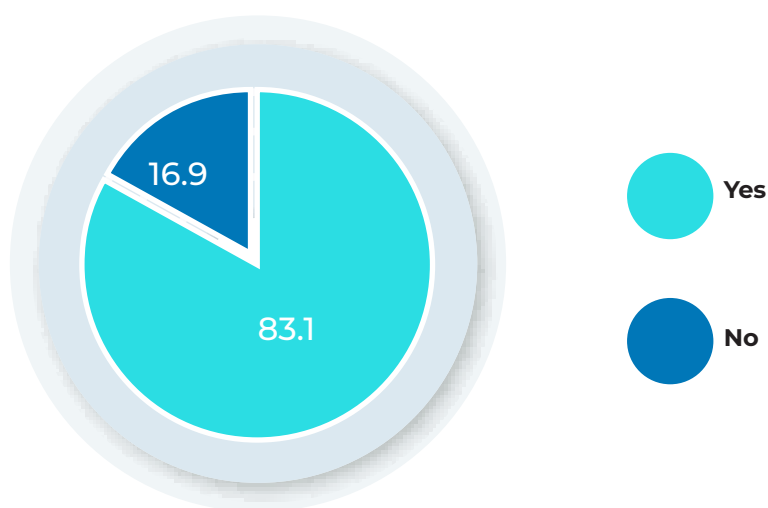
“62.5% of respondents oppose lowering the voting age.”

Finally, with regard to respondents' perceptions of the status of the voters' register in Montenegro, the survey results show that trust in the accuracy of the voters' list remains divided. In 2025, a total of 42.4% of citizens believe that the voters' register contains accurate data (“yes” 7.9% + “mostly yes” 34.5%), which represents more than slight improvement compared to 2023, when only 30.9% of respondents trusted the accuracy of the voters' register data. At the same time, the share of those expressing distrust (“no” 25% + “mostly no” 14%) amounts to 39%, which is noticeably lower than in 2023, when negative views reached 43.8%. Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents who are unable to form an opinion on this issue remains relatively high, 18.6% (2023: 25.3%).

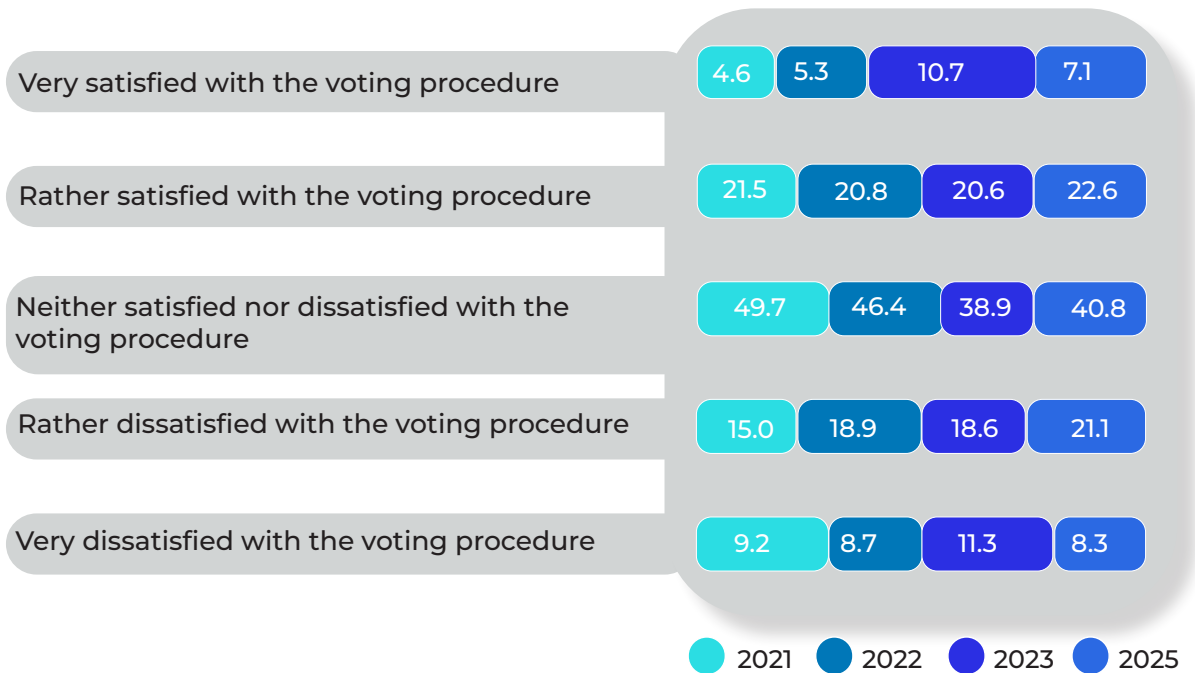


PART 2: Respondents' Attitudes Toward Electoral Processes in Montenegro

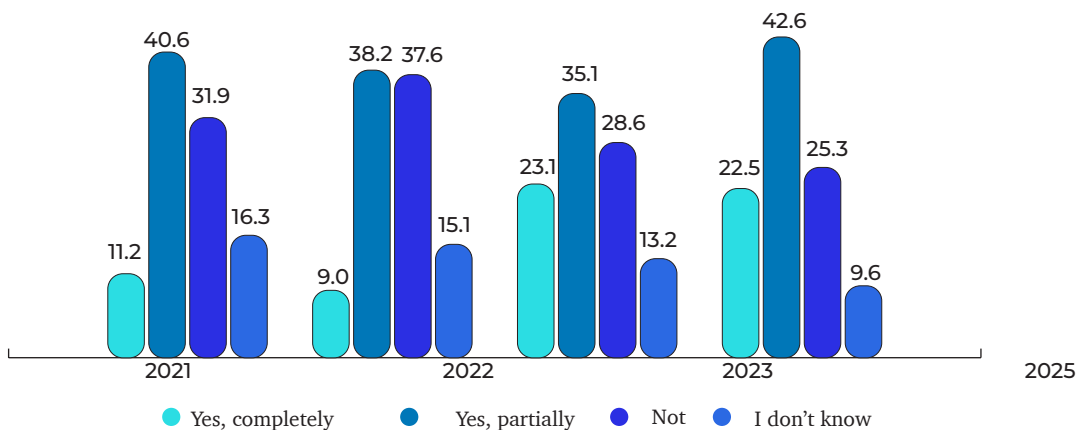
The survey results indicate that a large majority of citizens (as many as 83.1%) have participated in elections in Montenegro at least once. This finding points to a high level of electoral experience and political engagement within the population. On the other hand, 16.9% of respondents have never voted. Although this is a smaller group, it still represents a significant segment of the population that remains entirely outside the electoral process. In this context, a particularly concerning finding is that 46.8% of young people (aged 18 to 24) have not participated in electoral processes. This suggests that the youth population is the main source of “first time abstention”, indicating a weak connection between this social group and the political system.



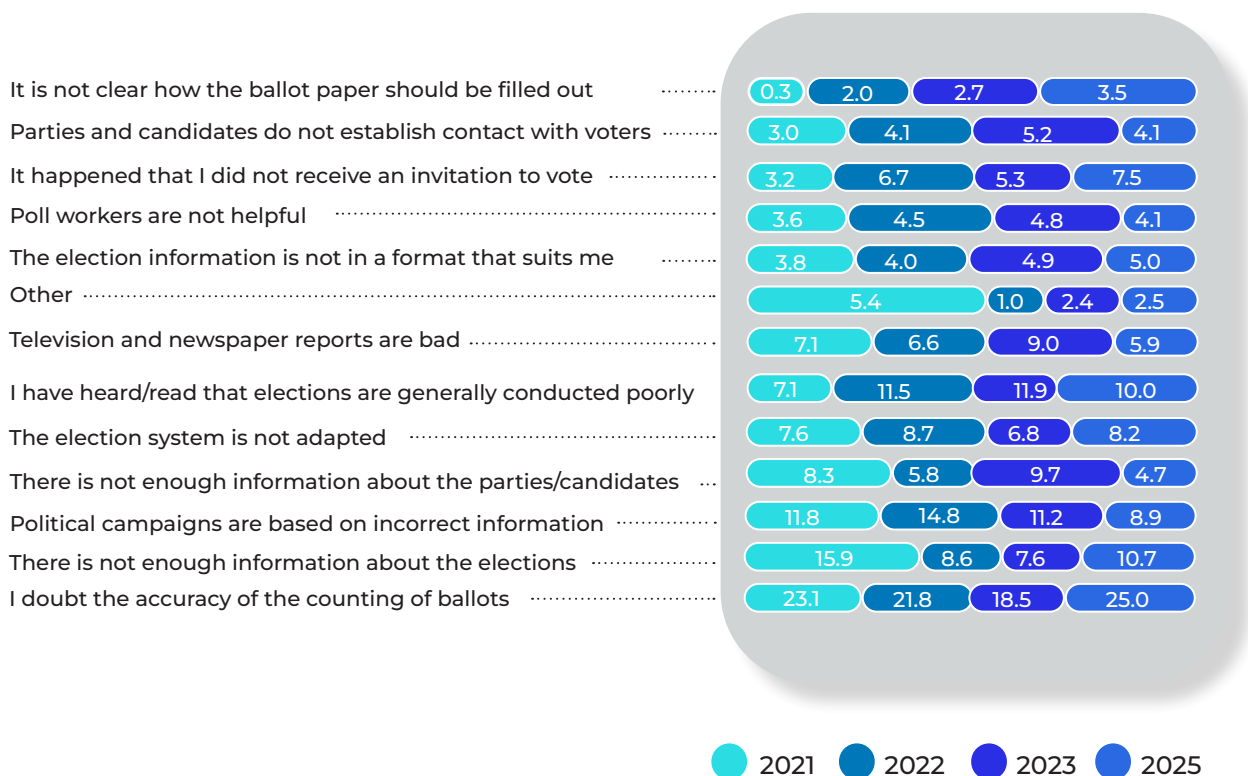
Regarding the assessment of the experience of voting itself, this question was answered only by respondents who had voted in elections. The 2025 results show that for most citizens, the voting experience ranges from neutral to moderately positive, with dissatisfaction present but not dominant. The largest share of respondents in 2025 assessed their experience as “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” (40.8%). Overall, nearly one third of respondents report some level of dissatisfaction with the voting procedure: 21.1% are moderately dissatisfied and 8.3% are very dissatisfied. Almost one third of respondents (29.7%) report a positive voting experience, including 7.1% who are very satisfied with the voting procedure in Montenegro.



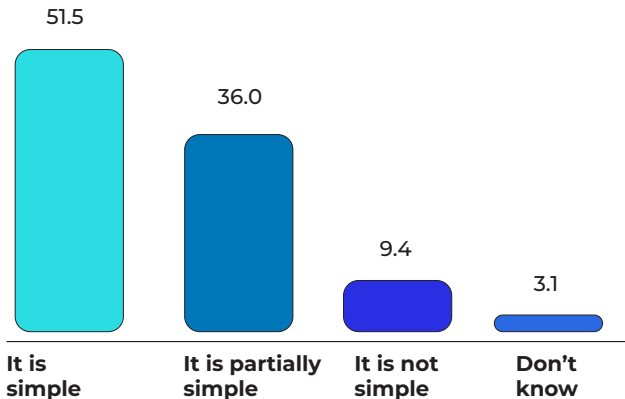
A total of 65.1% of respondents believe that elections in Montenegro are fully or partially free and fair. This represents a significant improvement compared to the 2023 survey, when 58.2% of respondents held this view. 22.5% of respondents believe that elections in Montenegro are fully free and fair. According to the survey results, one in four respondents believes that elections are not free and fair. The share of respondents who believe elections are not free and fair was highest in the 2022 survey (37.6%), after which it declined to 28.6% in 2023 and further to 25.3% in 2025. This decline indicates a gradual reduction in pronounced skepticism toward electoral processes in Montenegro.



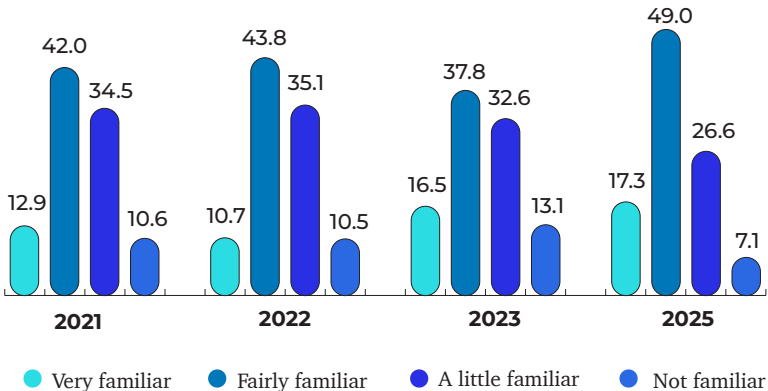
The 2025 data show that citizens who believe elections in Montenegro are not free and fair most often base their views on issues related to the accuracy of vote counting, the availability of information, and administrative irregularities. The most pronounced reason is suspicion regarding the accuracy of ballot counting, cited by 25% of respondents. This is the highest share among all offered reasons and points to deeply rooted distrust in the final phase of the electoral process. Doubts about vote counting are the dominant reason for distrust across all groups - particularly among men (24.7%), those aged 65+ (25.6%), and citizens who identify nationally as Serbs (28.7%). The second most frequently cited issue is a lack of information about elections, considered important by 10.7% of respondents. This indicates an ongoing need for clearer, consistent, and timely communication from competent institutions and the media toward voters. A significant share of respondents (10%) state that they have heard or formed the impression that elections are generally conducted poorly. This finding points to the strong influence of secondary sources of information (media, social networks, and political narratives) in shaping perceptions of the integrity of elections. Smaller, but not negligible, shares of respondents cite problems related to the conduct of poll workers (4.1%) and uncertainty about how to complete ballots (3.5%), suggesting the need for additional voter education.



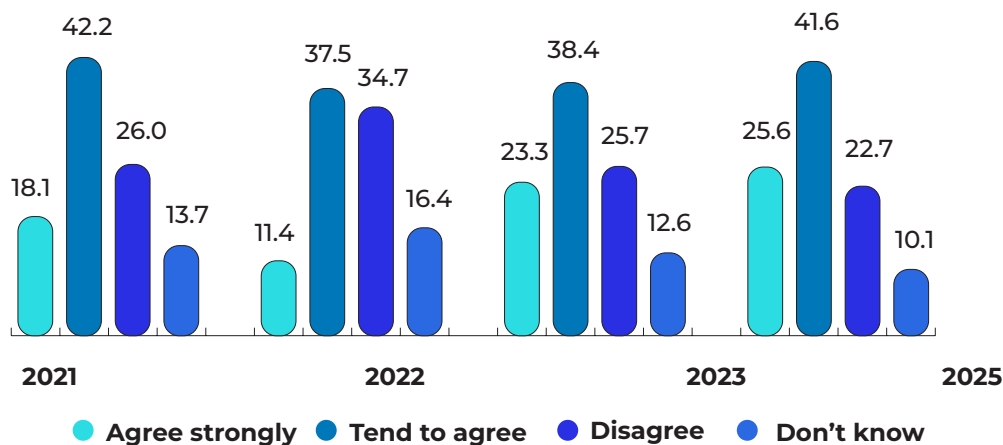
In response to the question, “Do you think that the voting procedure in elections is simple?”, the results show that most respondents consider the voting procedure to be understandable and straightforward, but a significant number of voters still perceive certain difficulties in the process. More than half of citizens (51.5%) believe the procedure is simple, while more than one third of respondents (36%) believe it is “partially” simple. A smaller share of respondents (9.4%) believes the procedure is not simple. Overall, the voting procedure in Montenegro is perceived as generally simple, but with room to improve clarity and accessibility, particularly for the one third of voters who view it as only partially simple.



The survey results show that most citizens are well informed about the voting procedure, with a significant decrease in the share of those who have insufficient information about the voting process in Montenegro. A large majority of citizens consider themselves well informed (66.3% in total). 17.3% of respondents state that they are very well informed, while 49% say they are fairly well informed. One quarter of citizens (26.6%) consider themselves to be “somewhat informed” about the voting procedure, which is not negligible. This should be an important target group for additional educational and informational activities, especially ahead of the next general elections in 2027. As many as 33.5% of respondents aged 18 to 24 state that they are “somewhat informed” about the voting procedure. In addition, respondents with lower levels of education report limited knowledge of the procedure - 50% of respondents with no education and 34.3% of those with primary education stated that they have little knowledge of the voting procedure.



When it comes to citizens' trust in the vote counting process, nearly one quarter of citizens (22.7%) still express distrust, which represents a significant challenge. Nevertheless, two thirds of citizens (67.2%) have some level of trust that votes are counted accurately. However, most of this trust falls within the "partial" category, indicating that trust is present, but only to a certain extent. Compared to similar surveys conducted in 2021, 2022, and 2023, this year recorded the highest share of citizens who expressed complete trust in the vote counting process - 25.6% (2021: 18.1%; 2022: 11.4%; 2023: 23.3%).

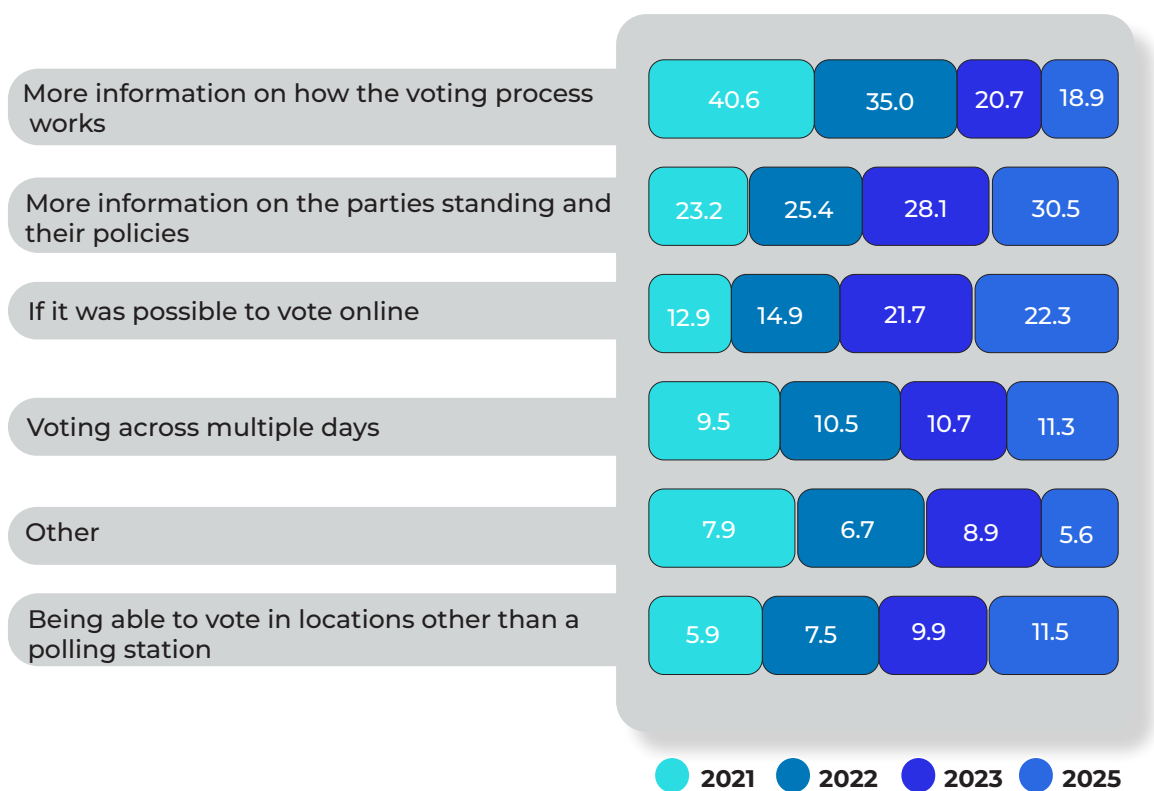


The survey results on the extent to which citizens consider various phenomena problematic in the electoral process indicate the presence of several deeply rooted challenges in the organization of elections in Montenegro. Across surveys conducted in previous years, electoral fraud (defined as any irregularities that may affect the election outcome) has consistently been perceived as by far the greatest problem. In the baseline survey in 2021, 80.2% of citizens considered electoral fraud to be a problem (2022: 74.3%; 2023: 69%). Although a decline compared to 2021 is evident, in 2025 as many as 70.2% of citizens still view electoral fraud as a key threat to the integrity of the electoral process. Citizens also perceive problems related to media bias (67.5%), barriers preventing persons with disabilities from participating in the electoral process (42.9%), and inadequate oversight of political activities on social media (47.5%).

Comparative data for the 2021-2025 period is available in the infographic on page 14.

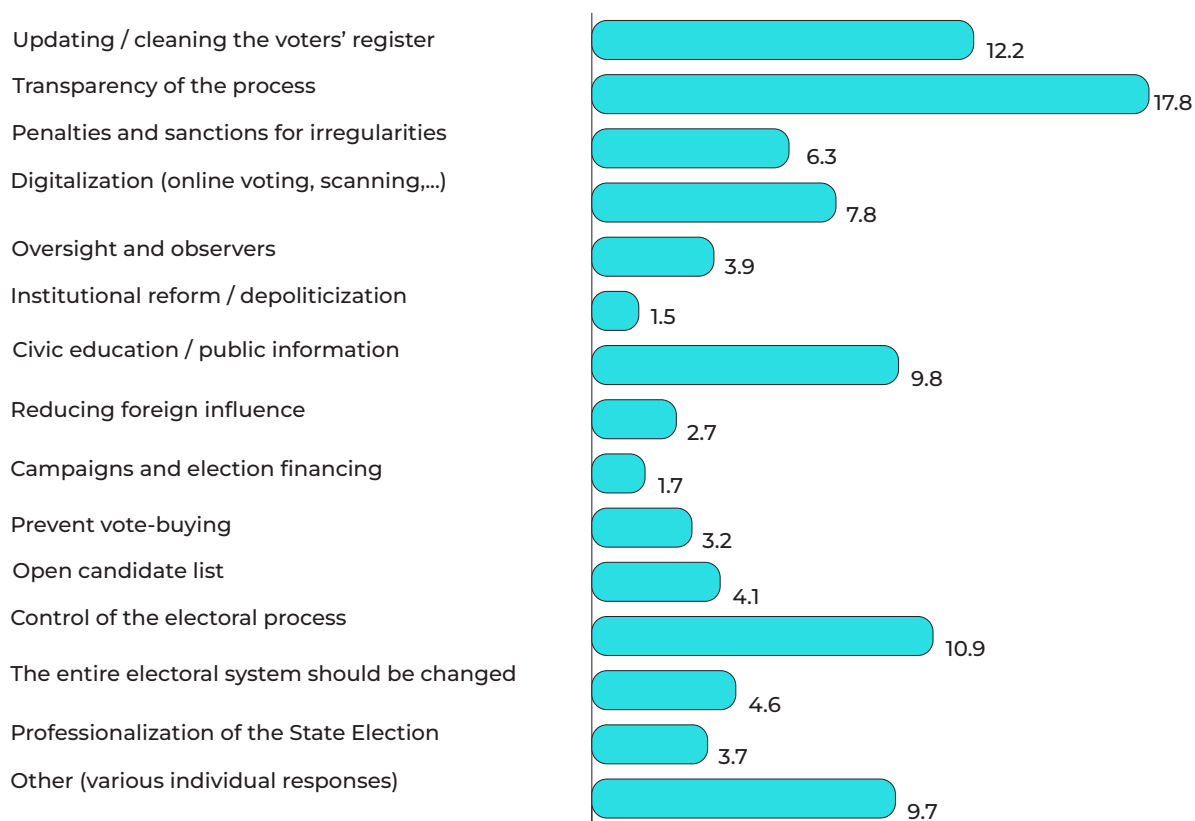
	Not a problem	Problem	Don't know
Electoral fraud (any irregularities that may affect the election outcome)	4.8	80.2	14.9
Bias in the media	15.0	67.5	17.6
Barriers to democratic participation for disabled people	20.8	42.9	36.3
Inadequate control of political activity on social media	20.5	47.5	32.0
2021			
Electoral fraud (any irregularities that may affect the election outcome)	7.0	74.3	17.8
Bias in the media	17.7	61.9	20.4
Barriers to democratic participation for disabled people	19.4	55.7	25.0
Inadequate control of political activity on social media	19.8	51.4	28.8
2022			
Electoral fraud (any irregularities that may affect the election outcome)	14.1	69.0	16.9
Bias in the media	25.2	56.8	18.0
Barriers to democratic participation for disabled people	21.7	60.9	17.4
Inadequate control of political activity on social media	20.8	62.4	16.8
Hate speech during the electoral period	12.8	73.6	13.6
Political influence on members of election commissions	14.8	68.9	16.3
2023			
Electoral fraud (any irregularities that may affect the election outcome)	17.5	70.2	12.3
Bias in the media	30.8	56.6	12.5
Barriers to democratic participation for disabled people	26.1	56.1	17.8
Inadequate control of political activity on social media	23.5	57.1	19.4
Hate speech during the electoral period	17.3	67.7	15.0
Political influence on members of election commissions	17.6	70.6	11.8
2025			

With regard to citizens' perceptions of which measures would most improve their voting experience, it is evident that respondents' perceptions are evolving, with a visible trend shifting from the need for basic information toward demands for modernization and the digitalization of voting. The largest increase was recorded in the category of the need for more information about political parties and policies. This year, nearly one third of respondents (30.5%) stated that more information about political parties could contribute to improving their voting experience (2021: 23.2%). The results of this year's survey also show a strong increase in interest in digital voting models. When it comes to online voting, 22.3% of citizens expressed a positive view. For example, four years ago, the share of respondents with a positive view of online voting was 12.9%. Based on this, it can be concluded that citizens increasingly view online voting as one of the potentially most desirable reforms.

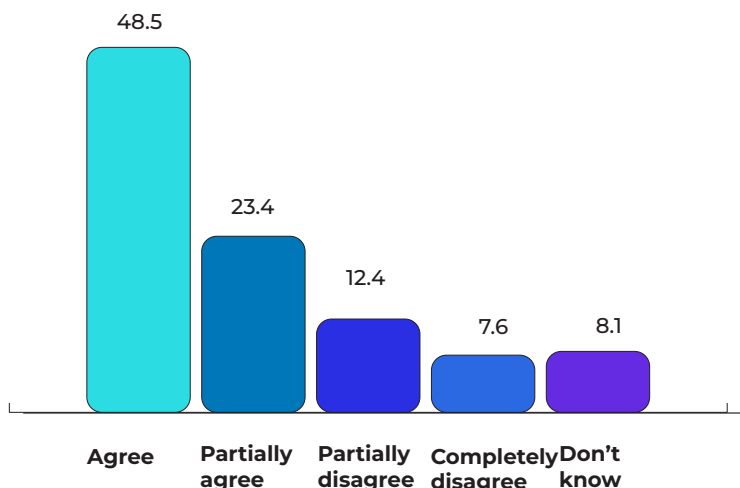


“It can be concluded that citizens increasingly view online voting as one of the potentially most desirable reforms.”

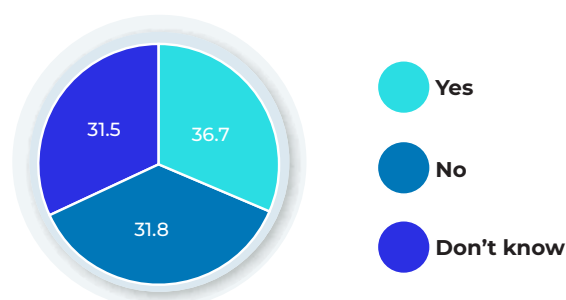
The results of this year's survey show that citizens recognize a broad range of obstacles to increasing public trust in the electoral process in Montenegro. 17.8% of respondents identify the transparency of the electoral process as the key priority. This indicates that citizens perceive a lack of transparency as one of the core problems that should be addressed in the next phase of electoral reform - from access to information about procedures, through oversight of voting and vote counting, to the overall visibility and transparency of the work of electoral administration bodies. With 12.2%, the regulation of the voters' register is the second priority for voters in Montenegro. This finding is expected, as doubts about the integrity of the voters' register are among the most common sources of suspicion regarding the integrity of the overall electoral process. Citizens also believe that stronger oversight of the electoral process and the digitalization of electoral procedures should be among the more important reforms to be implemented in the coming period.



The survey results indicate that citizens have a relatively high perception that campaign rules are enforced and sanctioned in accordance with the law. Nearly half of respondents (48.5%) fully agree with the statement that if a political party or campaign participant violates the rules, the competent authorities act in line with the law (e.g., initiate proceedings and impose a sanction), while an additional 23.4% partially agree. One fifth of respondents (20%) express distrust in this statement, indicating that perceptions of impunity and selective enforcement of the law during electoral processes still persist.



When it comes to respondents' views on whether there is interference by third parties in electoral processes in Montenegro, more than one third of respondents (36.7%) believe that such interference exists. Compared to 2023, when 23.5% claimed that interference existed, the share of respondents holding this view has increased significantly, confirmed by a rise of more than 13 percentage points. As many as 43.1% of respondents aged 65+ believe that third party interference in elections exists. The same view is held by 42.3% of respondents who identify as Montenegrins. 31.8% of respondents believe that there is no third-party interference in electoral processes in Montenegro, while 31.5% do not know the answer to this question. As many as 67.3% of Bosniak respondents believe that there is no third-party interference in electoral processes in Montenegro, and the same view is held by more than half (54.5%) of respondents with primary level education.

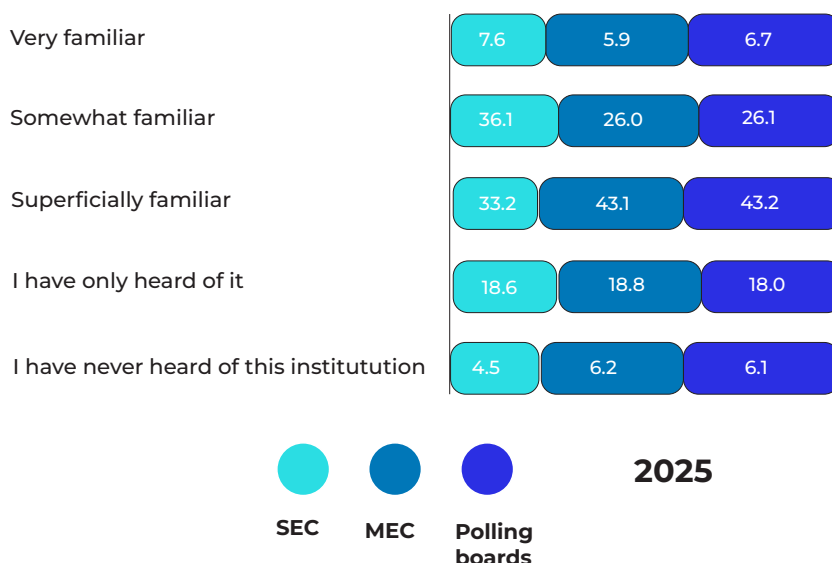


Citizens who believe that third party interference exists also identify potential sources of such influence. The results reveal a high diversity of perceptions and the absence of a single dominant narrative, but also several actors that clearly stand out. It should be noted that, in this year’s survey, this was an open-ended question. The most frequently mentioned source of interference in Montenegro’s electoral processes is Serbia (23.8%). 18.2% of respondents believe that the European Union influences electoral processes in Montenegro, while 17.2% believe that criminal groups interfere in Montenegro’s electoral processes.



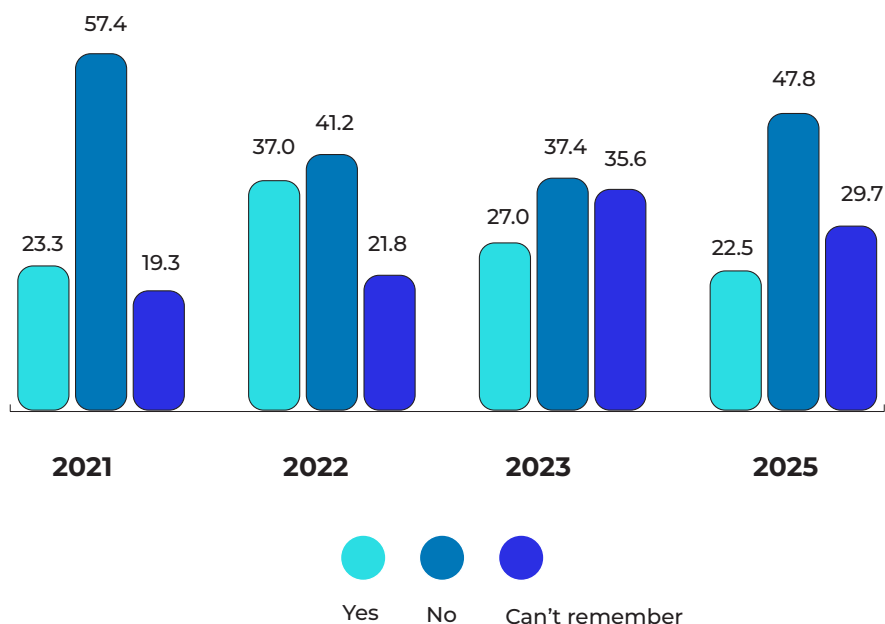
PART 3: Respondents' Attitudes Toward the State Election Commission

Within the survey, we sought to examine respondents' views on electoral administration bodies, primarily SEC ¹. At the outset of the research, we aimed to collect baseline information on the extent to which respondents were familiar with the bodies responsible for administering elections - the State Election Commission, municipal election commissions, and polling boards. These data measure the basic level of voter awareness of electoral administration bodies. The survey results show that citizens are most familiar SEC. It has the highest average level of respondent awareness (36.1% stated that they are "somewhat familiar") and the lowest share of those who have never heard of the institution (4.5%). These findings suggest that the public generally knows that SEC exists, but does not sufficiently understand what it does, how it makes decisions, or the extent of its influence on the integrity of elections. Municipal election commissions are a less visible part of the electoral process. Only 5.9% of respondents stated that they are "very familiar" with municipal election commissions, which is the lowest share compared to SEC and polling boards. With regard to polling boards, they are recognized, but almost half of respondents (43.2%) say they have only shallow/vague understanding.



1 Note: These results are difficult to compare with previous years because this year's survey used a five-point scale, whereas the previous survey used a four-point scale.

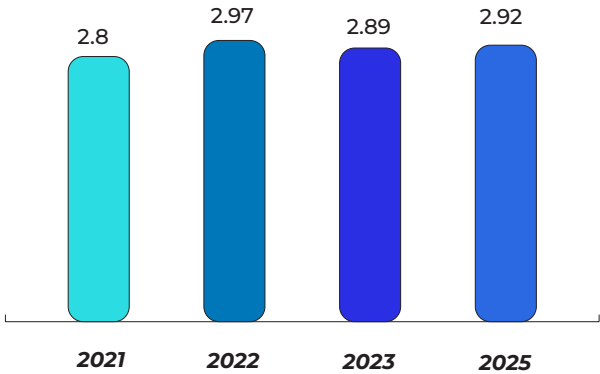
When it comes to SEC over the past 12 months, it can be concluded that its visibility declined to some extent during 2025. This question measures SEC’s public visibility, i.e., the extent to which the institution is present in the media, public discussions, and political processes. SEC’s visibility among citizens over the 2021-2025 period (since we began asking respondents this question) shows fluctuations, with a clear peak in 2022, when as many as 37% of respondents stated that they had heard or read something about SEC, followed by a notable decline in 2025 to only 22.5%, the lowest level in the entire period. In parallel, the share of citizens who had not heard about SEC in the past 12 months increased to 47.8%, while almost one third of respondents in 2025 reported that they do not remember whether they had been exposed to any information about the institution at all. These trends indicate that, despite SEC’s central role in the electoral process, its communication and media presence are not sufficiently consistent, resulting in limited public awareness and visibility. In the coming period, especially following recent legislative amendments, (including even the renaming of the institution to the “Central Election Commission”) it will be necessary to continuously implement activities aimed at increasing the institution’s public presence and the visibility of both the institution and its members. In particular, it should be noted that more than half of young voters (aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34) have not heard or read information about SEC over the past year.



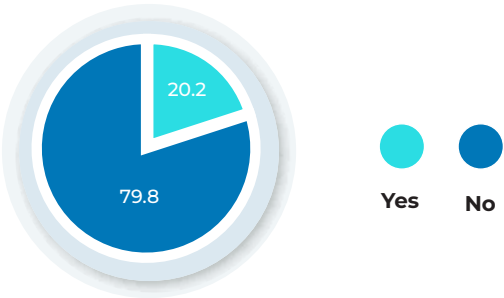
Respondents most often describe SEC as an important institution (30.7%), transparent (19.3%), and professional (14.9%). Compared to earlier years (especially 2021 and 2022), the 2025 results indicate a clear qualitative shift: perceptions of impartiality have increased compared to the start of the period (from 8.3% to 13.6%), and perceptions of transparency have risen by more than seven percentage points, suggesting a stabilization and strengthening of trust in SEC’s work. The strongest contrast compared to previous years is reflected in the decline of negative attributes - perceived bias has almost halved from 2021 to 2025 (from 14.7% to 6.4%) while the number of positive and clearly defined perceptions of SEC’s work has increased, with the institution seen as more professional, more open, and more institutionally important than in earlier years.



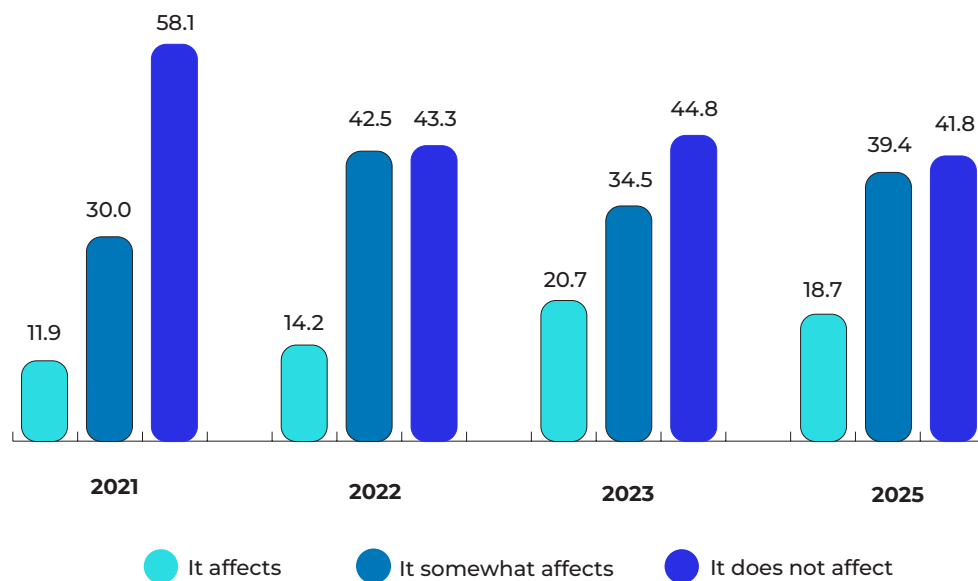
SEC's average performance rating is 2.92, representing a slight increase compared to 2023 (2.89). This indicates that public opinion of SEC's work in 2025 is moderately positive, but still without a clear shift toward a high level of trust in the institution. Combined with earlier findings showing stronger perceptions of SEC's importance, transparency, and professionalism, the 2025 rating suggests that citizens' qualitative perceptions of the institution's work are improving. However, the quantitative ratings still reflect moderate support rather than strong confidence.



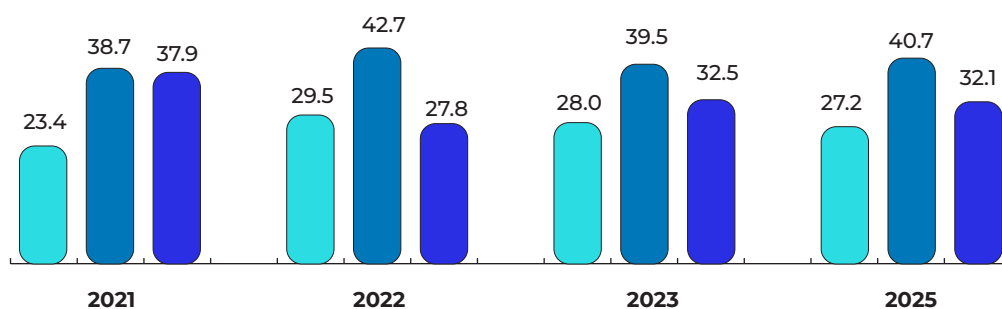
SEC meetings have recently been livestreamed online. However, only one fifth of respondents (20.2%) report having watched at least one SEC session, while 79.8% have not. This result shows that, although there is some interest in directly following SEC's proceedings, the vast majority of citizens still do not use this transparency mechanism. This outcome may reflect a combination of factors, including a low prior level of awareness of SEC, generally limited media coverage of the Commission's activities, or overall restricted public interest. At the same time, the fact that one fifth of citizens have watched SEC sessions represents an important indicator of increased institutional openness and the existence of a core group of citizens who actively monitor its work - something that could be further strengthened in the coming period.



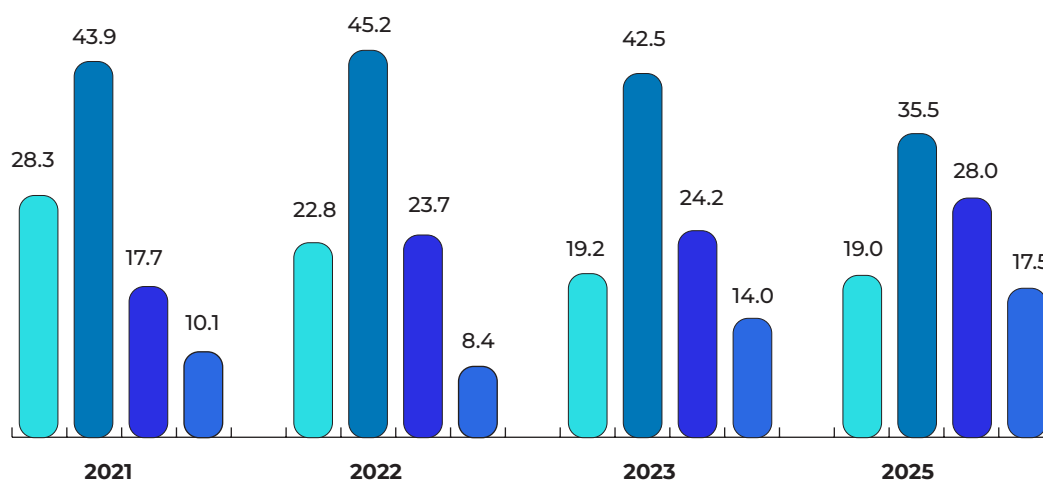
The survey results show the quality of work SEC delivers does influence the decision to vote for more than half of respondents (58.1%), while 41.8% report that this factor does not affect their decision to participate in elections. Compared to previous years, this year's results confirm a trend present since 2022: an increasing number of citizens link the quality of SEC's work to their own willingness to take part in elections. At the same time, the share of those who claim that SEC's work does not influence their voting behaviour has steadily declined (from 58.1% in 2021 to 41.8% in 2025).



The results of this year's survey show that learning more about SEC's work would affect the voting decision of 67.9% of citizens, while 32.1% would continue to vote regardless of such information. The share of respondents who say such information would not affect them has increased slightly compared to 2022 (27.8% to 32.1%). These trends suggest that, over the past several years, citizens' overall attitudes regarding expectations of SEC's professional conduct in electoral processes have stabilized. More than half of voters believe that SEC's functioning affects the democratic nature of, and trust in, the electoral process. However, the share of those who believe that SEC "significantly affects" the democratic quality of the electoral process remains low (19%) and is approximately the same as in 2023 (19.2%).

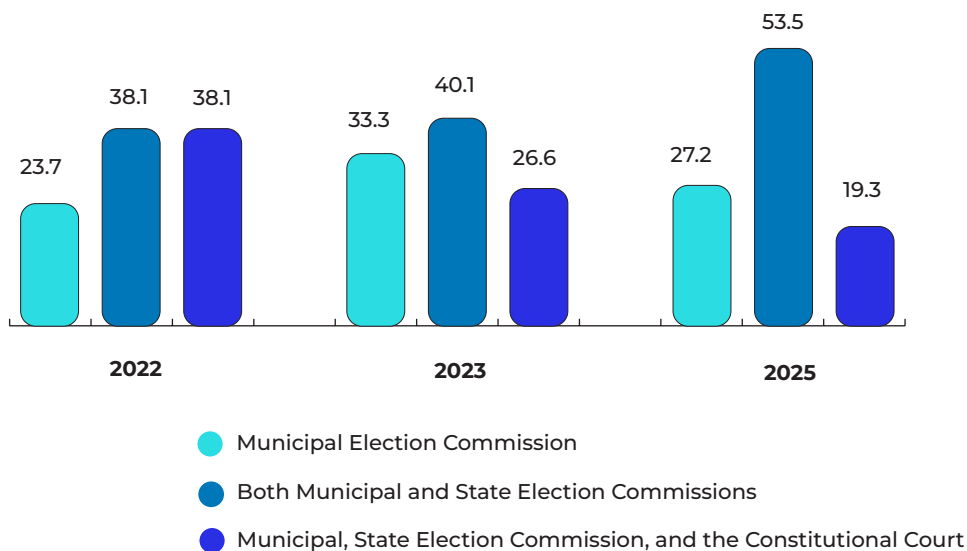
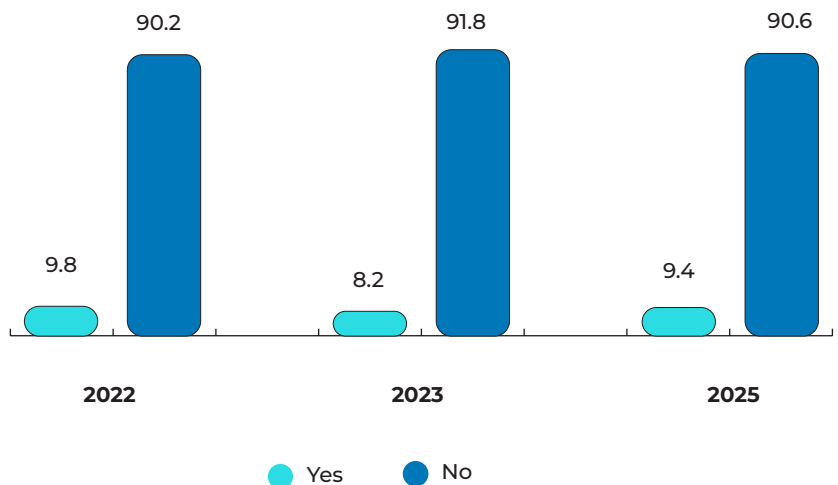


- It would have a significant impact
- It would have some influence, but I would vote
- It wouldn't matter



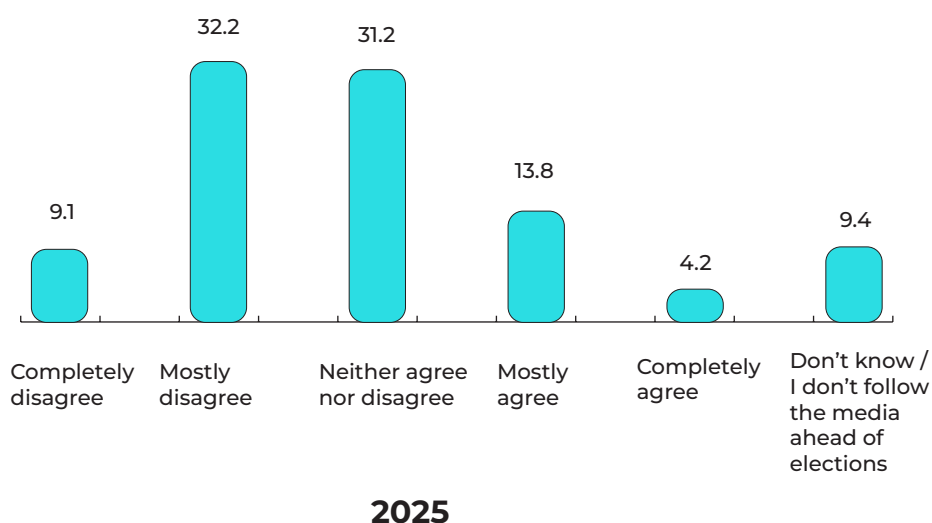
- It has a significant impact
- It has some impact
- It has a limited effect
- It doesn't affect

This year's survey shows that only 9.4% of respondents report having filed a complaint at least once with the competent election commission, SEC, or the Constitutional Court due to a violation of voting rights, while 90.6% have never done so. This indicates that citizens' engagement through formal complaint mechanisms during the electoral process remains very low (2022: 9.8%). Among respondents who filed a complaint due to a violation of voting rights, the largest share (53.5%) contacted both a Municipal Election Commission and SEC at the same time (2023: 40.1%).



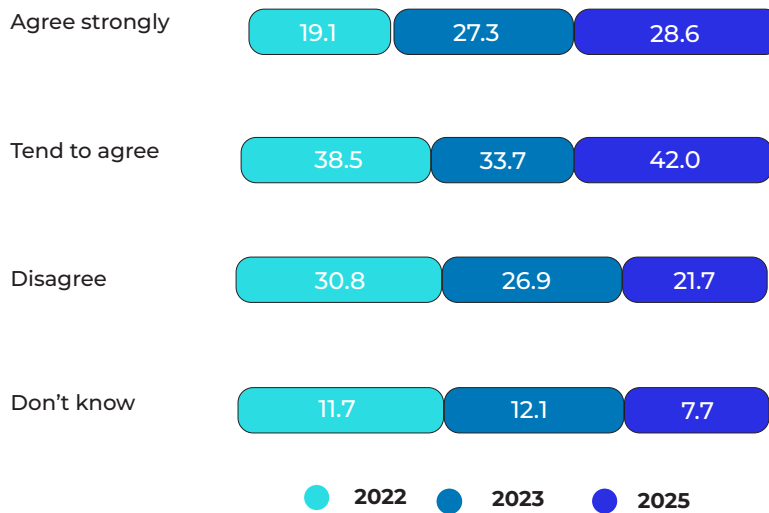
PART 4: Respondents' Attitudes Toward Media Reporting During Elections

The survey results show that citizens still hold a predominantly critical view of media impartiality in Montenegro ahead of elections, but that attitudes are gradually becoming more nuanced compared to previous years. When the most negative responses are combined (“completely disagree” 9.1% + “mostly disagree” 32.2%), a total of 41.3% of respondents believe that the media report in a biased manner during the pre-election period. This year’s results also show an increase in the share of citizens taking a neutral position (“neither agree nor disagree” 31.2%), which is significantly higher than 16.3% in 2023. Positive attitudes (“mostly agree” 13.8% + “completely agree” 4.2%) account for 18% of respondents in 2025 - slightly less than in 2023 (18.3%), but higher than in 2022 (9.6%). This confirms the trend of a gradual increase in trust in media reporting ahead of elections.²

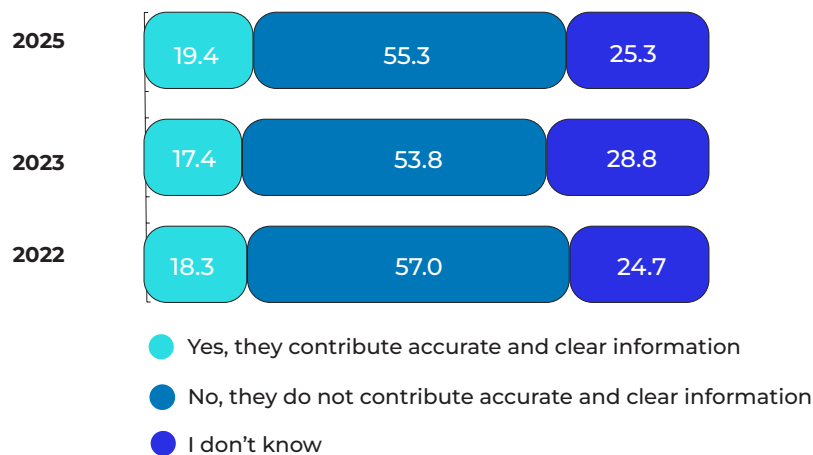


² **Note:** These results are difficult to compare with previous years because this year’s survey used a five-point scale, whereas the previous survey used a three-point scale.

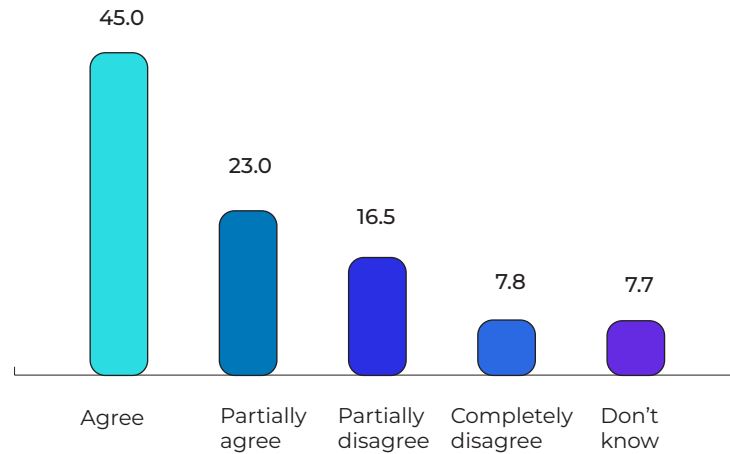
This year's results show a strengthening belief among respondents that journalists in Montenegro are free to report on elections, continuing the positive trend that began in 2023. The share of respondents who fully agree with this statement increased to 28.6%, the highest level compared to previous years (up from 27.3% in 2023 and a significant improvement compared to 19.1% in 2022). At the same time, negative perceptions are declining: the share of those who believe that journalists are not free to report has steadily decreased from 30.8% in 2022 to 26.9% in 2023, and further to 21.7% in 2025 representing the lowest level of distrust since these surveys began.



Respondents' views on the role of social media in providing accurate and clear information about candidates and party programmes remain predominantly critical, reflecting continuity in the findings. Although 19.4% of respondents believe that social media contribute to better informed voters - representing a slight increase compared to 2023 (17.4%) and 2022 (18.3%) - this remains a minority view. The dominant perception is still negative: 55.3% of citizens believe that social media do not contribute to accurate and clear information.



Finally, the survey results show strong support for the idea that political campaigns must transparently indicate when they use artificial intelligence to create content. As many as 45% of respondents fully agree with this statement, and an additional 23% partially agree, meaning that 68% of citizens in total expect mandatory labeling of AI generated political material during election campaigns.



Conclusion:

The findings suggest that public confidence in elections in Montenegro is improving, but remains moderate, conditional, and unevenly distributed across different aspects of the electoral process. Compared to earlier survey waves, citizens today express a somewhat more positive assessment of whether elections are free and fair, greater confidence in the accuracy of the voter register, and slightly stronger trust in the work of SEC. These trends indicate that some progress has been made in strengthening electoral legitimacy and reducing the level of skepticism recorded in earlier years.

At the same time, the results clearly show that this progress is still fragile. A substantial share of citizens continue to express doubts about the fairness of elections, the accuracy of vote counting, media impartiality, and the presence of political influence within election administration. Concerns about electoral fraud, political influence on election management bodies, hate speech during campaigns, and insufficient oversight of political activity on social media remain highly visible in public opinion. In addition, perceptions of third-party interference in elections have increased significantly, pointing to a growing sense of external vulnerability in the electoral environment.

The research also shows that citizens support the continuation of electoral reform. Public demand is especially visible in relation to greater transparency, further improvement of the voter register, stronger control mechanisms, and broader modernization of the electoral process. The growing interest in digital solutions, including internet voting, indicates that citizens increasingly associate electoral reform not only with integrity and control, but also with accessibility, efficiency, and innovation. At the same time, the strong support for mandatory labeling of AI-generated political content demonstrates that citizens expect electoral regulation to keep pace with new technological risks.

An important finding concerns political participation and public information. Although most citizens have voted at least once and generally perceive the voting procedure as simple, there are still groups that remain insufficiently informed, especially young people and those with lower levels of education. Youth abstention is particularly notable and represents a serious long-term challenge for democratic inclusion. Likewise, the limited visibility of SEC in the public sphere, despite somewhat improved perceptions of its professionalism and transparency, suggests that institutional communication with citizens remains inadequate.

Overall, the study indicates that Montenegro's electoral system is perceived as more credible than in previous years, but not yet strong enough to generate broad and stable public trust. The central challenge for the coming period is therefore not only to preserve the gains that have been made, but also to address the structural sources of distrust that continue to shape public attitudes. Future reform efforts should focus on increasing transparency, strengthening institutional accountability, improving voter education, enhancing media and digital campaign oversight, and rebuilding confidence among groups that remain more distant from the electoral process. Only through such a comprehensive approach can public trust in elections be further consolidated.

