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Old Tactics, New Regime: Repression of Student Protests in Serbia

ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, students in Serbia have organised protests and faculty blockades to draw public attention to various social issues, including the erosion of university autonomy. In the 1990s, student demands focused on democratisation, while in the 2000s, social and economic issues took precedence. In late 2024, a new student movement emerged, using direct democracy and faculty blockades to highlight problems of corruption, (lack of) accountability, and institutional dysfunction. Reactions to these protests varied but primarily aimed at suppressing student mobilisation, often undermining academic freedom and involving repressive measures against protest participants. By comparing student protests – primarily those from 1996/97 and 2024/25 – this chapter examines how state responses have evolved under different types of political regimes. Special attention is given to forms of repression, delegitimisation, and state pressure on universities. The analysis draws on the theoretical framework of competitive authoritarianism, with a focus on the distinction between old and new forms of this regime type (Levitsky and Way 2020). Media sources were used to analyse the main narratives and events. The aim is to explore, through comparative analysis, how authoritarian practices

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toward student resistance have transformed, whether repressive measures have become more subtle, and how these mechanisms align with the logic of competitive authoritarianism.

KEYWORDS: Student protests, competitive authoritarianism, state repression, university autonomy, Serbia

INTRODUCTION

Mass student protests in Serbia have been organised to draw attention to various social issues. After the 1996 local elections, students joined citizens in demanding the recognition of electoral results that showed the opposition's victory, with the central focus placed on the democratisation of society. These protests were one of the biggest waves before the change of government in 2000 and ensured a large mobilisation of citizens directed against the then government of Slobodan Milošević. Although the resistance in the nineties was primarily led by political parties, it also included the *Otpor* (Resistance) youth movement.

During the rule of the Serbian Progressive Party, new waves of mobilisation and large-scale protests arose. Students also sporadically participated in them. After the 2017 presidential elections, the informal group Against Dictatorship organised actions due to dissatisfaction with the results. The demands were directed at the media – they demanded dismissals within Radio Television of Serbia and members of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, as well as an audit of the voter list. A similar scenario occurred in 2023, when during the Serbia Against Violence protest, students and young people organised themselves into the Students Against Violence group, carrying out various actions and performances related to the issue of corruption and freedom. After the elections in December, they organised blockades of intersections and demanded the opening of the voter list.

Activists of the 1 of 5 million group addressed the issue of the status of the University of Belgrade itself when, in 2019, they blocked the Rectorate building, demanding the annulment of the doctorate of the Finance Minister Siniša Mali due to allegations that he plagiarised his doctoral thesis. During negotiations with the then rector, she pointed out that the issue of this doctorate was damaging the reputation of the University, and she supported this fight “for the autonomy and reputation of the University”. The narrative that Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić led against the blockades relied on expressions such as “party scum” and described the participants in the blockade as party-instructed (Al Jazeera Balkans 2019).

In late 2024, the largest wave of student protests and university blockades so far emerged, emphasising problems of corruption, lack of transparency in state institutions, and (ir)responsibility of those in power. Initially, the

students organised blockades of streets in front of their faculties for 15 minutes to honour the victims by supporting the action that was launched throughout Serbia. On the twenty-second of November, an attack took place on students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, and citizens gathered on the street, and it turns out that members and officials of the Serbian Progressive Party participated in the attacks. After an attack on students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts on November 22nd – allegedly involving SNS members – and the absence of institutional response, blockades spread to most state and private faculties through plenums. They become the dominant actor organising protests. Four demands¹ were made: the publication of reconstruction documentation; the identification and prosecution of individuals suspected of assaulting students and professors (including their dismissal if they hold public office); the dropping of criminal charges against detained protesters; and a 20% increase in funding for state faculties.

State reactions to these protests most often manifested through the discrediting and delegitimisation of students, media propaganda, and various forms of police response. How these mechanisms were implemented has evolved. In the literature, the similarities and differences of mixed regimes in response to protests have not been explored so much. Some papers describe the differences between old and new competitive authoritarianism, but there has been no comparison based on specific protests in specific contexts. For this reason, the comparison between the 1996/97 and 2024/25 student protests provides insight into how state responses have changed within different variants of hybrid political systems.

This paper aims to describe how state reactions to student protests have evolved in relation to shifts in political regimes and the emergence of new forms of competitive authoritarianism. The analysis applies the concepts of “old” and “new” competitive authoritarianism and the notion of university autonomy to highlight the issue of political pressure on academic institutions during student mobilisations. The paper draws upon statements by state officials and media narratives to examine how the government constructs discourses about student protests. A comparison between the 1996/7 protests and the student blockades started in 2024 will be used to fill a gap in the literature where there are no concrete comparisons.

The first part of the paper presents the theoretical framework that defines the concepts of old and new competitive authoritarianism and outlines the types of state responses to mass protests in Serbia. The comparative analysis focuses on state reactions during the rule of Slobodan Milošević and later under the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Across the analysed periods, it is possible to observe both a transformation in the role of the university and the persistent pressures exerted on it during or after student protests.

1 More information: <https://blokade.org/zahtevi/>

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Goldstein, “repression involves the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions” (Goldstein 1978, xxvii). The relationship between social movements and repression is such that repression represents the government’s reaction to and pressure on social mobilisation, but as such, it is part of the origin and evolution of collective mobilisation (Meier et al. 2025, 775). Student movements in Serbia have proven to be one of the most important opportunities for mobilisation that have caused various forms of repression.

In the analysis of political systems after the end of the Cold War, Levitsky and Way (2002, 51–53) define the concept of competitive authoritarianism as a new hybrid type of regime that combines democratic and authoritarian elements. Serbia, like other post-communist countries, presents a typical example because it holds multiparty elections, but they take place in unfair conditions where there is an “uneven playing field between government and opposition”. This type of regime allows for the existence of the opposition, independent media, and civil society, but the government uses administrative, economic, and media resources to systematically limit their effectiveness.

As the authors have shown, this type of competitive regime was a consequence of the international context at the time. During the nineties, the USA and Europe had a wide influence in international relations, so it was possible to spread the ideas of democracy through linkage (ties to the West) and leverage (dependence on the West), and in this way, they had influence over other regimes, even in Eastern Europe, encouraging formal democratic practices such as elections and limited pluralism. Countries introduced elections, but due to unfavourable conditions such as a small middle class, weak opposition, and weak civil society, they could not ensure complete democratisation. However, due to the strengthening of Russia and China and the weakening of linkage and leverage, the period of Western liberal hegemony ended, and the regimes themselves began to change. They describe these changes as a new competitive authoritarianism characterised by a leader with broad support among the people, who must achieve their goals for “tilting the playing field” in subtler and more sophisticated ways, often without the need for direct and visible repression (Levitsky and Way 2020, 52–60).

This paper additionally relies on the conclusions of Spasojević and Lončar (2023), who point out that the government’s response to mass protests in Serbia differed in the old competitive authoritarianism that existed from 1990 to 2000 compared to the new competitive authoritarianism characteristic of the government of the Serbian Progressive Party. As they point out, “while old competitive regimes usually combine repression and concessions, new

competitive regimes try to abstain from repression as long as possible” (Spasojević and Lončar 2023, 1384). The authors present Serbia as an ideal-typical example of the new competitive authoritarianism – Vučić proved to be a popular leader with tendencies to centralise power in his person (regardless of his position). In such a context, state violence is used selectively – the regime seeks to avoid direct police repression as it strives to preserve internal legitimacy and a positive international image. When the use of force is still necessary, indirect repression is used through coercion mechanisms – the actions of informal groups such as hooligans, criminal structures, or party activists. Such forms of “outsourced repression” enable the regime to maintain a democratic image while at the same time neutralising opposition actors (Spasojević and Lončar 2023, 1385).

To explain the reaction to student protests, it is necessary to describe the reaction to mass protests in general. In their work, Spasojević and Lončar include the protests against illegal demolition in Belgrade led by the Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own initiative, the protests against dictatorship (student protests after the presidential elections in 2017), 1 of 5 million, protests in 2020 related to anti-corona measures, and environmental protests linked to Rio Tinto in 2021 and 2022, which were all held while the SNS was in charge. The conclusion is that the regime reacted more tolerantly to the protests by ignoring them or downplaying their importance, the presence of the police was significantly reduced, with the strategy of delegitimizing the actors. The government’s narrative focused on creating an image of stability and democratic tolerance while at the same time targeting “unknown enemies” who are allegedly behind the protests.

It is worth emphasizing that the authors here also mention exceptions, primarily anti-Curfew protests in 2020, which arose as a spontaneous reaction to the announcement of new measures to combat the pandemic and soon took on a more violent character (Spasojević and Lončar 2023, 1386–1387). Then the reaction of the police was more violent – chemical bombs and tear gas were used, and there was even a police attack on citizens sitting on a park bench near the protest. This indicates that repression in the new competitive authoritarianism is adaptive: it is activated only when the regime judges that its legitimacy is seriously threatened.

Three types of tactical reactions were observed by which the government reacts to these mass protests. The first one is tolerance, which implies that the significance of the protests themselves was diminished to extinguish these protests over time, even if the protests were not reported in accordance with the law. The message that was sent to the citizens of Serbia in this way implied that the protests themselves are useless and that the topics they deal with are so irrelevant that it is not even important to mention them in the statements of officials. They worked on delegitimizing the protests and their participants (Spasojević and Lončar 2023, 1388–1389).

The second tactic involved a lack of police presence in order to avoid any potential conflict. This tactic represents a clear difference compared to earlier protests, but also other public events. The authors emphasise the argument that any violence occurring at the protests would actually increase the legitimacy and participation of the participants (Spasojević and Lončar 2023, 1390–1391). As they point out, “The imperative is to preserve a democratic image of the regime and reduce the chances of being framed as violent and authoritarian by the opposition or international media. In addition, since violence generated greater levels of interest and participation from the crowd, the regime had a vested interest in pacifying the protests, expecting that, as before, they would slowly fade away.”

The third tactic of the regime (Spasojević and Lončar 2023, 1393) involves the idea that the protests are presented as if they were organized and instigated by external and internal enemies, and their goal would be to change the current government. During the Milošević period, the dominant strategy was that he was a man who defended the state, while the role of the enemy was played by civil society and the opposition, whose goal was to destroy the state.

These strategies show continuity in the instrumentalization of repression – from direct violence in the old competitive authoritarianism to softer, symbolic, and discursive forms of control in the new. This shift represents the key framework for the analysis of student protests – from those in 1996/97 to the protests of 2024/25. In the next part of the paper, it is essential to analyse the reactions to the student protests themselves and determine how they relate to the analysed reactions and what the differences are between the periods of old and new competitive authoritarianism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Old Competitive Authoritarianism – Protests 1996/1997

The protests of 1996 and 1997 were part of the resistance against the practices of old competitive authoritarianism. They arose as a reaction to the regime’s refusal to recognize the results of local elections and were organized by the opposition coalition *Zajedno* (Together), which claimed electoral victory. Students joined the protests to demand the protection of rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Police said on December 1 that protests were being tolerated too much. This announcement was reported by Reuters and France Press under the label urgent (Delić and Nikolić 1997, 59). Ivan Marković, the then spokesman of the Yugoslav Left (JUL) described the protests as terrorism and violence (Delić & Nikolić 1997, 67). The police also applied violence multiple times by banning the movement of demonstrators, using water cannons, physical attacks, and

making arrests. Arrests were more frequent, even at the beginning of the protests. When the students wanted to go to the president's residence, they were prevented because the police stopped them (Delić and Nikolić 1997, 112). At the end of December, the police prohibited protest marches in the center of Belgrade, and the presence of police cordons became a daily occurrence. The protest was supposed to be organized on the same day as the 1st meeting of the Socialist Party of Serbia. There were several clashes between the two groups gathered, and even shooting, and the police used tear gas to disperse the citizens (Delić and Nikolić 1997, 170–177). In February 1997, the police separated two groups from different sides of the bridge. In the late evening hours, after repressing the protesters, they used water cannons, and journalists were also attacked (Delić and Nikolić 1997, 333).

The reactions of pro-government media included generally ignoring the protests and avoiding reporting on them, downplaying their importance, and portraying them as polarizing, imposed, and foreign. In addition, video montages were used to make the number of participants appear smaller. To further influence viewers, political “expertise” and opinions of so-called “honest, hard-working ordinary citizens” were broadcast regularly. They revealed that the only representation of the protest most citizens knew about was through regime-controlled media (Prosic Dvornic 1998, 127–129). When analysing the reactions of officials to student protests and announced boycotts of classes, one can single out the statement of the leader of the Young Socialists (SPS), Aleksandar Rastović, who said the *Student strike, pure politicization* (Delić and Nikolić 1997, 40).

Among other reactions, a regime-affiliated student organization was founded – the *Independent Student Movement*. Rallies of the Socialist Party of Serbia were organized throughout the country, and the main slogan emphasised that Serbia would not be ruled by foreigners. As Prosic Dvornic points out (1998, 131), “None of the meetings went well, and everywhere there were conflicts between regime supporters and opponents. Staging one in Belgrade was extremely risky and nearly turned into a clash of catastrophic proportions. The nation was brought to the brink of civil war (...). Many believed that the regime counted on these conflicts to use them as an excuse for brutally crushing the civil and student protests” (Prosic Dvornic 1998, 131–133).

Regarding the autonomy and status of the university under Slobodan Milošević's rule, the 1992 University Law was adopted with the explicit purpose of reducing university autonomy. It granted the state the right to appoint 50% of the University Council members, as well as the rector and three vice-rectors, ensuring a majority for government-backed decisions. One of the key student demands during the 1996/97 protests was the removal of the government-appointed rector, who sought to downplay the demonstrations and portray universities as functioning normally (Prosic Dvornic 2000, 122). The rector at the time said that it was actually a smaller number of students who had no

connection with the university that organized protest, and he interpreted the demands as a party and daily political issue (Delić and Nikolić 1997, 48).

The confrontation with the university continued a year after these protests. In addition to police actions, the regime attempted to institutionally curtail academic autonomy. The 1998 University Act further expanded state authority over universities. It established new supervisory boards appointed by the government and granted the state the right to dissolve public universities at will. Although presented as an effort to “depoliticize the university,” these measures were in fact intended to punish professors and students who had supported the protests. The academic community’s response was strongly negative – over twenty faculties of the University of Belgrade endorsed a resolution condemning the law as unacceptable and even drafted a counter-proposal. On the day of the law’s passage, the police violently dispersed gathered students, professors, and citizens (Human Rights Watch 1999).

In this period, repression had both physical and institutional dimensions. The state used the police and legal system for direct control, while the media were used to ideologically legitimize power.

Protests in New Competitive Authoritarianism

From November 2024, student protests adopted a new form based on the principles of direct democracy and self-organization. Wider social protests started when part of the canopy at the railway station collapsed on November 1st in Novi Sad, causing the death of 16 people. This event was characterized by the public as a clear display of corruption and government under the Serbian Progressive Party, where people who were responsible for this type of carelessness were being sought.

State responses can be divided into the period before and after the Vidovdan protest on June 28. In the beginning, the government applied tactics of toleration and co-optation: all demands would be met, while the media downplayed the significance of the blockades (Glas Amerike 2024). The students were accused of trying to “overthrow the government” and that they were “paid a little from the outside, a little from the inside” for that, as well as “fighting over money for the sake of overthrowing the government.” The then Minister of Education pointed out that the faculties are not blocked by a large number of people, but they are just loud, and that there is no place for politics at the university (Bogdanović 2024). To target individual students, media close to the government were used – *Informer*, *Kurir*, *Alo*, which published information about individual students and presented them as leaders, even though the students themselves repeatedly emphasised equality among members of the movement.

The first large protest took place at Slavija Square at the end of December, and the police reacted by detaining the farmers who had gathered earlier in

order to prevent the arrival of tractors. A specific situation occurred at the protest on March 8th, where students organized an action for the rights of women and workers (Danas 2025). When the farmers wanted to cross the bridge with tractors, the police forces forbade it, so the protest itself moved to the other side of the bridge in an instant to hold another speech. The protest on March 15th in Belgrade caused the biggest reaction: heavy police deployment, restricted protest zones, and the alleged use of a sound device that caused panic and health issues. While the government denied its use, officials later admitted possession of such equipment (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2025a).

A more serious reaction by the police and security services began before the protest organized on Vidovdan on June 28. Before the protest, the students announced an ultimatum demanding the calling of extraordinary parliamentary elections and the termination of the rally in the center of Belgrade in front of the National Assembly. If these demands are not met, it was announced that “citizens will be ready to take all existing measures of civil disobedience” (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2025b). Students were invited to informational interviews, taken into custody, and several of them were charged on suspicion of having committed the crime of preparing an act against the constitutional order and security of Republic of Serbia (Danas 2026). Many more police were present at the Vidovdan protest than at previous protests, and they were equipped to break up demonstrations. The final part of the protest was marked by giving the “green light”, which meant that citizens should take matters into their own hands. A police cordon separated the two groups of citizens, the protestors and people from Pionirski park. Many citizens were detained, and some were injured. The next day, physical blockades of the streets in Belgrade and throughout Serbia began by placing containers and other types of obstacles on the streets. Since then, the police presence has become constant, and the participants of the demonstrations are detained as soon as their number on the street decreases, often in the late evening or early morning hours.

Subsequent months were marked by selective repression, including police inaction toward violence by SNS supporters in several towns, while citizens and students faced arrests and force. Numerous incidents of police brutality were reported: threats to rape female students in the government garage by the commander of the Unit for the Security of Certain Persons and Facilities (Cvetković and Gočanin 2025), beatings of minors who were standing and waiting for food in line, attacks on members of the first aid team (Novaković 2025), shooting from a pistol by members of the Kobra unit, an elite army unit that deals with the protection of protected persons, and many others. Amnesty International warned of a high level of repression against peaceful civil protests, where it appealed to the authorities to stop the disproportionate use of force against demonstrators (Amnesty International 2025).

Over time, these protests also thinned out, and the daily blockade of the streets stopped. Further protests, such as protests to mark 10 and 11 months since the canopies were erected, were not as numerous. The pressure of the

authorities has certainly not stopped, but it was more subtle in relation to the reaction to the protests that took place over the summer and was more related to the very position of the university in Serbia, which will be described later.

During the 2025 protests, pressure on universities persisted. As the blockades continued, the government increased pressure for their termination and for the return of students and faculty to regular classes. Professors did not receive their salaries, and universities stopped receiving operational funds, leading to substantial debt. The rector became the target of pro-government media campaigns. Groups of professors organized themselves into informal associations such as Rebel University and Free University. In Belgrade, these groups organized a multi-day blockade of a major intersection, demanding: the dissolution of the Working Group drafting the new Law on Higher Education and a public debate on its content; the adoption of state-funded quotas for new student admissions; and the reversal of amendments to the Regulation on University Standards, which had reduced research time for academic staff from 20 to 5 hours per week (Manojlović 2025). The new Minister of Education accused these groups of abusing universities for political purposes and creating chaos in the city.

The most serious attack on university autonomy occurred with police incursions into university buildings, representing a direct violation of institutional independence. In July, police officers stationed on the steps of the Faculty of Law intervened against citizens and students seeking refuge after being forced off the streets. Equipped for riot control, they attempted to enter the faculty building (Vreme 2025a). In Novi Pazar, unidentified individuals claiming to be police entered the State University building and forcibly removed students from the premises, while police officers outside prevented others from entering (Vukajlović 2025). The most prominent example was the police entry into the Rectorate and Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. In September, deans arrived at their faculties accompanied by police officers to “restore order” and reopen buildings, despite the opposition of students still occupying the spaces. Perhaps the most alarming incident occurred when, on the day of one of the protests, police entered the Rectorate building late at night, effectively trapping everyone inside. Participants were forced to present identification cards, issued misdemeanor charges, and several citizens were taken into custody (Nova 2025).

Further pressures also continued, but in a more subtle way. The government has decided to establish a new Faculty of Serbian Studies by separating departments from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. The management of the faculty, the Free University, and faculties throughout Serbia condemned this decision due to the questionable legality of the procedure, the lack of transparency of the process, and especially the non-involvement of professors and students who would only be transferred to another institution (Vreme 2025b).

Comparative Conclusion

The conclusion of Spasojević and Lončar seems convincing at first. When comparing the student protests of 1996/97, and 2024/25, it becomes evident that certain patterns and attempts at delegitimisation have remained consistent over time – such as portraying students as a small, politically motivated group seeking to undermine the state system, but also there is a clear transformation in the methods of repression. During the 1990s, under the so-called “old” competitive authoritarianism, repression took on a hybrid form: physical force was present, the police were more often on the streets, violence happened against the gathered citizens. In the new competitive authoritarianism, the use of physical force became more selective, with targeting directed toward individuals and carried out through legal and institutional mechanisms. Thus, it can be concluded that there really is a difference in the state reaction in different types of regimes. However, as indicated in the paper, it is recognized that the situation is not so clear. As the protest lasted for a long time and managed to mobilize hundreds of thousands of citizens, the reactions of the authorities and the police were no longer so subtle.

As Spasojević and Lončar observed in their analysis of the anti-curfew protests of 2020, those events represented an exception to the general pattern – and a similar conclusion can now be drawn regarding this phase of the student protests. Because the protests lasted more than a year and a half and gathered a broader coalition of citizens and social groups than most earlier movements, the government could not simply ignore them or rely on the strategy of waiting for public fatigue. Since June 28th, police presence and pressure have been continuous, though not always visible; their actions and instances of violence have persisted even during peaceful demonstrations, as evidenced by individual cases of students and citizens facing ongoing pressure for their participation. Nevertheless, images of police repression circulated widely in both domestic and international media. The tactic of allowing limited, time-restricted freedom of assembly served as a way for the regime to preserve the appearance of democratic tolerance, while simultaneously applying selective violence to demonstrate that the state retained control and would not allow further unrest. It should also be noted that even before June 28, the use of sound cannons during a peaceful protest constituted an excessive use of force.

The case of university autonomy clearly shows that repressive measures have become increasingly visible and that pressure on professors and faculties has not subsided. Compared to the protests of the old competitive authoritarianism, it is evident that this time autonomy was violated during the protests themselves – likely a consequence of their longer duration. As students persisted for months without withdrawing, state pressure extended directly to universities, faculty administrations, and professors.

What was once an exception in earlier mass demonstrations now seems to have become standard practice. Although one might expect repression

under the new competitive authoritarianism to be more subtle, the examples discussed reveal a return to overt forms of violence. As the protests grew in size and became increasingly difficult to control, the authorities abandoned their previous strategy of ignoring and selectively tolerating dissent, turning instead to physical repression whose intensity, scale, and brutality began to resemble that of 1996/97. In moments of crisis even the most sophisticated hybrid regimes, confronted with the loss of narrative control, ultimately resort to traditional authoritarian mechanisms of force. This suggests that distinction between old and new authoritarianisms is not so clear so that in different periods the methods may be similar.

CONCLUSION

This paper, through the concepts of old and new competitive authoritarianism, examined the state's reactions to student protests in Serbia, with a particular focus on the issue of university autonomy. The findings show that some tactics remain the same and regimes continue to strive to delegitimize their opponents. The analysis indicates that the student protests since June 2025 marked a departure from the previously subtle patterns of repression typical of the new competitive authoritarianism under the Serbian Progressive Party. Practices of repression and pressure sometimes closely resemble those observed during the 1996/97 protests, especially regarding police presence, methods of control, and the use of violence during demonstrations. It can therefore be concluded that repression against students and citizens, as well as violations of university autonomy, increasingly mirror the practices of the old competitive authoritarianism, suggesting a re-emergence of overt state coercion when the regime loses control over public discourse. Further research should provide answers as to in which situations measures resembling both old and new forms of competitive authoritarianism will be employed.

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Ela Zeković

STARE TAKTIKE, NOVI REŽIM: REPRESIJA NAD STUDENTSKIM PROTESTIMA U SRBIJI

APSTRAKT

Tokom proteklih decenija, studenti u Srbiji organizovali su proteste i blokade fakulteta kako bi skrenuli pažnju javnosti na različita društvena pitanja, uključujući urušavanje autonomije univerziteta. Tokom 1990-ih, studentski zahtevi bili su usmereni na demokratizaciju, dok su tokom 2000-ih u prvi plan došla socijalna i ekonomska pitanja. Krajem 2024. godine pojavio se novi studentski pokret, koji je, koristeći direktnu demokratiju i blokade fakulteta, ukazivao na probleme korupcije, (ne)postojanja odgovornosti i institucionalne disfunkcionalnosti. Reakcije na ove proteste bile su različite, ali su prvenstveno bile

usmerene na suzbijanje studentske mobilizacije, često podrivajući akademsku slobodu i uključujući represivne mere protiv učesnika protesta. Upoređujući studentske proteste – pre svega one iz 1996/97. i 2024/25. godine – ovo poglavlje analizira kako su se odgovori države menjali pod različitim tipovima političkih režima. Posebna pažnja posvećena je oblicima represije, delegitimizacije i pritiscima države na univerzitete. Analiza se oslanja na teorijski okvir kompetitivnog autoritarizma, sa fokusom na razlikovanje starih i novih oblika ovog tipa režima (Levitsky and Way 2020). Medijski izvori korišćeni su za analizu ključnih narativa i događaja. Cilj je da se kroz komparativnu analizu ispita kako su se autoritarne prakse prema studentskom otporu transformisale, da li su represivne mere postale suptilnije i na koji način se ovi mehanizmi uklapaju u logiku kompetitivnog autoritarizma.

KLJUČNE REČI: studentski protesti, kompetitivni autoritarizam, državna represija, autonomija univerziteta, Srbija