

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Political psychology is an interdisciplinary field of scientific research, focused on studying the psychological basis of political behavior and attitudes, influence of political context on individual and group behavior, psychological effects of political actions, and so on. It is a growing interdisciplinary field, founded at the intersection of social psychology and political science, but also sharing both the topics and researchers with sociology, education, and economics.

While social sciences have studied psychological aspects of politics for decades, even centuries, political psychology appeared as an institutionalized discipline some forty years ago. In 1978, professor Jeanne N. Knutson founded the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP), which soon attracted wide membership worldwide. The Society initiated an academic journal, *Political Psychology*, which is currently among the top academic journals both in social psychology and in political science.

Over the last two decades, research in political psychology spread across the former socialist world as well. Challenges of social and political transformations towards the West European political models created a need for scientific study of psychological aspects of the involved processes and phenomena. Scholars of different generations, whether or not they call themselves a political psychologist, are studying the most pressing issues these societies are facing. This research often reaches close to the ancient social science ideal – to continue expanding our understanding of human behavior and to do service to the society.

An impressive overview of political psychology research in the South-Eastern region of Europe was presented at the Mini Conference on Political Psychology in South-Eastern Europe, held in Novi Sad (Serbia), in October 2016 (<http://psihologija.ff.uns.ac.rs/ispp2016/>). The Conference was supported and partly sponsored by the ISSP and by the Department of Psychology, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. Dozens of presented papers, covering a wide range of topics, from prejudice to political tolerance, from ethnic conflicts and violence to peace marches in Hungary, clearly demonstrated that the gathered researchers do not hesitate to address the burning and controversial issues, nor that they compromise their theory and method.

This special issue of *Primenjena psihologija* presents a selection of papers from this Mini Conference, together with some contributions first appearing in this issue. Although it was not planned, it turned out that all of the included papers, in one way or another, deal with Serbia, and involve at least some authors from Serbia. This unintended situation turned this special issue also into a showcase of political psychology research in Serbia. Even a cursory review of the papers leaves the impression of a wide range of socially very relevant topics, concern for psychological theory, and insistence on sound research methodology.

At this point, I would like to remind readers that the quality and quantity of political psychology research in Serbia has roots in the long tradition of politically-related research of Serbian psychologists. While great names of Serbian social psychology, such as Nikola Rot, Dragomir Pantić, Ljiljana Bačević, Mirjana Vasović, Bora Kuzmanović, and others, probably would not call themselves political psychologists, a significant portion of their work would fit into the contemporary category of political psychology. A recently published chapter by Dragomir Pantić and Zoran Pavlović (2016) illuminates the not so well-known origins of scientific research dealing with political attitudes, values, opinions in Serbia. With such roots, the academic level of the papers included in this volume is not surprising.

The following several paragraphs will provide a brief review of the papers in this special issue. Conflicts and wars that accompanied the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, and psychological consequence thereof, represent one of the major themes that preoccupy psychologists in Serbia. Tijana Karić, Vladimir Mihić, and José Ángel Ruiz Jiménez focus on the psychological aspects of collective memory. How do Serbian respondents react to collective memory stimuli that are presented from different angles, i.e., from the angles of the conflicted ethnic groups – Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats? Their study analyzes how such stimuli impact respondents' stereotypes, social distance, and national identification.

Consequences of the post-Yugoslav conflicts are even more in the focus of Professor Miklos Biro's text "Public opinion in Serbia on ICTY: A chicken or an egg?". The establishment, mode of operation, and sentences passed (and not passed) by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) have been highly controversial in Serbia. Biro's review of public opinion research evidence shows that the level of negative attitudes among the public toward the ICTY could be connected with the rhetoric of the Serbian political elite, and the way that media handled this issue.

Post-Yugoslav history is also reflected in Huseyin Cakal and Nebojša Petrović paper titled "Intergroup contact and ingroup identification as predictors of intergroup attitudes and forgiveness in the Serbian context: The moderating role of exposure to positive information". Here, the authors use a survey experiment to study the role of exposure to positive information on intergroup attitudes and forgiveness. One of their many interesting findings is that past contacts with members of the outgroup persist as significant predictors of present-day outgroup attitudes, in this case of Serbs towards Bosniak Muslims.

The remaining two papers deal with more explicitly political topics. Boban Petrović and Janko Međedović examine how the lexically derived ideological dimensions are associated with party preferences, and whether and how these relationship changed over time. Interestingly, contrary to what we could expect assuming the existence of the process of "democratic learning", it seems that the association between party preference and ideological dimensions is decreasing over time. Pavlović and Todosijević, in their paper "Authoritarianism and cognitive, political involvement", address the neglected question of whether authori-

tarianism is associated with political cognition. The answer is nuanced: high authoritarianism is associated with lower factual political knowledge, but not with political interest and interest in election campaigns. Apparently, transitory political context can make high authoritarians more or less interested, but political knowledge seems to be a more stable correlate of authoritarianism.

To summarize, the papers included in this volume illustrate the wide range of topics, approaches and research methods that characterize political psychology in Serbia. While the psychological study of politics in earlier decades relied almost exclusively on survey research and focused on attitudes towards actual political issues, current political psychology is more varied both theoretically and methodologically. It also appears that the tumultuous events of the last two decades provided additional stimuli for younger researchers to engage in political psychology research.

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Reference

- Pantić, D., & Pavlović, Z. (2016). Public opinion research in Serbia in the non-pluralist period. In K. Bachmann & J. Gieseke (Eds.), *The silent majority in communist and post-communist states: Opinion polling in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* (pp. 43–58). New York: Peter Lang. doi:10.3726/978-3-653-06119-2