

PUBLIC OPINION POLL

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF SERBIAN CITIZENS

Belgrade, June 2017

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1. Methodological notes

Survey carried out by	Centre for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) with support from United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Fieldwork	Between 16 and 26 May 2017
Sample type and size	Random, representative sample of 1,000 Serbian citizens aged 18 and above
Sample frame	Polling station catchment areas as the most reliable registry units
Selection of households	Random sampling without replacement – each second street address from starting point for each polling station catchment area
Selection of respondents by household	Random sampling without replacement – respondents selected by date of first birthday in relation to survey date
Survey method	Face-to-face at home
Survey instrument	Questionnaire

This public opinion survey, carried out by CeSID and USAID, took place between 16 and 26 May 2017 and covered the territory of the Republic of Serbia, excluding Kosovo and Metohia. The poll was performed on a representative sample of 1,000 adult citizens of Serbia.

The survey instrument was a 97-item questionnaire developed in collaboration with the donor.

The interviews were conducted 'face-to-face', in direct contact with respondents. During enumerator training, instructors insisted on adherence to two important rules that, in addition to the sample, together have a major impact on the representativeness of the survey – order of steps and the first birthday rule.

Adherence to the order of steps ensures that an enumerator can comprehensively cover each survey point, whilst the first birthday rule prevents responses only from members of the public who first answer the door when the enumerator visits. Enumerators were required to interview the member of each household aged 18 or above whose birthday came soonest after the date of the enumerator's visit.

This ensured the representativeness of respondents by gender, education, and age.

2. Description of the sample

The following categories of respondents were covered based on the methodology established for the survey:

Structure of respondents by gender: Women, 49 percent; men, 51 percent.

Structure of respondents by age: 18-29, 16 percent; 30-39, 17 percent; 40-49, 21 percent; 50-59, 16 percent; 60-69, 19 percent; 70 and above, 11 percent.

Structure of respondents by education: Elementary school or less, 16 percent; two- or three-year secondary school, 22 percent; four-year secondary school, 37 percent; college/university, 25 percent.

Respondent occupation: Housewife, 7 percent; farmer, 5 percent; unskilled or semi-skilled worker, 8 percent; skilled or highly-skilled worker, 26 percent; technician, 14 percent; office worker, 11 percent; school/university student, 6 percent; professional, 17 percent.

Respondent place of residence: City/town, 49 percent; suburb, 12 percent; rural community, 39 percent.

3. Introductory notes*

Gauging public support for the parliamentary agenda, institutions, Members of Parliament, and electoral reforms, as well as public perceptions of various forms of civic activism, is of exceptional significance for all decision-makers. This is why the Enhancing Accountability and Responsiveness of Elected Officials in Serbia (People First) Project envisaged three research cycles designed to produce findings that will motivate elected public representatives to enhance their responsibility and transparency in various ways.

The research was carried out face-to-face, on a sample of 1,000 adult citizens of Serbia, excluding Kosovo and Metohia. The survey questionnaires always contained the same batteries of questions so as to ensure the findings were comparable; the focus of each individual survey, however, changed depending on the context and progress made in reforms to the political system initiated by the Serbian Parliament.

The results of this research were made public at a conference held at Belgrade's Media Centre on 1 June 2017. The key findings will also be presented to parliamentary groups to acquaint Members of Parliament with the public perception of the social and political situation in Serbia and all other major issues examined as part of this research and follow-on studies.

The first research cycle took place in July 2015 and was devoted to *Civic Engagement*; the second was performed in April 2016 and looked into the *Political and Social Situation in Serbia*; whilst the third, final, cycle of research was undertaken in May 2017 on the topic of *Political Engagement of Serbian Citizens*.

CeSID Research Team

** All words/terms used in this report in the masculine gender are to be understood as including persons of both male and female gender they refer to.*

4. Summary

- ***Public perceptions of the recent past and the present***

In comparison to 2016, **the percentage of respondents who feel Serbia is ‘headed in the right direction’ has fallen** (from 38 to 33 percent), **as has the number of those unhappy with the country’s orientation** (down from 42 to 39 percent). The current administration will find it encouraging to learn that the figures are still much better than in early 2012, when as many as 68 percent of those polled had felt Serbia was heading in the wrong direction. In contrast, one-third of all respondents claim their circumstances are ‘intolerable’ or ‘barely tolerable’, with the number of those claiming ‘mediocre’ living standards on the decline, along with a corresponding increase in the group reporting ‘tolerable’ quality of life.

One-quarter of the population see themselves as ‘losers of transition’, whilst, at the same time, 23 percent view themselves as ‘transition winners’ (an increase of between 5 and 11 percentage points on all three preceding cycles, which encompassed two pre-crisis years and one of full-blown crisis). As in earlier similar research, more respondents now claim to be worse off (39 percent) than better off (34 percent) when compared with their parents’ generation. On a scale from 1 to 10, respondents plot their conjectured future well-being at around the 5.8 mark on average, pointing to continuing hesitancy in expectations.

Currently, respondents who believe the events of 5 October 2000 were ‘the start of Serbia’s decline’ (20 percent this year, down from as many as 25 percent last year) ***outnumber those who hold the opposite view*** (i.e. that this date was ‘the start of Serbia’s democratic transformation; 17 percent). Conversely, there has been a drop of seven percentage points relative to 2016 in the number of those polled who claim Serbia began to prosper in 2012 with the coming of Aleksandar Vučić to power (down from 29 percent in 2016 to 22 percent in 2017).

- ***Civic and political engagement in Serbia***

The assumption that members of the public in Serbia are, traditionally, less likely to be politically or civically engaged is borne out by our findings of the extent of membership and activity in civic and political organisations. Churches claim the most members (16 percent of all respondents), followed by political parties (at 15 percent). These are followed by professional organisations (13 percent), trade unions (11 percent), and, finally, non-governmental organisations (with as little as 6 percent of all respondents reporting membership). Most members of these organisations were found to be inactive, with the greatest proportion of these in political parties (a total of 6 points of the 15 percent total) and trade unions (where 6 points, more than half of the 11 percent total, are inactive).

As many as 37 percent of those polled reported the absence of any interest in politics, whilst 34 percent claimed they would seek information about political events (but not engage personally). ***As few as 4 percent of those polled considered themselves ‘politically active’***, with 17 percent believing politics ought to be left to those who are responsible for it. Members of the public steer

clear of politics mainly due to a lack of trust in political parties and politicians (47 percent in total), and are convinced that people with (existing) political involvement are primarily interested because of opportunities for personal gain. As few as 6 percent of those polled felt politically active people are interested in helping ‘achieve important social goals’. Nevertheless, although not members of political organisations, Serbian citizens do practise a limited form of political engagement by voting in elections and keeping abreast of political developments more or less regularly.

A total of 45 percent of all respondents saw political parties as the only means of engaging in politics, with the same number claiming they do nothing but ‘cause quarrels amongst people’. As many as 36 percent of those polled did not differentiate between existing political parties, whilst 27 percent felt civic movements would replace parties in the future.

- ***Political engagement and value orientations of Serbian citizens***

Members of the public in Serbia are highly introverted and embrace traditional values, at the same time rejecting more universal principles and not striving to attain higher goals. Thus, most Serbian citizens prefer not to engage in addressing issues that require public action or discussion; they would rather not attempt to solve complex social issues or ‘tilt against windmills’, and would not object if denied the ability to discuss social problems.

There is a correlation between political engagement and conservative values, reflected primarily in conformism and a preference for personal security. Members of the public saw low living standards, high unemployment, and job and income insecurity as reasons to protest, and reported being ready to take part in demonstrations only if their and their families’ security and livelihood were to be jeopardised. Personal security clearly comes to the fore in this regard.

Serbian public opinion is also characterised by a fatalism of sorts and a belief that engagement cannot solve anything. Over one-half of those polled did not believe they can influence political events, with opinion divided as to whether anything major in life can be changed at all, because ‘so many things do not depend on us’.

- ***Public perceptions of the 2017 presidential election***

A lack of interest in politics and elections is the primary reason why members of the public in Serbia choose to abstain from exercising their right to vote. More than two-fifths of respondents (43 percent) who reported not having voted in April’s presidential election claimed to be completely apolitical and entirely uninterested in politics.

A total of 17 percent of those polled believed the outcome of the election had been a foregone conclusion, which deprived their votes of any meaning, whilst 12 percent could not be convinced by any of the 12 presidential candidates to turn out and vote for any of them.

Voter abstinance is at its most widespread amongst young people, especially students, but also the general population aged between 18 and 29. In addition to young Serbians, who are particularly unlikely to engage in politics, women are also somewhat over-represented in the non-voting population in comparison with men.

Members of the public mainly witnessed the election campaign, brief but abounding with highly aggressive and often inappropriate messages, through the medium of television. Significantly more than one-half of the Serbian population (59 percent) relied on television coverage of candidates' presentations and their political messages. The Internet and social networks were the primary source of information for as few as one-fifth of those polled.

At the same time, the media were the most poorly perceived part of the election process, and received a score of 2.57 from members of the public. Presidential candidates were awarded only a slightly better average score of 2.72. The National Electoral Commission (NIC) and local Polling Boards received scores of 3.02 and 3.17, respectively.

Worryingly, *fewer than one-fifth of those polled (42 percent) saw the entire electoral system in a positive light.* By contrast, slightly more than one-quarter (28 percent) felt negatively about the elections, with one in three neutral in the matter. Unfavourable views of the election process were primarily caused by the perceived absence of a level playing field for all presidential candidates, with the ruling party's candidate seen as having enjoyed an initial advantage.

The reservations that members of the public had about the conduct of the elections led two-thirds of those polled (65 percent) to re-affirm the importance of civic monitoring of the entire electoral process. In addition, the public *again underscored the prevailing view that the electoral system needed to change if it was to fully reflect the will of the people.* More than one-half of those polled (57 percent) agreed that members of the public ought to be allowed to vote for individual Members of Parliament or local councillors, as opposed to party tickets; nearly two-thirds of all respondents (37 percent) claimed 'the current electoral system and method by which Members of Parliament are elected does not allow the will of members of the public to be expressed', which further highlighted the need to change the electoral arrangements.

- ***Public perceptions of the 2017 post-election protests***

A series of protests took place in the weeks following the presidential election of 2 April 2017, primarily in Belgrade, but also elsewhere in Serbia. Most respondents who had an opinion did not speak in favour of these protests (as reported by 38 percent of those polled); one in four expressed support for the demonstrations; and one in five were undecided in the matter. Although nearly one-third of those polled (31 percent) were unable to gauge the nature of the protests, nearly one in three (31 percent) believed the protesters were mainly dissatisfied with social and economic issues.

A total of 28 percent of those polled felt a new wave of protests was likely in the future, but a convincing majority (45 percent) nevertheless believed no new demonstrations were in store for the country; this group was dominated by men and elderly respondents. Nevertheless, even if new

protests did take place, most respondents (57 percent) reported not being ready to participate in them.

- ***Confidence in institutions and perceptions of Euro-Atlantic integrations***

Confidence in all institutions is on the decline; this is the key conclusion of this research cycle. Future studies will have to focus on determining if this is a passing trend caused by the timing of the survey (following the presidential election campaign) or whether this sentiment will persist.

Only five institutions enjoy the trust of more than 30 percent of the public: (1) *Armed forces*, at 57 percent, stable in first place for the second consecutive year; (2) *Churches/religious institutions*, at 46 percent, with a substantial drop relative to 2016 and 2015; (3) *Police*, at 39 percent; (4) *Government*, at 33 percent; and (5) *President of the Republic*, at 32 percent. Institutions in the second group enjoy the trust of between 20 and 30 percent of those polled: *Mayors* (28 percent); *Parliament* (25 percent); *Municipal/town assemblies* (24 percent); and the *judiciary* (21 percent).

Institutions that ought to articulate civic opinion in the political system are not widely trusted: these include non-governmental organisations (16 percent); the media (15 percent); trade unions (14 percent); and political parties (11 percent).

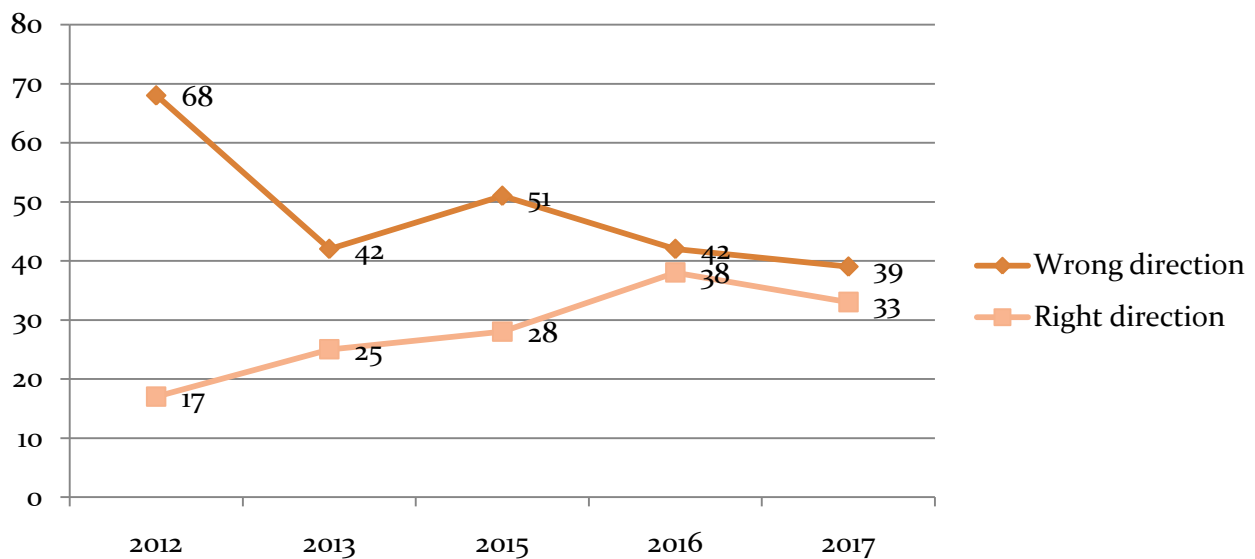
A total of 45 percent of those polled would vote in favour of joining the EU in a potential referendum (halting the downward trend in approval of the EU), whilst 42 percent would vote against, the highest figure in the past six years. ***One in 11 respondents supported Serbia's joining NATO, with opponents numbering as much as 79 percent.***

5. Perceptions of the recent past and the present

The question of the direction in which Serbia is moving is important, as answers to it paint a broad picture of how members of the public view on-going social and political processes. One-third of those polled currently believe the country is moving ‘in the right direction’, and these are outnumbered by six percentage points by the group who feel the opposite. Percentages of respondents reporting both views have fallen relative to the last opinion poll, conducted in 2016. Nevertheless, when this year’s findings are compared to those of two or three, and, especially, four years ago, the results are now seen as much more favourable, which has indirectly reflected on the governing coalition’s election performance.

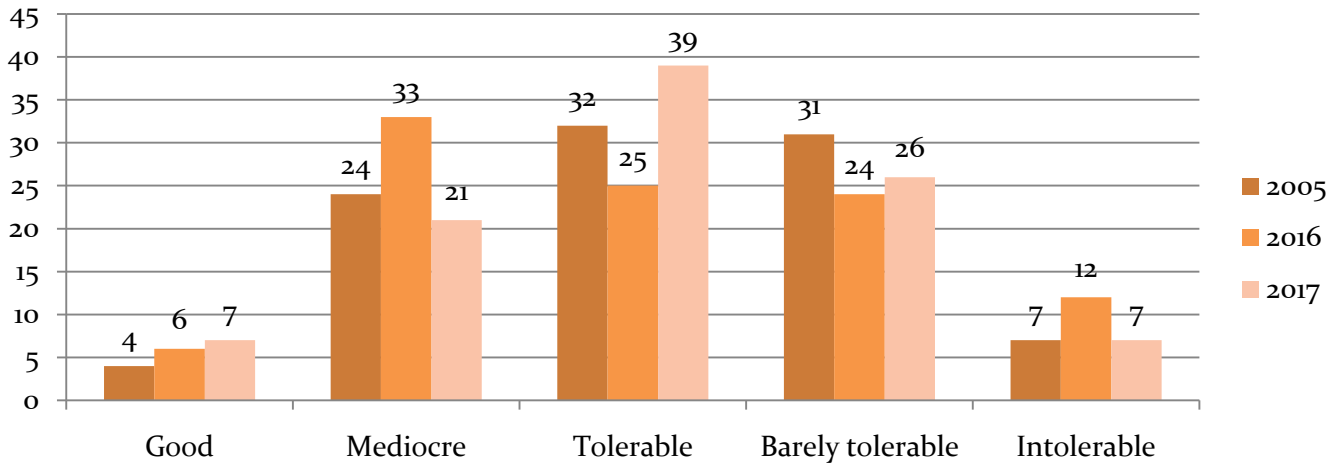
Younger respondents are disproportionately unhappy with the direction in which Serbia is moving (with 18 to 29s and 30 to 39s reporting dissatisfaction rates of as much as 50 percent, and 48 percent, respectively), as are respondents with university or college degrees, professionals, and technicians.

Chart 5.1. Is our country headed in the right or the wrong direction?(In %, 2012-2017)



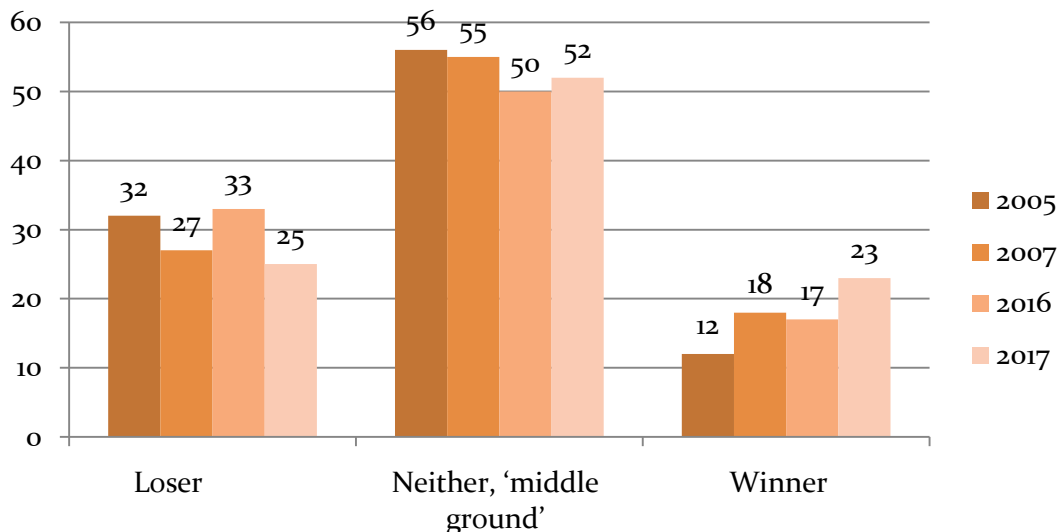
Almost two-fifths of those polled (39 percent) claim their circumstances are ‘tolerable’, the highest proportion in the past two years. At the same time, the percentage of respondents who claim their quality of life is ‘mediocre’ has fallen (from 33 to 21 percent); so obviously some of the disaffected have spilled over into the ‘tolerable’ camp. One-third of all respondents claim their living standards are ‘intolerable’ or ‘barely tolerable’. By contrast, 7 percent of those polled report ‘good’ living standards, slightly more than in previous research cycles.

Chart 5.2. What are the circumstances in which you and your family live right now like? (In %)



Serbia has for a number of years now been undergoing transition, a process fraught with controversy that has caused much disaffection amongst part of the population. A comparison of findings from two pre-crisis years and two years following the emergence of the crisis reveals that the percentage of respondents who see themselves as ‘losers of transition’ has always been greater: today this figure stands at 25 percent, a decline relative to last year, when one in three of those polled saw themselves as transition losers. By contrast, 23 percent of respondents view themselves as transition winners, between 5 and 11 percentage points more than in any of the previous cycles. As expected, most answers are clustered around the middle ground response of ‘neither’: their percentage has never been lower than one-half of the population as a whole.

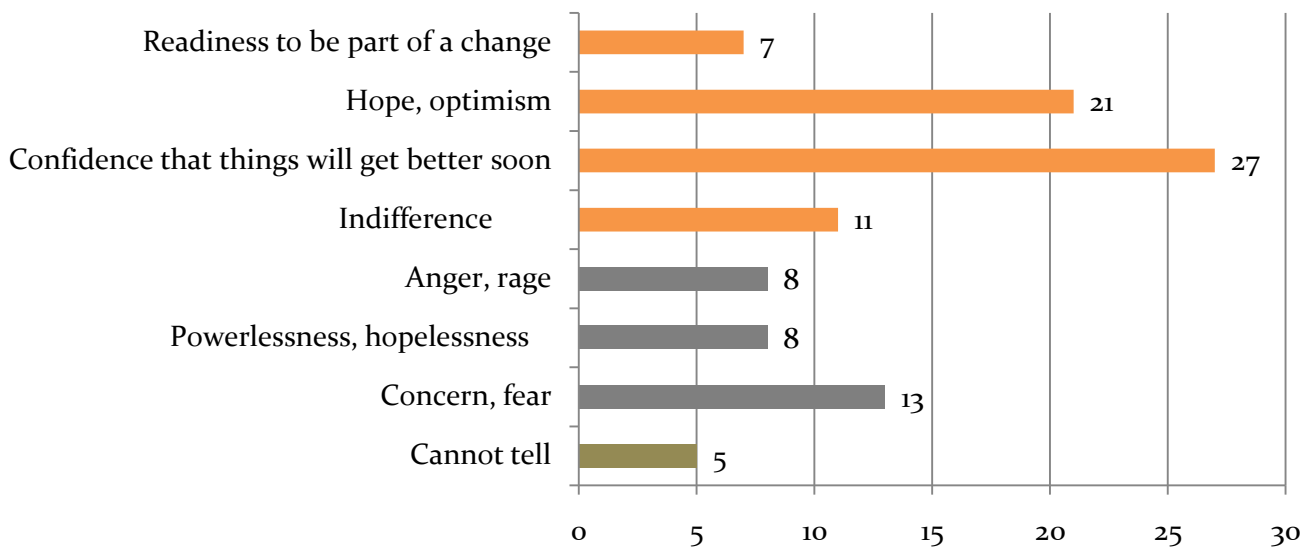
Chart 5.3. Winners or losers of transition? (In %)



Respondents’ emotions matter not only because they affect their individual sentiments, but also because of their potential to motivate political engagement, protests, or social change. Some sort of positive emotion is prevalent in 55 percent of those polled: 27 percent of all respondents reported

having ‘confidence’ in the future, 6 percentage points fewer said they felt ‘hope’ and ‘optimism’, whilst 7 percent voiced a ‘readiness to be part of change’. On the other side are the 13 percent of respondents who felt ‘concern’, and 8 percent each who reported feeling ‘anger’ and ‘powerlessness/hopelessness’, for a total of 29 percent of the population holding negative or pessimistic feelings. One in nine respondents reported feeling ‘indifferent’.

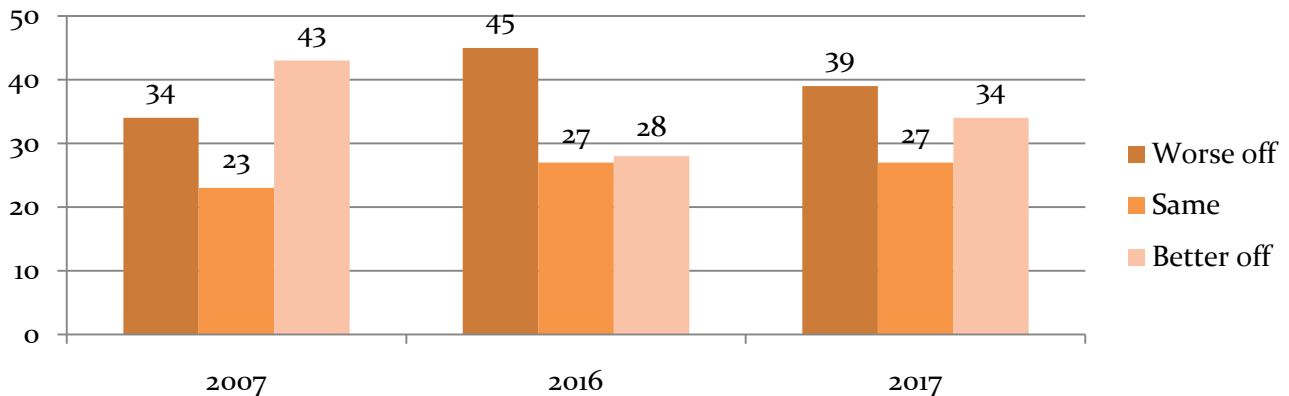
Chart 5.4. Which of the following emotions do you feel the most often? (u %)



The question of emotions correlates well with the following one, in which we asked respondents to plot their conjectured future on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 was ‘poor’ and 10 ‘bright’). The average score of 5.8 indicates substantial caution, revealing just how guarded any optimistic projections must be.

It is also important to understand how Serbians compare their own quality of life to that enjoyed by their parents. As in previous years (2007 and 2016), respondents who saw today’s living standards as poorer (39 percent) outnumbered those who felt otherwise (34 percent). These are more favourable findings relative to last year (with a 6-percentage-point increase in the number of respondents claiming better living standards), but still worse than in pre-crisis 2007. The results show that the fallout from the economic downturn has remained visible, and also that many respondents see the quality of life enjoyed by their parents under old political regimes as better than their own.

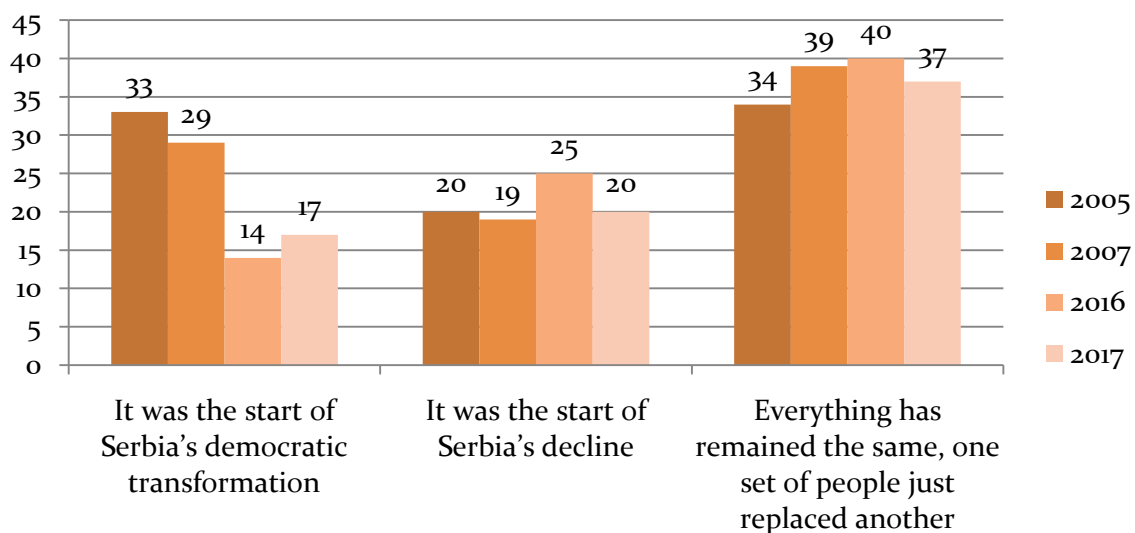
Chart 5.5. Is your quality of life better, the same as, or worse than that of your parents? (In %)



We measured respondents’ perceptions of recent political history by examining their views of two key occurrences that took place after 2000 (we defined ‘key’ here in terms of importance for internal politics and the party-political system): the events of 5 October 2000, and the political changes of 2012 that brought the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its leader, Aleksandar Vučić, to power.

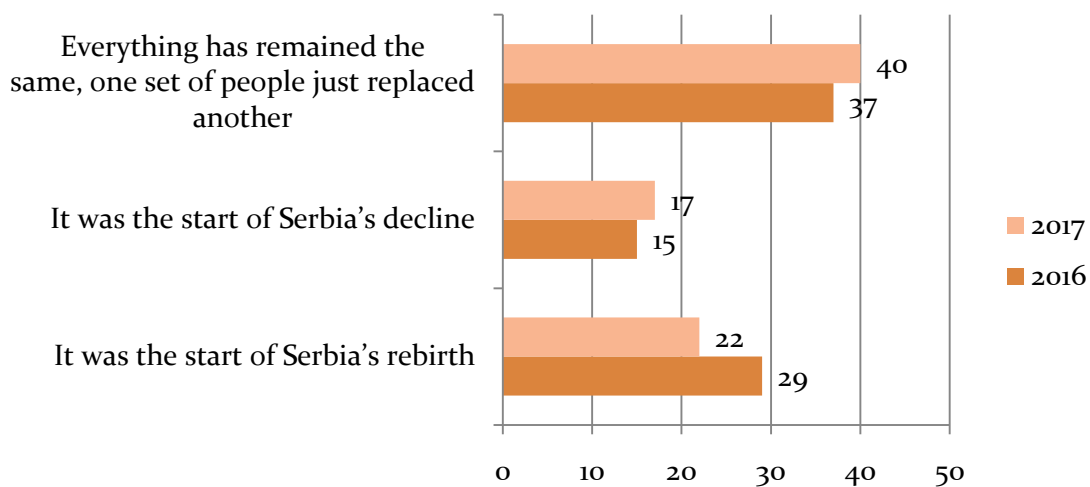
Two main conclusions can be drawn from the population’s perception of the changes ushered in on 5 October. Firstly, respondents who believe this was ‘the start of Serbia’s decline’ (20 percent this year, and as many as 25 percent last year) still outnumber those who feel 5 October was ‘the start of Serbia’s democratic transformation’ (17 percent this year, and 14 percent in 2016). These trends are the reverse of those seen in the early 2000s, with the findings also worse than between 2005 and 2007. Secondly, there has been an increase in the percentage of respondents claiming that ‘everything remained the same, one set of people just replaced another’ (at a more or less stable two-fifths of those polled).

Chart 5.6. Impact of changes made on 5 October 2000 (In %)



Many analysts have described the changes that occurred in 2012 as a ‘political earthquake’. A total of 22 percent of those polled now believe the coming to power of Aleksandar Vučić and the SNS was the ‘the start of Serbia’s rebirth’; this figure is 5 percentage points greater than the number of respondents who felt positive about the outcome of 5 October 2000. Nevertheless, it is still markedly lower than at the same time last year (when 29 percent had reported this view), with a simultaneous increase, from 15 to 17 percent, in the percentage of respondents seeing the change in power as ‘the start of Serbia’s decline’. Exactly two-fifths of those polled reported feeling that ‘everything has remained the same’, just as in the 5 October question.

Chart 5.7. How do you see the coming to power of the coalition assembled around Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party in 2012? (In %)



6. Civic and political engagement in Serbia

At its heart, ‘civic engagement’ means the active involvement of members of the public in social life. On the other hand, ‘political engagement’ denotes activities by members of the public aimed at influencing government structures, authorities, and the overall social and political situation in a country, whether by voting in elections or by pursuing other forms of activism. As such, it is particularly significant to explore public perceptions of political life by analysing interest in politics, views that adversely affect political engagement, and, finally, assessing key motives for taking part in political life.

The following Chart (6.1) reveals the extent of membership and activity in civic and political organisations. Churches and religious organisations have the most numerous membership, at 16 percent, followed by political parties at 15 percent. Next come professional organisations (13 percent), trade unions (11 percent), and, finally, non-governmental organisations (as little as 6 percent). The final finding comes as no surprise given the historically low public confidence in civil society organisations (for a more detailed discussion, see the section of this report on confidence in institutions below).

However, an important point to note is that inactive members dominate all of these organisations, with political parties the most affected by this trend (where 6 points of the 15 percent are inactive), followed by trade unions (where inactive members account for more than half of the total, at six points of the 11 percent).

Chart 6.1. Extent of membership and activity in civic and political organisations (In %)

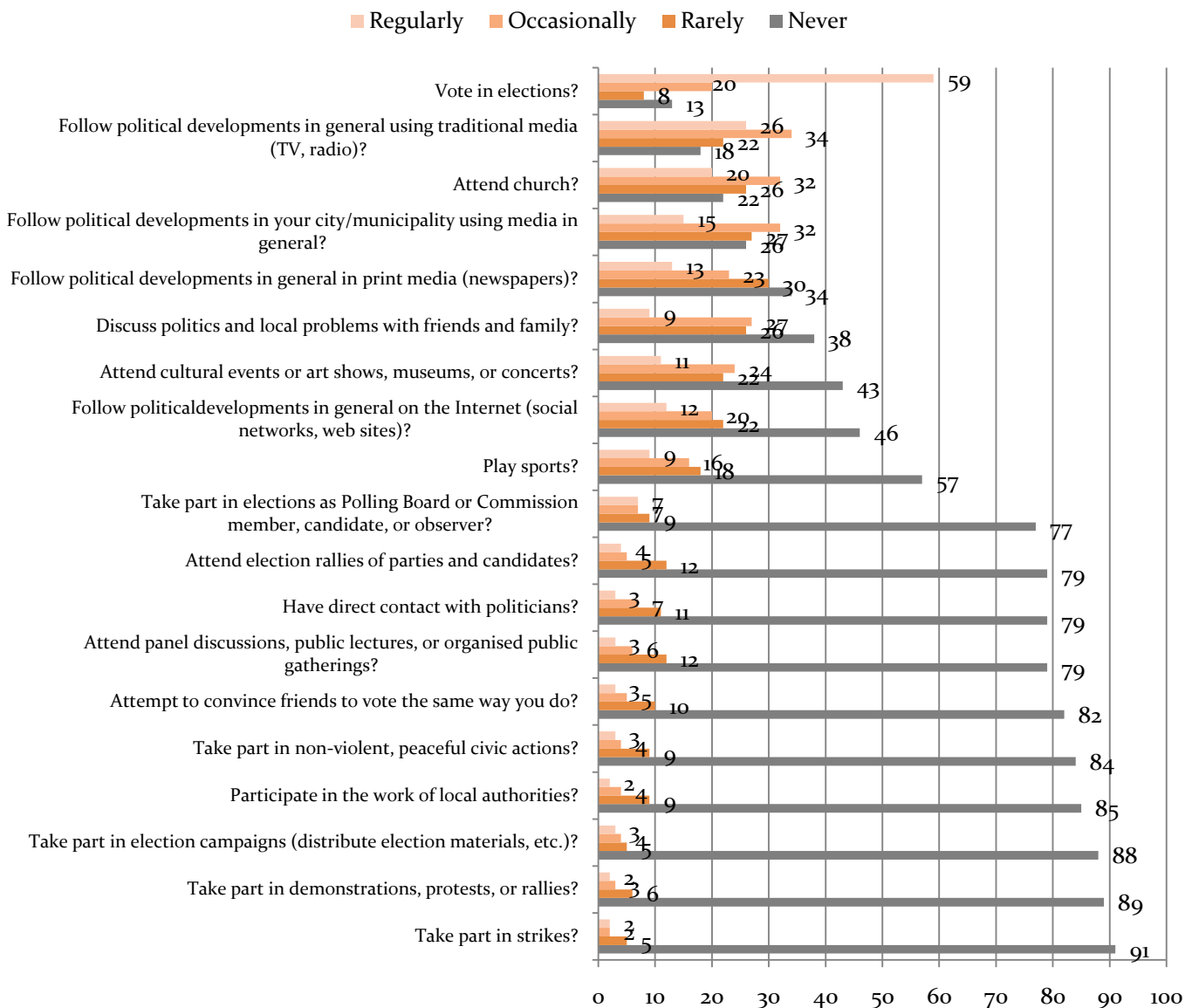


Churches and religious organisations have the most ‘moderately’ and ‘somewhat’ active members (at 6 percent in total), followed by political parties (5 percent in total); trade unions and non-governmental organisations have the least such members (at 2 percent each).

Chart 6.1 revealed the extent of civic engagement (or lack thereof), but we were also interested to know which activities were practised by the Serbian public more often than others, and how frequently this took place (see Chart 6.2).

It is readily apparent that Serbians, although not members of political organisations, do practise a limited form of political engagement by voting in elections and following political developments more or less regularly. More than one-half of those polled (59 percent) report regularly turning out to vote in elections; if to this figure we add the 20 percent of those who claim to vote only occasionally, the resulting number shows that nearly four-fifths of all Serbian citizens participate in elections for their representatives with greater or lesser regularity. In addition, in total, more than one-half of those polled (60 percent) more or less regularly follow political developments in the country by means of traditional media, primarily television and radio (with 26 percent claiming to do so regularly, and 34 percent stating they did so occasionally). By contrast, 13 percent report never turning out to vote, with 18 percent claiming they never followed political developments via traditional media.

Chart 6.2. Do you, and, if so, how often do you... (In %)



It also ought to be noted that men who vote slightly outnumber women who do so (although the difference is not sufficiently pronounced to allow a statistical regularity to be established). Moreover, the number of respondents claiming never to vote declines with age (so the group that never votes comprises 25 percent of under-30s, 23 percent of 30 to 39s, 18 percent of 40 to 49s, 14 percent each of 50 to 59s and 60 to 69s, and only 5 percent of over-70s). Women respondents more frequently claimed they ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ followed political developments via traditional media (46 percent of women and 54 percent of men said they did so ‘regularly’, 45 and 55 percent, respectively, claimed they did so ‘occasionally’; finally, 55 and 45 percent, respectively, each said they did so ‘rarely’ and ‘never’).

The sole remaining activity practised more or less regularly by more than one-half of all respondents was going to church or religious institution: one in five of those polled (20 percent)

claimed to do so 'regularly', with another one in three (32 percent) doing so 'occasionally'. Ranked fourth is keeping abreast of political developments at the local level, where a total of 47 percent of those polled 'regularly' or 'occasionally' at least seek information about local politics in their municipality or town/city.

Fewer members of the public abstain from, rather than take part in, all other activities we listed in the questionnaire, as shown in Chart 6.2. Thus, greater numbers of respondents reported not following political developments online or in print media than doing so (64 percent of all respondents claimed not seeking information in print media, with 68 percent sharing this view for online media outlets); in total, 64 percent of those polled claimed to 'never' or 'rarely' discuss politics and local issues with family members and friends; 77 percent reported never having taken part in an election; 79 percent claimed never to have attended an election rally or had direct contact with a politician; 82 percent stated they never persuaded friends to vote for their own preferred political option; 85 percent reported never having taken part in local government (by serving on local working parties or advisory bodies); 88 percent claimed never to have taken part in election campaigns; and 89 percent reported never having taken part in demonstrations or protest rallies.

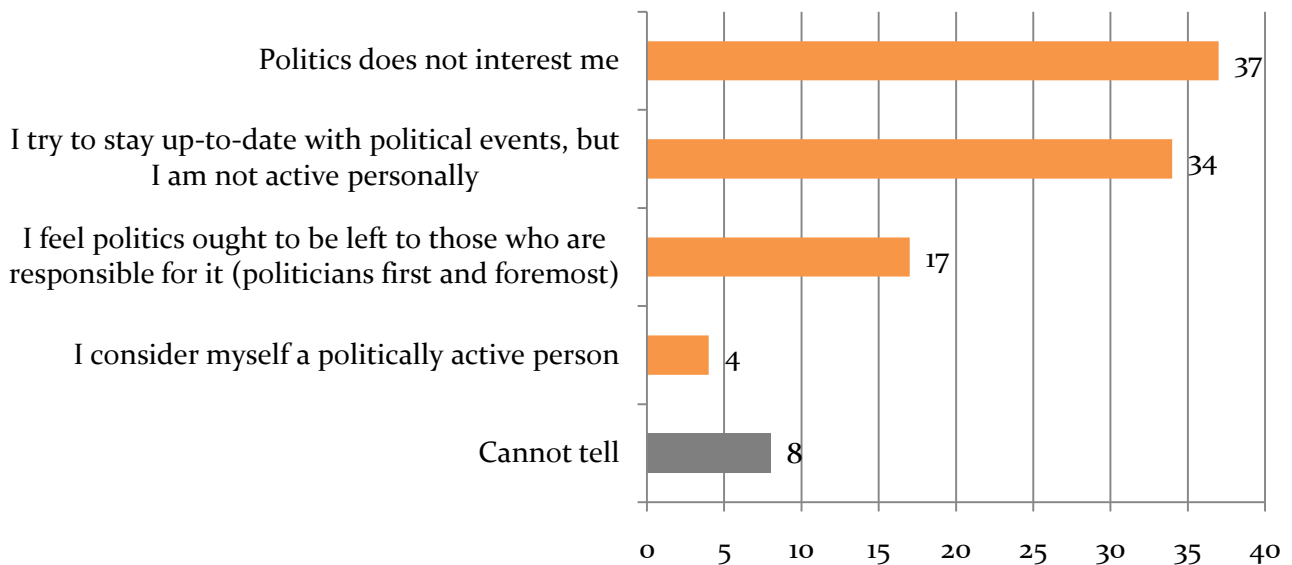
Even if civic engagement is viewed more broadly rather than only through the lens of political activism, the same chart tells us that the proportion of active members of the public remains low. Over two-fifths of those polled (43 percent) reported never having attended cultural or artistic events or visited museums or concerts, with another 22 percent of all respondents claiming to do so only 'rarely'. Over one-half of those polled were not active athletes: 57 percent of all respondents reported never having played sports; 18 percent claimed doing so rarely; 16 percent did so occasionally; with as few as one in 11 reporting they played sports regularly. As many as 79 percent of those polled claimed never to have attended a panel discussion, public lecture, or any other gathering; in total, as few as 9 percent reported practising this form of engagement more or less regularly. In addition, 84 percent of all respondents reported never having taken part in a peaceful, non-violent civic action, whilst as many as 91 percent claimed never having gone on strike. Given the age structure of the sample (with 46 percent of those polled older than 50), this figure additionally bears out just how weakened trade unions in Serbia have become.

6.1. Public perceptions of politics and political parties

As many as 37 percent of those polled reported not being interested in politics at all. Cross-referencing this finding with the demographics of the sample has revealed that younger respondents (18 to 29s) are more likely to be non-political, as are women, respondents with only primary and secondary education, and residents of towns/cities and suburban areas. Slightly more than one-third of those polled (34 percent) reported endeavouring to keep abreast of political developments but did not engage in politics themselves: this view is predominantly held by residents of urban areas. Nearly one in six of all respondents (17 percent) opted to leave politics and related issues to 'those who are responsible' for them (primarily politicians); there were no significant differences between various demographic categories in this regard. Finally, 4 percent

claimed to be politically active: most of these respondents came from cities/towns and suburbs, and were more likely to be younger and better-educated (for instance, one-half of all respondents who reported being politically active had college or university degrees).

Chart 6.3. In general, where do you stand on politics? (In %)



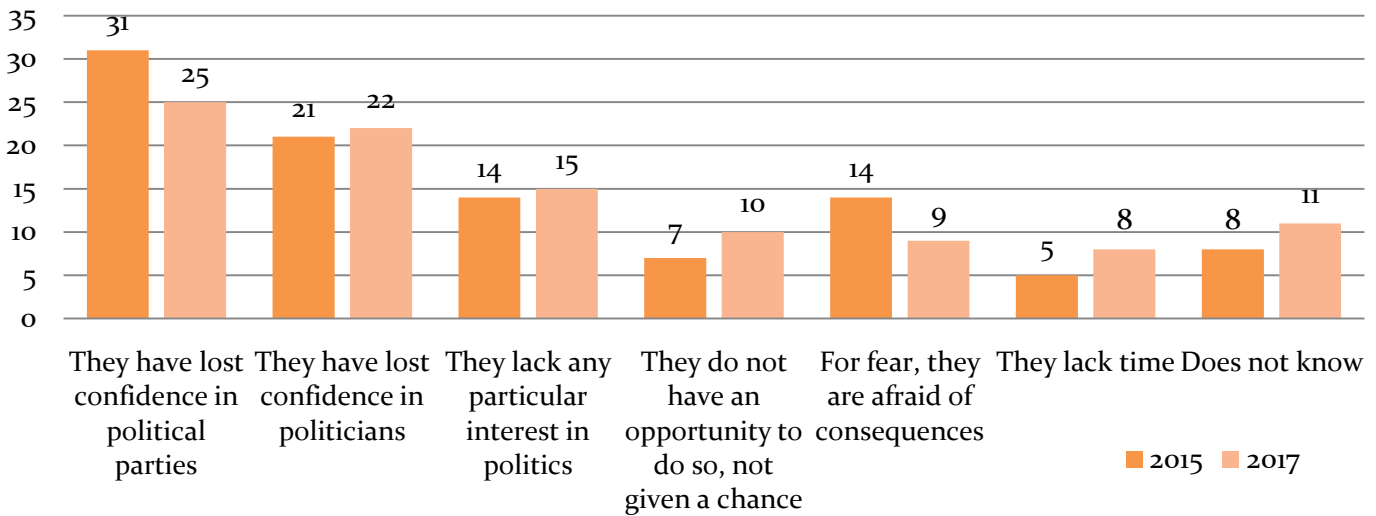
Respondents focused on the lack of confidence in political parties as the reason why many members of the public failed to engage in politics to any greater degree; this was a view reported by 25 percent of those polled. Another 22 percent singled out the lack of confidence in individual politicians, for a total of 47 percent of those polled who reported not being active in politics primarily due to a lack of trust. This finding comes as no surprise in view of the exceptionally high mistrust of political parties (at as much as 56 percent) once again recorded in this survey. Lack of interest was highlighted by 15 percent of those polled; lack of opportunity by one in ten; and fear of consequences of engaging in politics by one in 11 (or 9 percent). Finally, eight percent of all respondents cited lack of time as the reason for not engaging in politics.

The Chart below compares the findings of this opinion poll with those of CeSID’s research conducted in 2015.¹ The overall impression here is that the number of respondents for whom mistrust is the key reason for failing to engage has declined by about five percentage points relative to two years ago, as well as that Serbians who feel they lack opportunities to be active have also become more numerous. In 2017, the number of respondents who cited fear of the consequences of political engagement as the reason for not being politically active fell by about 5 percentage points.²

Chart 6.4. Why are many members of the public not personally active in politics to any greater degree? Comparison of 2015 and 2017 findings (In %)

¹ See <http://www.cesid.rs/istrazivanje/aktivizam-gradana/>.

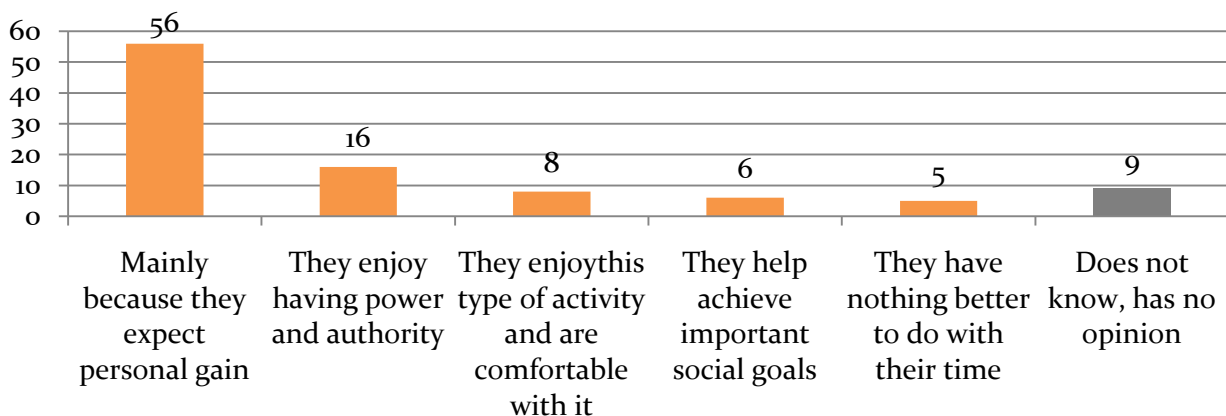
² The 2015 questionnaire offered respondents the answers of ‘Fear of consequences’ and ‘No likely benefits but potential harm’. To ease comparison, these two answers have been conflated and shown in aggregate.



We also wanted to learn about the general reasons why members of the public engage in politics. All respondents were asked this question (as we were interested in general perceptions), rather than only those who were members of political parties or were interested in politics.

As it appeared, as few as 6 percent of those polled felt people engage in politics to help to ‘achieve important social goals’. All others held more negative views, ranging from a conviction that such people ‘have nothing better to do with their time’ (5 percent), to a belief that they ‘enjoy this type of activity’ (8 percent) or ‘enjoy having power and authority’ (16 percent); to, finally, that people mainly do so in expectations of ‘personal gain’. This last view is shared by more than one-half of those polled (as many as 56 percent), which shows that political engagement is primarily viewed through the lens of personal benefit, material or otherwise. This finding ought also to be interpreted in the context of results that revealed widespread mistrust in institutions and political parties.

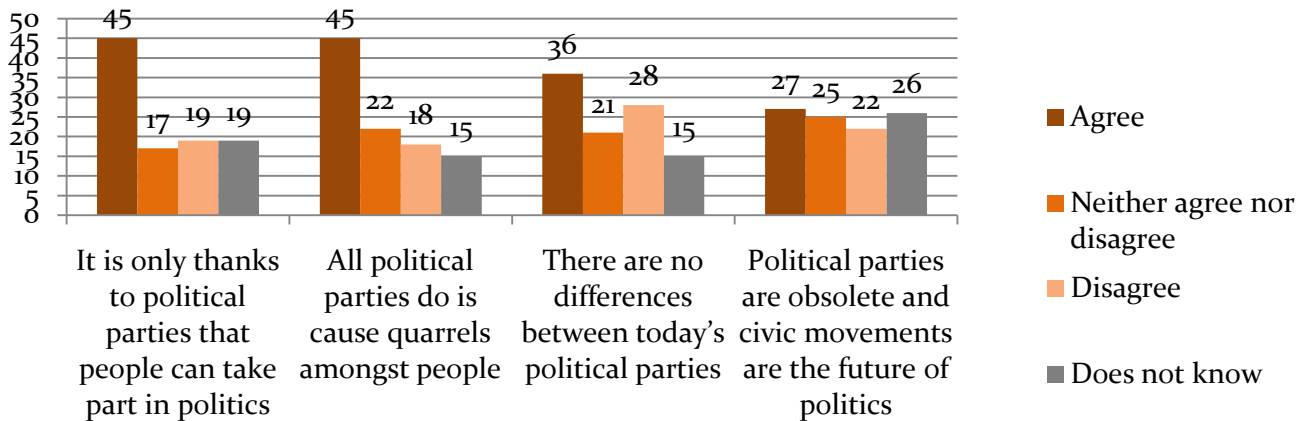
Chart 6.5. ...And, in your opinion, why do most active members of the public engage in politics? (In %)



We also analysed perceptions of political parties (see Chart 6.6). Respondents were presented four statements and asked to state to what extent they agreed with each of them on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 meant ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 meant ‘strongly agree’). The greatest agreement was

recorded with the statements that ‘It is only thanks to political parties that people can take part in politics’ and ‘All political parties do is cause quarrels amongst people’, with 45 percent of all respondents each voicing their accord. Similar numbers of respondents (19 and 18 percent, respectively) reported disagreeing with either statement. The second statement was found to be most acceptable to respondents who are generally not interested in politics and those who have no trust (at all) in political parties (a total of 60 percent).

Chart 6.6. Respondents’ perceptions of political parties (In %)



Slightly more than one-third of those polled (36 percent) agreed that ‘There are no differences between today’s political parties’. As in the case of the two statements cited above, most respondents who agreed with this assertion reported not being interested in politics, with a solid number also reporting interest but refusing to engage personally. As expected, most respondents who failed to differentiate between the various political parties lacked trust in them: in this case the figure reached as much as 85 percent. Fewer than one-third of those polled disagreed with the statement that there were no differences between parties, with this frequency of responses mainly influenced by respondents who sought information about politics whilst staying aloof personally.

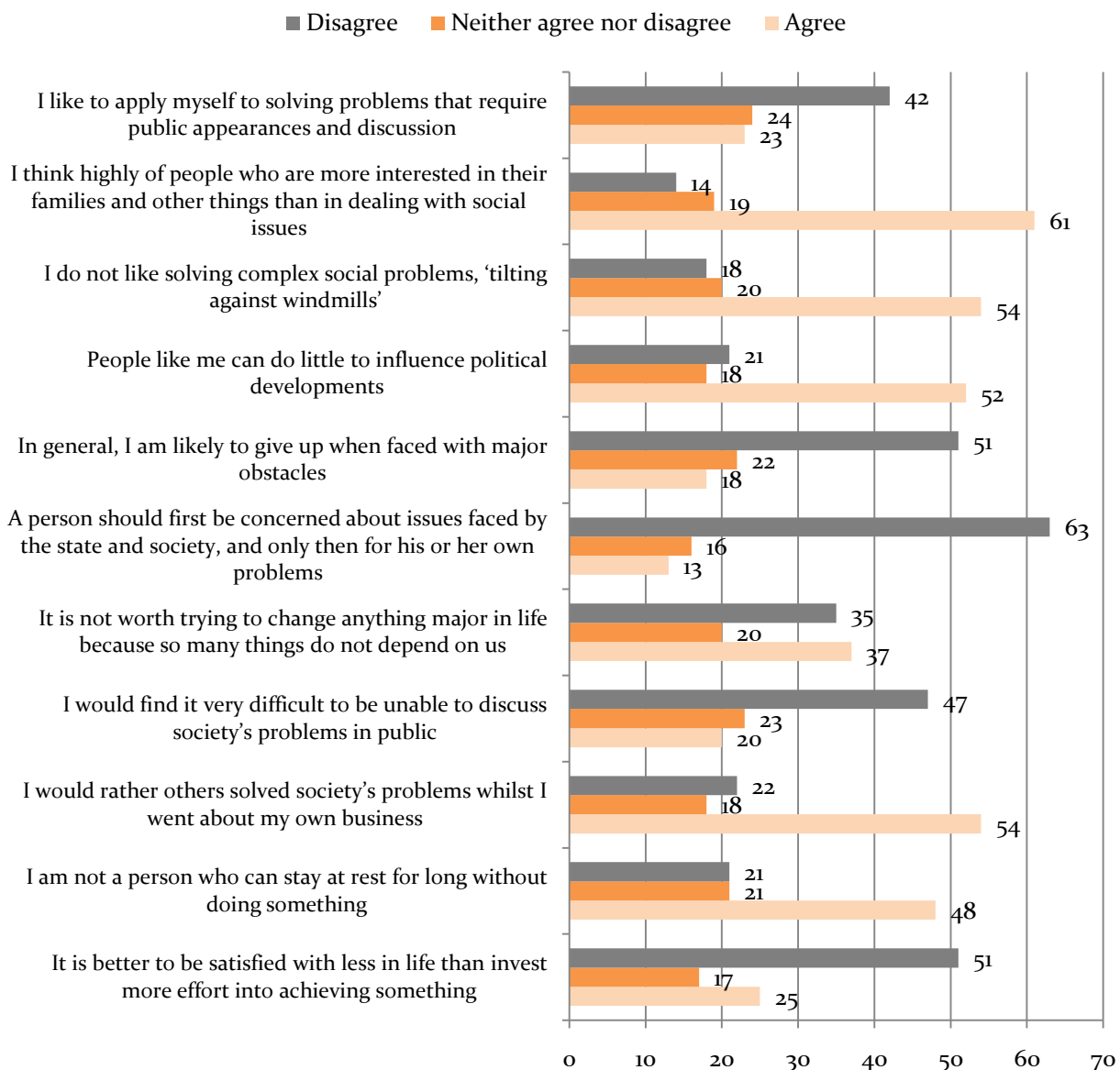
Finally, the view that ‘political parties are obsolete’ and that civic movements (rather than parties) are the future of politics is an assertion that 27 percent of those polled agreed with (see Chart 6.6). Here the answers are divided nearly equally, with 22 percent disagreeing with this claim and another 25 percent neither agreeing nor disagreeing (with another 26 percent not being able to answer). The sole exception was provided by voters of Saša Janković: in this group, 54 percent of those polled agreed that civic movements would come to the fore in the future.

7. Political engagement and value orientations

Seeking to find an explanation for the exceptionally low level of both civil and political engagement in Serbia, we offered respondents a battery of questions containing statements we could use to gauge value orientations and link them with engagement levels (see Chart 7.1)

The findings reveal pronounced introversion and espousal of traditional values, with respondents at the same time rejecting more universal principles and not being likely to strive to attain higher goals.

Chart 7.1. Value orientations and political engagement (In %)



Thus, most respondents reported shying away from public appearances or discussions to resolve problems (this view was shared by 42 percent of those polled, with 23 percent claiming this approach suited them). Also, respondents claimed they did not like 'solving complex social

problems, “tilting against windmills” (54 percent); and claimed they would feel fine if denied the opportunity to ‘discuss society’s problems in public’ (47 percent).

Low political engagement correlates with conservative values, expressed primarily through conformism and a preference for personal security. Indeed, most respondents see the poor living standards, high unemployment, and job and income insecurity as the reasons driving the recent protests, and would take part in demonstrations only if the security and livelihood of their family were put into jeopardy. Respondents’ answers bear out this assumption, in particular the degree of conformism and inclination to prioritise personal security. As many as 61 percent of those polled agreed they thought highly of ‘people who are more interested in their families and other things than in dealing with social issues’; 63 percent disagreed with the statement that ‘A person should first be concerned about issues faced by the state and society, and only then for his or her own problems’; and more than half (54 percent) claimed they would rather have others solve their problems whilst they went about their own business.

More than one-half of those who claimed never to vote in elections (56 percent, with another 19 percent unable to say) agreed that others should tackle social issues and leave them free to deal with their own problems. A total of 55 percent of respondents who never vote also disagreed with the statement that ‘A person should first be concerned about issues faced by the state and society, and only then for his or her own problems’. Moreover, as many as 65 percent of those who claimed never to follow political developments would prefer it if others tackled social problems and left them do deal with their own individual issues.

Serbian public opinion is characterised by a form of fatalism and a belief that individuals cannot change anything. Over one-half of those polled (52 percent) do not believe they can influence political developments; opinions are divided as to whether anything major can ever be changed in the course of one’s life, as many things do not depend on any one person (37 percent of those polled agreed with this assertion, whilst 35 percent disagreed; one in five were indecisive).

Comparative research³ has revealed a positive correlation between democracy and political engagement: the more democratic a society, the more its citizens are likely to be politically active, and vice versa. In view of these findings, the low level of political activism in Serbia comes as no surprise.

³ Vecchione *et al.* (2015). ‘Personal values and political activism: A cross-national study’. *British Journal of Psychology*, 106, pp. 84–106.

8. Public perceptions of the 2017 presidential election

A presidential election was held in Serbia on 2 April 2017. After one candidate won without a second-round runoff vote, uncommonly for Serbia although perhaps expected in this case, a debate unfolded in society as to whether and to what extent the entire electoral process complied with all democratic standards and procedures.

This section of the report will devote particular attention to measuring respondents' subjective perceptions of the electoral process, views of the conduct and behaviour of all actors in the election, and public perceptions of the current electoral system and the manner in which popular representatives in legislative bodies at the national and local levels are elected.

A Uniform Electoral Register Law was enacted in 2011 that significantly improved voter registration. Nevertheless, Serbia is still facing issues due to outdated and imprecise electoral rolls, which have been jeopardising the already fragile trust in the electoral process. Official data show that slightly more than 54 percent of all adult citizens of Serbia voted in the last presidential election. This particular election was seen as highly significant for opposition candidates, who expected greater voter turnout, which would have led to a second runoff ballot and so weakened the position of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party and its leader, Aleksandar Vučić. In this regard, the relatively low turnout, at just above one-half of all voters, was seen as a failure, with experts in the field wondering why members of the public were choosing not to vote.

It ought to be noted that the 54 percent turnout in the presidential election is based on the official figure of 6.7 million registered voters. The voting age in Serbia is 18, and, as such it is unsurprising that the number of registered voters is lower than the population figure (according to the latest census) by just 400,000.⁴

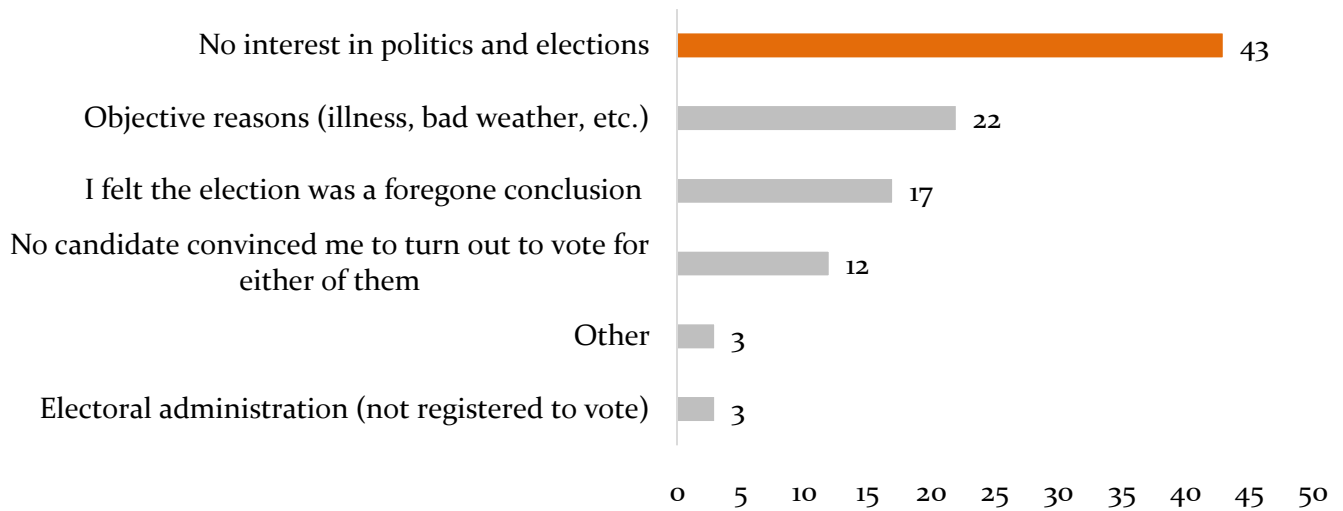
On the other hand, unofficial estimates put the number of voters actually able to turn out to vote in Serbian elections at between 5 and 5.5 million, substantially fewer than indicated by official figures released by the NIC. Explaining this difference requires answering the question of how many people really voted in the latest Serbian election.

An exceptionally high percentage of the respondents in our survey, as many as 79 percent, claimed to have voted. This figure obviously ought to be taken with some reservations, as this is a socially desirable answer, meaning that some members of the public will say they voted even if they actually did not. Nevertheless, voter turnout was much higher than suggested by official NIC data.

Most members of the non-voting group, which accounts for slightly more than one-fifth of all respondents (21 percent), admitted they had not voted because they were not interested in politics and elections at all; see Chart 8.1.

⁴ A more detailed discussion about the reasons for the disproportion between the number of registered voters and the population figure according to the 2011 Census can be found online at cesid.rs/sta-radimo/izvestaj-sa-predsednickih-izbora-2017-godine [in Serbian].

Chart 8.1. Why did you not vote in the presidential election?



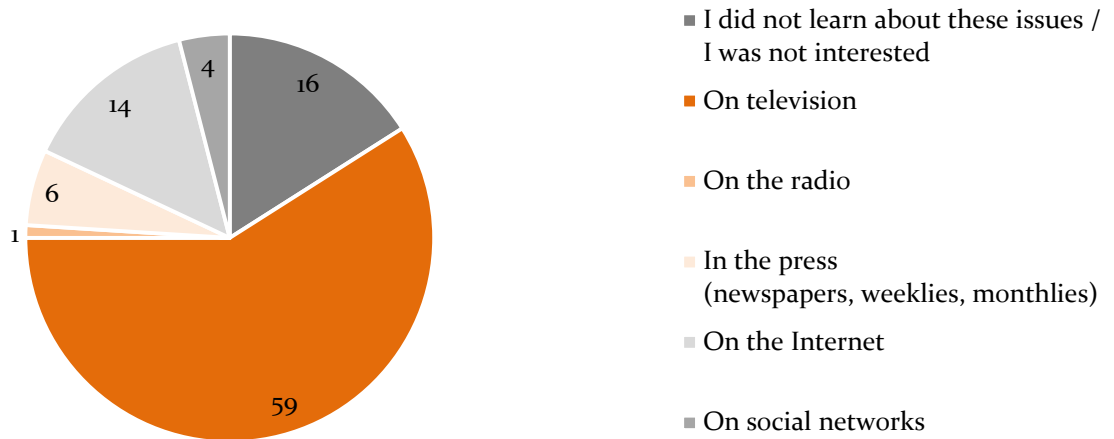
This answer is followed in second place by objective reasons, mainly illness or inability to visit the polling station, cited by somewhat more than one fifth of those polled (22 percent). Ranked third is apathy and a belief that the result was a foregone conclusion, reported by 17 percent of those polled as their reason to stay away.

It is important to note that 12 percent of all respondents reported they had not voted mainly because no candidate had been able to convince them to lend their support in the course of the election campaign.

Abstinent demographics reveal young people are less likely to vote to an above-average extent; this is particularly true of those who recently gained suffrage (the 18 to 29 age group). These respondents are usually still at university and are yet to show basic interest in political developments. Age plays an exceptionally important role, but women, another vulnerable group, are also less likely to be interested in the electoral process than men.

Apart from concerns about the voter register, presidential candidates supported by opposition parties also voiced a number of objections about the behaviour of the media in the election campaign. The refusal of Serbia’s sole media regulator, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), to monitor the broadcast media’s coverage of the election campaign has lent added weight to the opposition’s complaints about the lack of oversight of the media and the numerous irregularities that marred the campaign.

Chart 8.2 – How did you most often learn about presidential candidates and their activities in the election campaign?

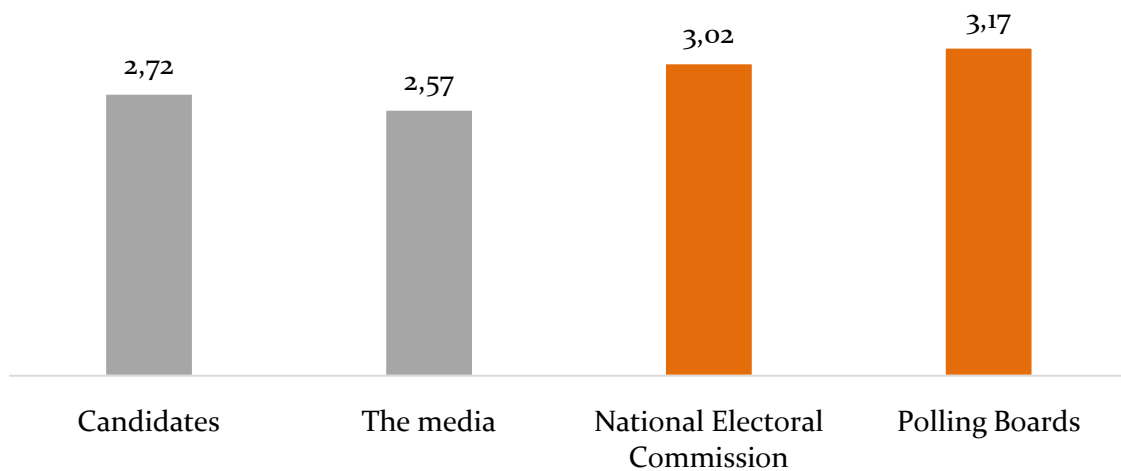


The importance of overseeing media reporting during an election campaign is also highlighted by the fact that 59 percent of those polled cited television as the key means of learning about presidential candidates and their campaigning; see Chart 8.2.

Although online campaigning, including via social networks, has recently gained prominence, our findings reveal television is still the primary source of political information in Serbia. Fewer than one-fifth of those polled (18 percent) sought information about presidential candidates online, including on web sites (14 percent) and social networks (4 percent).

Traditional media, such as radio and the press, which once played a key role in disseminating information, are slowly receding into obsolescence in Serbia.

Chart 8.3. Perceived contribution to freedom and fairness of election



The impact of the media on the electoral process remains very pronounced, and as such the low score given to media involvement in the electoral campaign is a cause for concern. See Chart 8.3.

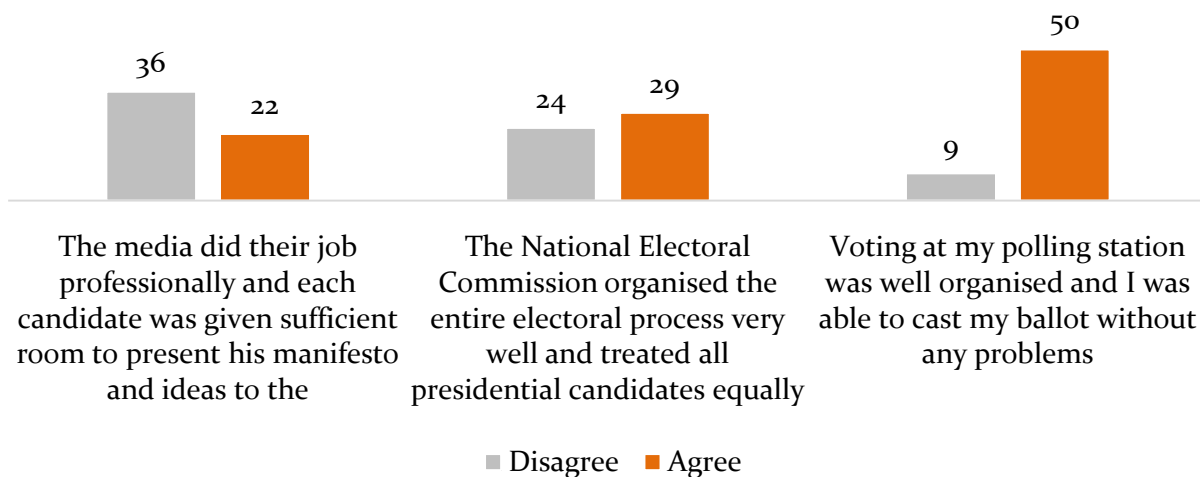
We asked respondents to assess the behaviour of *candidates, the media, NIC, and Polling Boards* in the course of the campaign on a score from 1 to 5 (with 1 being worst and 5 being best). The findings show that the citizens were highly critical of the media coverage of the elections and how presidential candidates were portrayed, giving media outlets the average score of 2.57. The candidates themselves fared somewhat better, with 2.72, but their relatively low score may be explained by the brief but very dirty campaign, where candidates often exceeded the bounds of common decency when interacting with one another.

In contrast, the NIC and Polling Boards received high scores, perhaps even surprisingly so. Notwithstanding the criticism levelled at the NIC in the course of the campaign and after the polling was complete, respondents awarded this body an average score of 3.02. Polling Boards received an average score of 3.17, making them the best-rated stakeholder in the election process.

The NIC and Polling Boards were seen in a more favourable light mainly because this election cycle did not involve more than one poll at the same time, which made the work of these electoral bodies much easier than for the last election, held in April 2016.

Exceptional public criticism of the media and favourable impressions of Polling Boards were additionally borne out by respondents' agreement or disagreement with the statements shown in Chart 8.4.

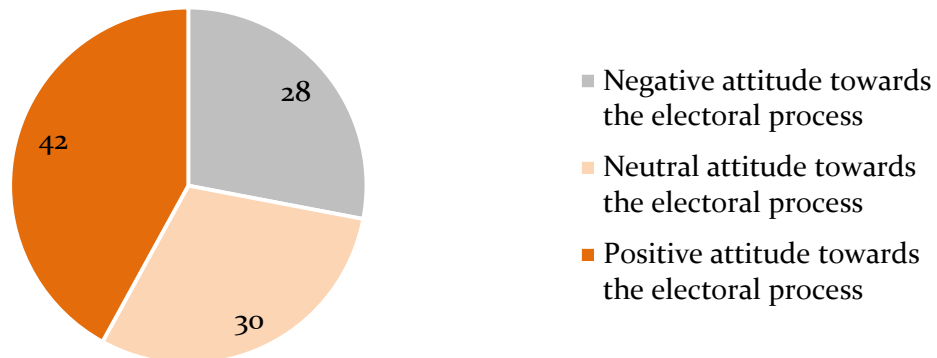
Chart 8.4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



More than one-third of those polled (36 percent) felt the media were neither professional nor allowed each candidate sufficient space to present his ideas to the public. As few as one in five respondents (22 percent) believed the media showed professionalism and neutrality throughout the election.

By contrast, one-half of those polled saw Polling Boards as organised and able to allow members of the public to cast their ballots without difficulty, whilst only one in 11 respondents (9 percent) disagreed with this statement. A total of 29 percent of those polled were happy with the NIC's performance, and slightly fewer did not agree that the NIC was successful in managing the electoral process.

Chart 8.5. Perceptions of the electoral process

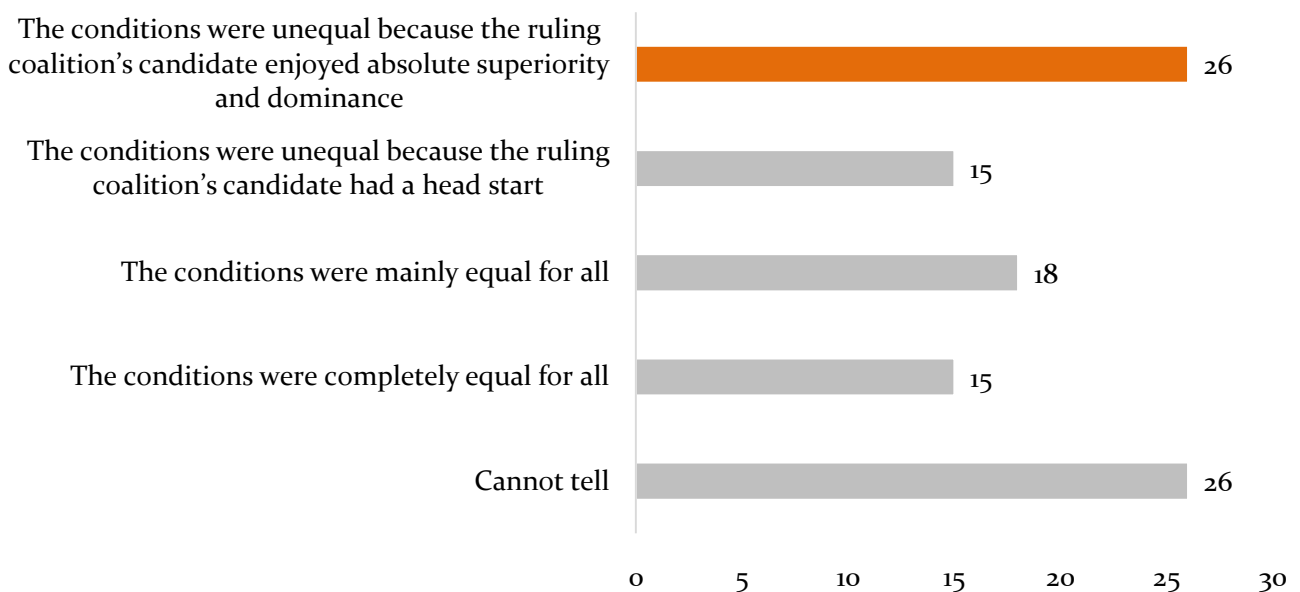


Respondents’ agreement or disagreement with the statements shown in Chart 8.4 allowed us to generate a synthetic indicator that reveals overall perceptions of Serbia’s most recent election. This indicator takes into account the behaviour of the media, the NIC, and Polling Boards, the institutions whose work we felt respondents could reasonably gauge. The findings are shown in Chart 8.5.

Slightly more than two-fifths of all respondents (42 percent) saw this year’s election in a positive light. A total of 28 percent of those polled perceived it negatively, whilst 30 percent had neither a negative nor a positive view of the 2017 presidential election.

As expected, views of the electoral process fully correlate with public perceptions of the conditions that presidential candidates faced in presenting their ideas to the public; see Chart 8.6.

Chart 8.6. Did all candidates have equal opportunities to present their manifestos and ideas to the Serbian public?

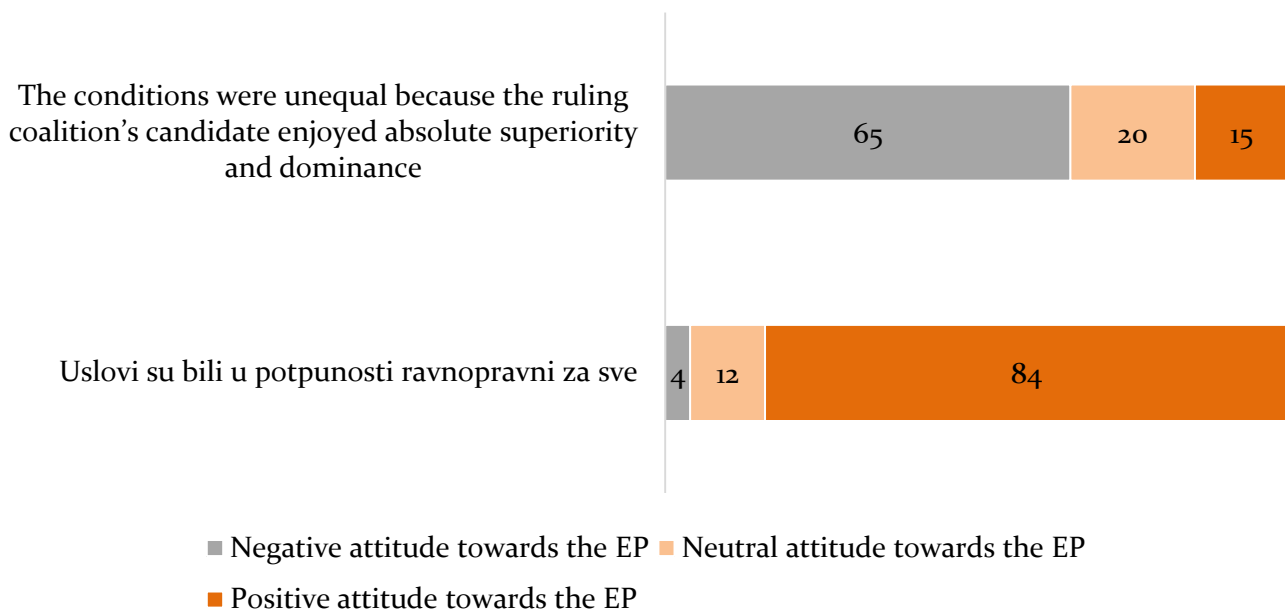


Two-fifths of those polled (41 percent) felt the election was neither free nor fair, as the ruling party’s candidate was greatly favoured – or, at the very least, enjoyed an initial advantage – over his opponents. As many as two-thirds of this group (65 percent) viewed the entire electoral process in a negative light.

By contrast, one-third of those polled (33 percent) believed the conditions were ‘completely’ or ‘mainly’ equal for all participants in the electoral process; see Chart 8.7.

The view that the election was free and fair was accompanied by positive perceptions of the electoral process.

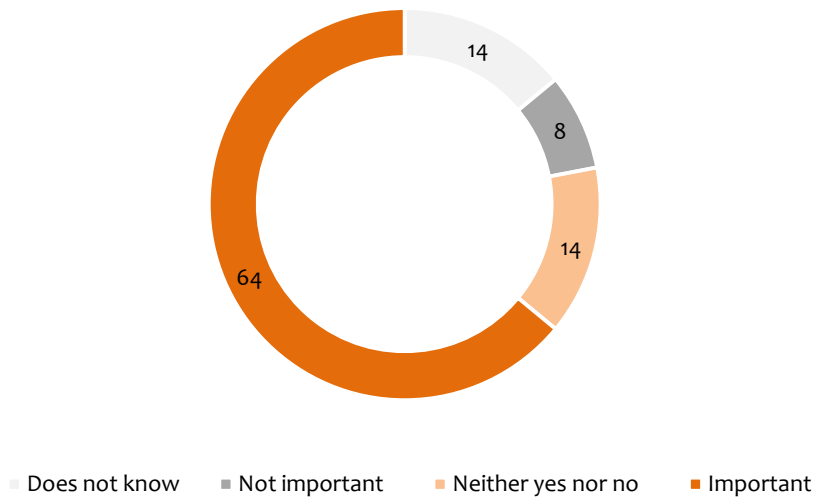
Chart 8.7. Relationship between perceptions of electoral conditions and views of the electoral process



As many as 84 percent of respondents who felt conditions in this year’s election were equal for all candidates held a positive view of the electoral process, whilst a mere 4 percent of this group saw it in a negative light.

The public’s markedly critical attitude towards the conditions in which the election was held has additionally highlighted the need for civic monitoring of the electoral process. This conclusion is further evidenced by the fact that nearly two-thirds of those polled (64 percent) affirmed the importance of citizen oversight in elections, thus revealing an interest in ensuring greater transparency of the polls through personal participation; see Chart 8.8.

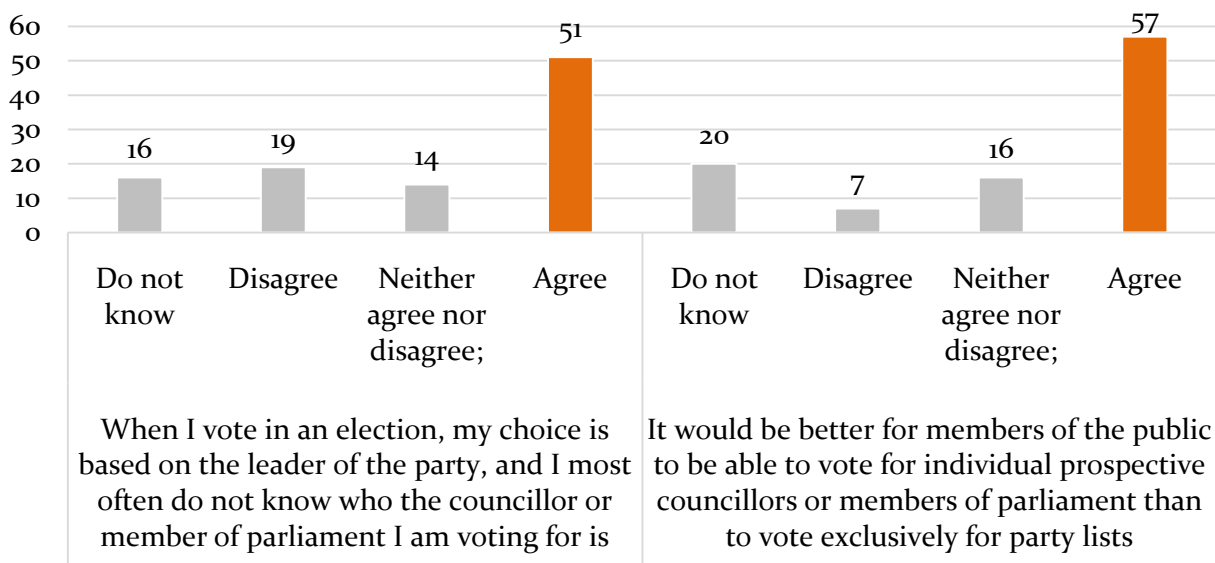
Chart 8.8. How important is civic monitoring of the electoral process to you?



Members of the public are not just more aware of the importance of citizen oversight of elections: the percentage of respondents, who favour changes to the electoral system, in particular through its personalisation, has remained remarkably high.

Over one-half of those polled (51 percent) admitted their choices were guided by party leaders rather than the potential Members of Parliament/local councillors on the electoral list; see Chart 8.9. As few as one in five respondents (19 percent) denied basing their voting preference on the person leading their preferred political side. Although most members of the public are currently prepared to cast their votes based on their perceptions of the party leader rather than of the people expected to represent popular interests in the local or national parliament, the findings indicate a clear desire for this practice to end.

Chart 8.9. Do you agree with the following statements?



More than one-half of all those polled (57 percent) agreed that members of the public ought to be allowed to vote for individual prospective Members of Parliament or local councillors instead of solely for party tickets.

Moreover, nearly two-fifths of those polled (37 percent) felt that the current electoral system and manner in which Members of Parliament are elected did not allow the will of the people to be articulated in elections. By contrast, as few as 16 percent of those polled did not see the electoral system as an obstacle to the expression of their political will.

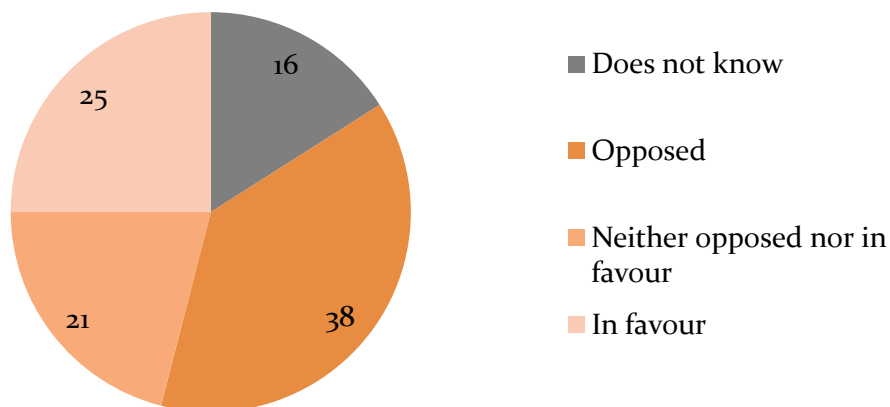
9. Public perceptions of protests following the 2017 presidential election

A series of protests took place in the weeks following the presidential election of 2 April 2017, primarily in Belgrade, but also in other Serbian towns, cities, and municipalities. These demonstrations lasted, with shorter or longer interruptions, until the inauguration of Serbia’s new president-elect (31 May 2017), and, on some days, numbered thousands of protestors.

This section will focus on public perceptions of these post-election protests. To determine them, we asked members of the public about their views of the protests and their nature, whether they would take part in them, and whether they felt more such demonstrations could be expected in the future.

Chart 9.1 shows how members of the public perceived the protests. Most of those who had an opinion did not support the demonstrations (38 percent); one in four expressed approval; and one in five were undecided (neither supportive nor opposed). A total of 16 percent of those polled did not have an opinion.

Chart 9.1. Public perceptions of post-election protests(In %)

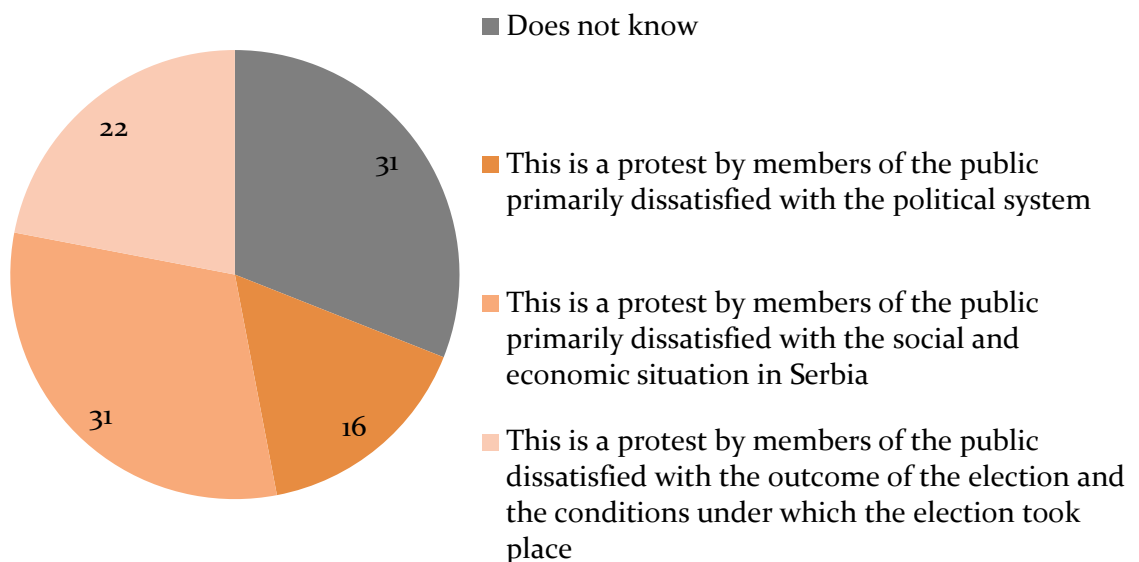


Men were more likely to give more definite responses (‘strongly opposed’ or ‘strongly in favour’); women were predominant in the ‘in favour’ group (51 percent vs 49 percent of men); and men were predominant in the ‘opposed’ group (56 percent vs 44 percent of women). In addition, support to

the protests decreased with respondent age: 39 percent of the 18 to 29s reported being in favour of the protests; this figure declined to 29 percent in the 40 to 49 age group, 21 percent in the 50 to 59 group, and 16 percent for the 60 to 69s, dropping to 14 percent in the over-70 age group. As expected, respondents who voted for president-elect Vučić were the least likely to be in favour of the demonstrations (with a mere 7 percent voicing support).

Chart 9.2 shows public views of the nature of the protests and the reasons for their emergence. Although nearly one-third of those polled (31 percent) were unable to say what the protesters had set out to achieve, the same number felt that disaffection with the social and economic system was the key driver of the demonstrations. A total of 16 percent of those polled believed the protests were caused first and foremost by unhappiness with the political system, whilst 22 percent saw them as an expression of dissatisfaction with the outcome of the election and the conditions in which it was held.

Chart 9.2. Views of the nature of post-election protests (In %)



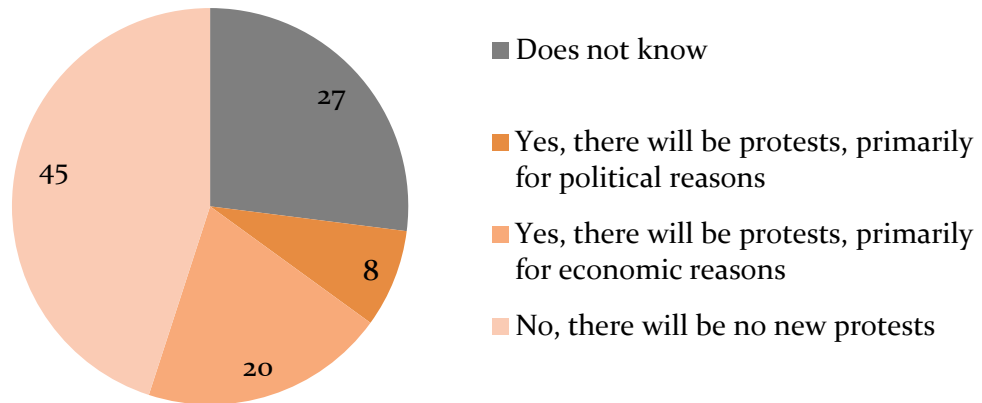
Women were more likely to feel the protests were driven by unhappiness with the social and economic situation (52 percent vs 48 percent of men), whilst men were more convinced that dissatisfaction with the outcome of the election and its conditions were the primary causes (58 percent vs 42 percent of women). No statistically significant difference was detected in answers by respondent age.

Finally, we were interested in knowing what the respondents thought about the future of the protests (see Chart 9.3) and whether they would consider joining the protests if they were to become more widespread (Chart 9.4).

A total of 28 percent of those polled believed that a new wave of protests would take place at a future date; of these, 8 percent felt that economic circumstances would provide the initial stimulus, whilst one in five (20 percent) claimed political developments would give impetus to the protests.

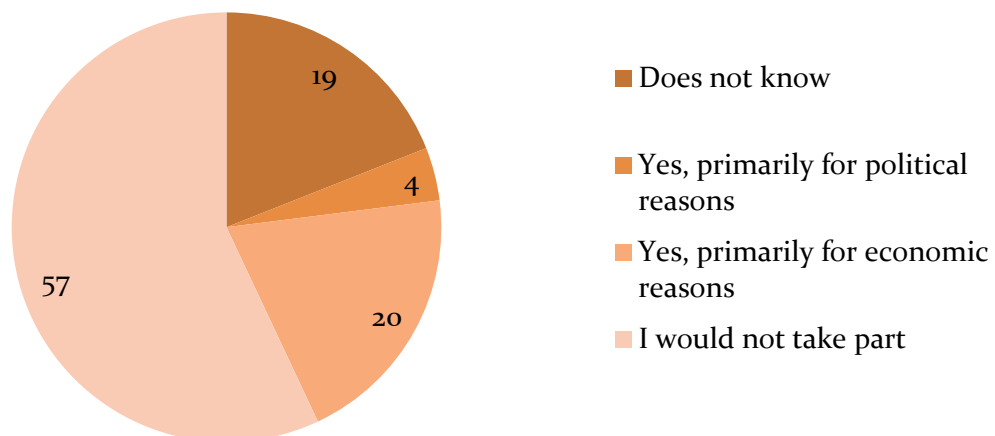
By contrast, an overwhelming majority (45 percent) nevertheless felt no new demonstrations were in store. This view was shared primarily by men and older respondents.

Chart 9.3. Do you feel these protests will lead to mass protests that can be expected in Serbia in the future? (In %)



Nevertheless, even if new demonstrations were to take place, most respondents would not take part (see Chart 9.4).

Chart 9.4. If protests did take place in the future, would you be ready to take part in them? (In %)



More than one-half of those polled (57 percent) reported not being ready to participate in demonstrations even if they did occur, whilst nearly one in four of those polled would be prepared to take part (of these, one in five would do so for economic reasons, and 4 percent would be motivated by political views). Nineteen percent of those polled could not tell or were otherwise unable to answer this question.

Respondents from the 18 to 29 and 30 to 39 age groups were the most likely to take part in possible protests, with women more inclined to cite economic concerns as the reason.

There are three key considerations that ought to be borne in mind when examining the Serbian public's appetite for protests: (1) the context of the research; (2) current levels of support for the various political parties; and (3) confidence in institutions, or lack thereof, and the level of development of civil society. Serbia has long been in transition, and has been facing high unemployment rates and poor living standards (with 33 percent of those polled believing their quality of life is 'barely tolerable' or 'intolerable'). These circumstances have engendered a sense of apathy amongst members of the public, who believe their own likely impact on changes to their environment is low or non-existent (see also Chart 7.1 showing value orientations). Moreover, protesting requires major mobilisation and sufficient resources, which are difficult to obtain given that Serbia's largest party enjoys the support of more than half of public opinion. Finally, trust in institutions is low, and the civil society is underdeveloped (and its relationship with the public blighted by deep distrust); taken together, these factors militate against the creation of a critical mass that could spark protests.

10. Trust in institutions and perceptions of EU/NATO integrations

10.1. Trust in institutions

Confidence in institutions is a key issue measured by this research, and is important not only for the legitimacy of government as a whole, but also for ongoing political developments and potential changes, and affects political and civic activism in both direct and indirect ways.

The main conclusion is that trust in all institutions is on the decline, certainly to some extent reflecting the timing of the research (which came after an election, when confidence indicators are usually lower), but perhaps also a bellwether of change if the shift persists for a longer period of time (see Chart 10.1).

Serbians place the most confidence in the armed forces, police, and churches/religious institutions; these trends have been in evidence for a number of years now. The armed forces have emerged as the most trusted institution (as reported by 57 percent of those polled), albeit with a drop of five percentage points relative to one year ago. Churches/religious institutions are now ranked second, with 46 percent of respondents reporting confidence in them (and another 23 percent claiming they did not place any trust in them), a significantly worse result than in 2016 (58 percent) or 2015 (61 percent). The police are ranked third, with a confidence rating of 39 percent, nearly 10 percentage points down on the findings of the last two years.

The second group of institutions (with trust exceeding 30 percent) comprise the Government and President, with trust and mistrust levels nearly equal, at 33 and 38 percent, and 32 and 38 percent, respectively. The interregnum before the inauguration of president-elect Vučić and confusion of his two offices by the public seems to be the reason for this finding. The upcoming period will show

whether Mr Vučić's popularity will carry over into his new office, and how his departure will affect confidence in the Government, hitherto at a relatively high level.

Table 10.1. Trust in institutions, in % (2015-2017)

* Levels of trust in these four institutions are not comparable to findings recorded before 2015, as the questions were either not asked or were not worded identically.

Churches, religious institutions	2017	23	46
	2016	21	58
	2015	14	61
Armed forces	2017	15	57
	2016	17	62
	2015	14	58
Police	2017	32	39
	2016	26	49
	2015	21	48
Serbian Government	2017	38	33
	2016	33	44
	2015	28	39
Serbian President	2017	38	32
	2016	40	34
	2015	34	37
Serbian Parliament	2017	44	25
	2016	38	33
	2015	35	26
The media	2017	48	15
	2016	54	18
	2015	42	19
Political parties	2017	56	11
	2016	58	14
	2015	55	11
Non-governmental organisations	2017	43	16
	2016	44	19
	2015	40	14
Judiciary*	2017	46	21
	2016		
	2015		
Mayors*	2017	36	28
	2016		
	2015		
Municipal/Town/City Assemblies*	2017	38	24
	2016		
	2015		
Trade unions*	2017	43	14
	2016		
	2015		

All other institutions enjoy the trust of less than 30 percent of all respondents. Of all the authorities we asked the respondents to rate, local institutions – mayors (trusted by 28 percent of those polled) and municipal/city/town parliaments (24 percent) – have fared somewhat better. The national parliament is seen in a similar light, with one-quarter of the population expressing confidence in the legislature, a figure close to that seen in 2015 but 8 percentage points lower than in 2016.

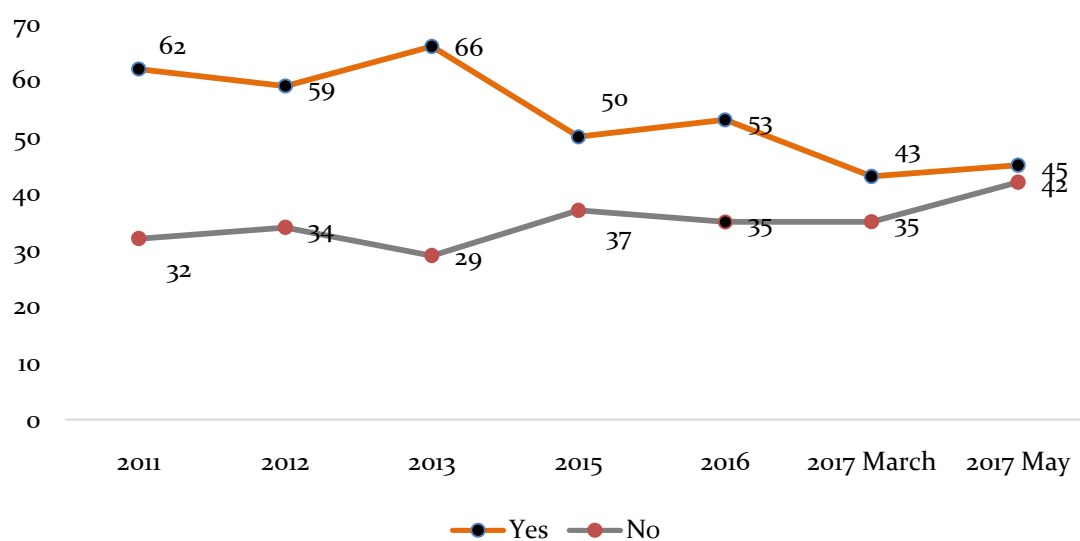
The judiciary enjoys the approval of 21 percent of those polled, but is mistrusted by as many as 46 percent. Institutions that ought to articulate citizens’ wishes in the political system, are by and large mistrusted by the public: this is the case with non-governmental organisations (trusted by 16 percent of those polled), the media (15 percent), trade unions (14 percent), and political parties (11 percent). Political parties have retained the dubious distinction of being Serbia’s least trusted institutions, with as many as 56 percent of all respondents reporting no confidence in them.

10.2. Perceptions of Euro-Atlantic integrations

The downward trend in support for Serbia joining the EU in evidence since early 2016 has now been halted, but approval of the EU still stands at under 50 percent: it is currently at 45 percent, 2 percentage points higher than in mid-2016. By contrast, the number of opponents of the EU has increased from a previously stable 35 to 37 percent to as much as 42 percent, the first time in the past six years that this percentage has broken the two-fifths barrier.

Opposition to the EU is more likely to come from men aged 18 to 29 and 40 to 49 with completed four-year secondary education, school/university students and farmers, and those residing in suburban areas.

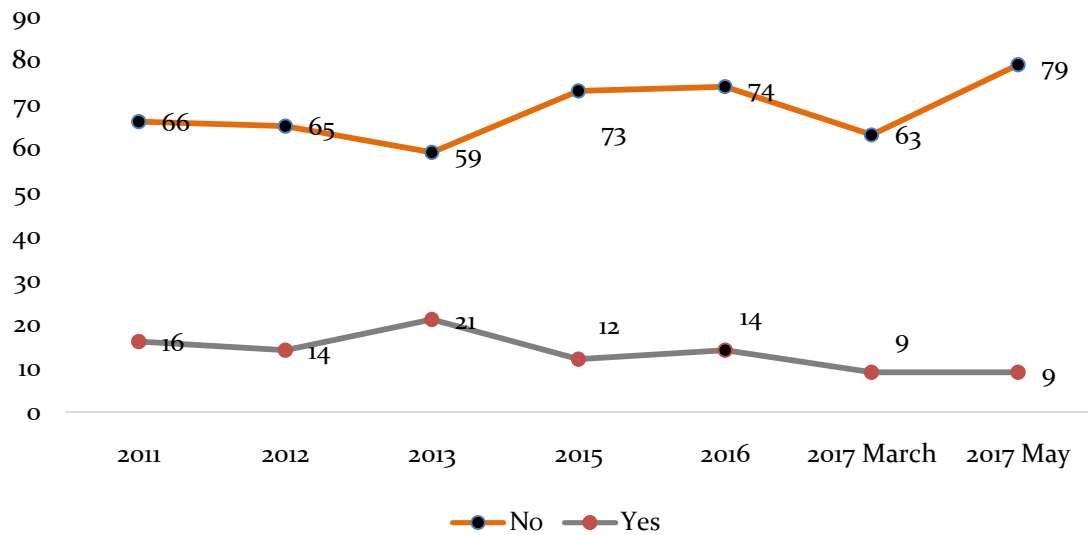
Chart 10.1. Approval of the European Union, in % (2012-2017)



Support for Serbia’s joining NATO has remained at the 9 percent seen in early 2017. Approval of the Alliance had stood at more than 10 percent until the beginning of this year, with a peak of 21

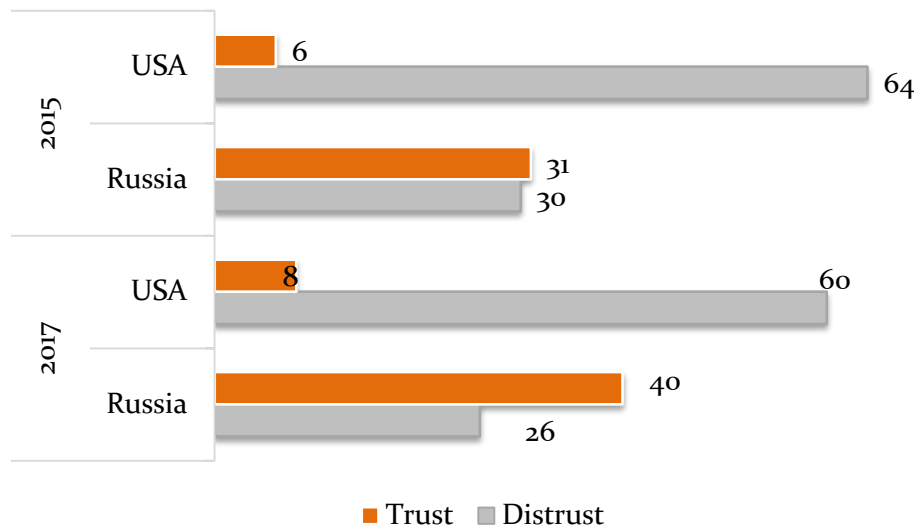
percent recorded in 2013. Nevertheless, the percentage of opponents to NATO is currently on the increase: their number now stands at as much as 79 percent, the greatest figure seen since 2011.

Chart 10.2. Approval of NATO, in % (2012-2017)



Finally, we asked respondents about their approval of the two global superpowers, the US and Russia. A total of 40 percent now approve of Russia, 9 percentage points more than two years ago, whilst mistrust has declined somewhat to 26 percent (4 percentage points less than in 2015). The US enjoys the approval of 8 percent of those polled, with 60 percent expressing mistrust. Both of these figures have declined slightly relative to 2015.

Chart 10.3. Approval of the United States and Russia, in % (2015, 2017)



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