

Public Opinion Research in Serbia in the Non-pluralist Period

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Introduction: The beginnings of public opinion polls in Serbia

During the 1950s, the political conditions and other circumstances were favorable for the foundation of institutions that would conduct empirical social science research in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which featured Serbia as one of the six federal states.¹

The break with Stalin (1948) and the introduction of the self-management system (1952) served to mitigate the political dictatorship and created niches for the critical reconsidering of

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social reality within the system of communist monism. Ten federal research institutions were founded at that time, including the Institut drustvenih nauka (Institute of Social Sciences—ISS) in 1957. In the beginning, the ISS served as a post-graduate school for young researchers from all six republics, the teachers being the most eminent scientists in the fields of sociology, law, political sciences, demography, and methodology (such as Joze Goricar, Milan Bartos, Jovan Djordjevic, Radomir Lukic, Rudi Supek, Vuko Pavicevic, and others). These students later became ISS employees. Especially important among them was Firdus Dzinic, who was the founder of an independent department within the ISS—the Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research. Founded in 1963, this was the first institution of its kind in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Another prominent figure is Niko Tos, who became the founder of the Center for Public Opinion Research and Mass Communications (1968) within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana.

The Centar za politikoloska istrazivanja i javno mnjenje—CPIJM (Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research—CPSPOR, as it was called since 1976) was multidisciplinary since its foundation. During the five decades of its existence, its employees have been sociologists (6), social psychologists (9), political scientists (11), jurists (7), social anthropologists (3), communication experts (3), and researchers in other social sciences (2). CPSPOR has continuously implemented its six programs: public opinion research, media research, election studies, and theoretical and methodological surveys, as well as occasionally conducting special empirical surveys of different social groups (youth, elites, workers, farmers) and phenomena (values, religiosity, political culture). During the half century of its existence,

CPSPOR has conducted approximately 250 research studies, that is, on the average five per year, varying between two to twenty per year.²

The first empirical public opinion polls were conducted in Serbia during the early 1950s by Odsek za studij programa Radio Beograda (Department for the Program Study of Radio Belgrade), later known as the Centar za istraživanje programa i auditorijuma RTV Srbije (Center for the Program and Audience Study of Serbian Radio and Television)—today a department within the Serbian Public Service featuring public opinion research both in its name and its activities. The archives of this institution mention a study by an unknown author entitled *Anketa Radio Beograda o muzickom programu* (Radio Belgrade Survey on the Music Program), conducted in 1952. This research involved 1,282 subscribers from 11 randomly selected settlements. It showed that at the time listeners preferred folk music, but also listened to other music genres. Allegedly, the first survey of Radio Belgrade listeners was conducted already in 1937.

However, the first public opinion survey featuring the necessary methodology (sampling, instruments, data processing, and the like) was conducted by the ISS inter-department public opinion group (the precursor to CPSPOR) in 1962, entitled *Jugoslovensko javno mnjenje o prednacrtu novog Ustava* (Yugoslav Public Opinion on the First Draft of the New Constitution). The team featured members from all Yugoslav republics and two provinces, except Macedonia: Ljubomir Tadic, Darinka Kostic, Stane Stanic, Dragomir Draskovic, Radivoje Marinkovic, Firdus Dzinic, Dimitrije Prodanovic, Milan Matic, Milivoje Trklja, Sergije Pegan, and Dusan Breznic. Their research results were published in an extensive volume in 1964 (Tadic et al.

² For a more detailed historical overview of the Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research and the Institute of Social Sciences, see Bacevic 1994: 267–291; Pantic 2009: 267–302. A detailed overview of empirical social research in Serbia is also available at <http://zacet.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?catalog=http%3A%2F%2Fzacet.gesis.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfCatalog%2FCatalog29&submode=catalog&mode=documentation&top=yes> (accessed 1 August 2014).

1964). This pioneering study can duly be considered the inception of public opinion research in the former Yugoslavia.

The main features of public opinion surveys in Serbia in the non-pluralist period (1963–2000)

Soon after the foundation of CPSPOR, in the second half of the 1960s, a series of periodical studies was initiated. From 1964 to 1970, CPSPOR conducted regular annual public opinion surveys in Yugoslavia, more precisely omnibus surveys usually pertaining to politics. These surveys were funded by the Fond za naučni rad Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije (Foundation for Scientific Work in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). The random samples for these surveys were constructed by the experts of the Federal Bureau of Statistics, and they varied in size from 2.500 to 4.500 respondents. The data collection was performed by face-to-face individual interviews, and the data were processed by the computer technology of the time. Finally, the reports were published in the ISS series *Jugoslovensko javno mnjenje* (Yugoslav Public Opinion). Having acquired extensive knowledge at US universities and institutes, Ljubomir Stojic, the first chairman of the Association of Psychologists of Serbia, founded the CPSPOR Fieldwork Service, which featured a two-stage organization. The first comprised regional instructors, primarily psychologists, who were responsible for the selection, training, and quality assurance of the work of the field interviewers based on standard manuals. At the beginning, the majority of field interviewers were teachers and social workers, but later psychologists prevailed (2/3). During the 1970s, the two-stage work of the Fieldwork Service was abandoned in favor of a centralized system of selection, training, and preparation for every

survey as well as rigorous control of the fieldwork (by post, telephone, personal visits to respondents, and sometimes re-interviewing). Many interviewers had worked for CPSPOR for years. Building interviewers' trust in and attachment to CPSPOR highly contributed to data quality while maintaining professional standards. From the very beginning, CPSPOR had a data processing section and an empirical data archive, and computer-processed data became available starting in the mid 1980s. The coordinator of data processing in the majority of cases was Professor Stanislav Fajgelj, the author of a number of methodology textbooks and of the NEDA database of CPSPOR and seven other Serbian research institutions.

During the 1960s, CPSPOR also conducted three election studies, managed by professors Milan Matic and Mijat Damjanovic and carried out with a group of associates (Matic et al. 1968; 1970; Pegan et al. 1966; 1983; Damjanovic 1965). In spite of the fact that elections at the time were usually a one-horse race, these studies revealed certain indicators and tendencies in voting behavior and pointed to the scope and shortcomings of the one-party system. The first studies of mass communication in Yugoslavia, the content and activities of the leading media, "international propaganda," and the like were also initiated in this period, and the first theoretical studies on these topics were published (Leandrov 1967; Orec 1966). The person in charge of these studies was Ljiljana Bacevic, who was a CPSPOR researcher from its foundation and headed the institution from 1989 to 2005.

Perhaps the most important activity of the ISS and CPSPOR in this period was international cooperation with the West, first and foremost with researchers from the USA. The above-mentioned Ljubomir Stojic managed to procure visits by highly renowned social scientists such as Erich Fromm, Edgar Moreno, Daniel Katz, and many others, who held several lectures in Belgrade. Daniel Katz from the University of Michigan and John Delamater, his assistant at the

time, spent an entire academic year (1967/68) at the ISS, working on a project on the forms of national identification and social community involvement, which included a comparative empirical study in the USA, Serbia, and Greece. This was a tremendously important experience for the members of the CPSPOR research team at the time. Other voluminous studies were also conducted during this period, including research on political culture (Zaninovich 1971; 1973), local leaders (Jacob 1971), value transformations in Yugoslav society, and prestige associated with certain professions (see Popovic 1977; Stanojevic 1979; Goati et al. 1977; Janicijevic et al. 1966).

However, the CPSPOR project that drew most attention at the time was accomplished in cooperation with Columbia University. The project was entitled *Opinion-Making Elites in Yugoslavia* (Barton et al. 1973; Dzinic et al. 1969). It was the first empirical study of elites in a communist state. A specific type of sample was applied—namely the snowball sample, assuming that the initial interviews were conducted with people who occupied the highest official positions in society, and then, based on largely sociometric questions, the persons mentioned by respondents were included in further interviewing. During 1968 and 1969, 517 persons from the six defined sectors were interviewed: legislators, federal administrators, mass organization leaders, economic leaders, mass communicators, and intellectuals. In the course of the project (1968–1974) several international conferences were held discussing elites and public-opinion making. The CPSPOR researchers working on this project were Firdus Dzinic, Ljiljana Bacevic, and Dragomir Pantic, as well as Vesna Pesic from the Center for Sociological Research. This study stirred much suspicion in the dogmatic circles of communist officials, culminating in 1969, when there was a debate in the Federal Assembly regarding this particular project, ending in the conclusion that it was potentially subversive. Besides this case, there were other problems with

the communist authorities at the time, which reflected negatively on constructing, funding, and using public opinion research data in practice. However, if the research data were favorable for the authorities, for example showing the widespread satisfaction of citizens with different aspects of life at the end of 1960s, or the low degree of ethnic frictions between the Yugoslav nations, public opinion research data were excessively promoted in the media.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the financing of CPSPOR from the federal funds for science ceased, since the funding of science was delegated to the federal republics. Unfortunately, it was not until 1976 that the Republic of Serbia began to fund the formerly federal institutes, including, for example, the Institut za nuklearne nauke u Vinci (Institute for Nuclear Science in Vinca) and the ISS. Even when it assumed its rights and duties as funder, ISS researchers were only financed to conduct fundamental and theoretical projects. The CPSPOR researchers were almost exclusively funded by the City of Belgrade for half a decade, which implied Savez komunista (the League of Communists), Savez sindikata (the Trade Union Alliance), Socijalisticki savez radnog naroda (the Socialist Alliance of Working People), and the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce. In the period between 1971 and 1976, CPSPOR was contracted to conduct four seasonal omnibus public opinion surveys and two special ones—dedicated to particular events and problems—in the capital city. Research contractors and beneficiaries were members of the Advisory Board for Surveys, which had the right to veto the content of the specific questions in the questionnaire, although this rarely happened in practice. At the time, the political climate was highly unfavorable to public opinion surveys, especially in Serbia, where Tito's regime persecuted all liberally oriented people. In spite of these financial and political obstacles, however, CPSPOR managed to conduct important studies on reforms of education, trade unions, the election system, the cultural life of Belgrade residents, political

culture among youths, and citizens' conceptions of social differences in society, to name just a few.

In the second half of the 1970s, CPSPOR signed a two-year contract with Savez omladine Srbije (the League of Serbian Youth) to conduct a set of surveys, which resulted in studies and publications on the interests, value orientations, political engagement, political socialization, cultural needs, and leisure time activities of the generation of young people aged 15 to 27 at the time. The majority of studies on youth was conducted by Dragomir Pantic, Mirjana Vasovic, and Srecko Mihailovic (see, for example, Mihailovic 1987; Pantic 1977; 1980; 1981; Pantic et al. 1984; Vasovic 1986a). The Republic of Serbia still remained indifferent toward this type of research, but at least it did not veto it, although it would have had the right to do so. It is interesting to note that until 2014, the Republic of Serbia did not commission a single research study from CPSPOR. However, during this time period, owing to the funding of the federal organs several surveys were conducted, embracing such topics as the influence of "foreign propaganda" in the country, international communication, the international image of Yugoslavia, citizens' political knowledge, and the like, managed mainly by Ljiljana Bacevic (1974; 1978; 1988; 1979) and Mirjana Vasovic (1978; 1986b).

Although these were difficult years for systematic public opinion research, there was still progress in the complexity of used methodologies and in the theoretical studies on the nature of public opinion and similar concepts. Summation or Likert type scales and indices were developed for several studies, and complex data processing was employed, e.g., analysis of variance and regression as well as factor analysis. Quota samples were perfected, and, whenever possible, comparisons were drawn with the results obtained by probability samples. It turned out that on the majority of vital questions, the differences between two sample types were

insignificant due to the fact that the construction of quota samples also included a three-stage random selection of research points (region—municipality—local community). When a quota sample was applied in the final stage at the local community level, interviewers used one type of random walk, choosing the person whose birthday was first, as well as other procedures from the range of random sampling. The interviewers' task was to include the first person meeting the quota criteria according to gender, generation, educational level, and ethnicity. Compared to random samples, quota models proved to be more practical and to entail a lower non-response rate (25–30% vs. 50%–300% in strict probability samples). Besides, the latter permanently over-represented the population of highly educated people at the expense of female respondents, older respondents, and ethnic minorities, which demanded further post-stratification.

After Tito's death (1980), serious economic and political crisis struck Yugoslavia, which further exacerbated the already difficult conditions of public opinion research in Serbia. Moreover, the CPSPOR contract for conducting public opinion surveys in Belgrade was terminated by Slobodan Milosevic immediately after he was appointed the leader of the Belgrade League of Communists. However, in spite of financial and other obstacles, CPSPOR researchers managed to conduct several important public opinion surveys on the following topics: public panel discussions in Belgrade (Mihailovic 1984), the present condition of religiosity and religious practices among Belgrade residents, and institutional characteristics of religious organizations—immediately before the beginning of the new religious boom (Bacevic 1991; Flere 1985; Pantic 1988; Vasovic 1985; Vujovic 1985), images of Belgrade in the Yugoslav press (Bacevic 1984), the engagement of members of the League of Communists (Milic et al. 1981), public opinion among Serbian and Yugoslav youth, and public opinion among Yugoslav working people (Joksimovic et al. 1974; Mihailovic 1986). In the second half of the 1980s, the

Yugoslav League of Communists developed a new interest in obtaining insights into the opinions of LC members on different aspects of the increasing social crisis, especially on the part of its officials inclined toward reforms. Several research studies indicated that territorial and national attachment became the primary criteria of differentiation of LC members and non-members instead of the once prominent educational, professional, and status factors. In this respect, citizens were more inert than the majority of members of the republic political elites. The latter endeavored to induce new kinds of divisions since they were aiming to dissolve Yugoslavia, even by means of armed conflict.

On the eve of break-up of Yugoslavia and the introduction of a multi-party system in Serbia (1990), CPSPOR conducted several public opinion surveys across the country in cooperation with institutions from other republics. The ensuing publications were entitled *Jugosloveni o društvenoj krizi* (Yugoslavs on the Social Crisis) (Grbic 1985), *Deca krize* (Children of the Crisis) (Mihailovic et al. 1990), and *Jugoslavija na kriznoj prekretnici* (Yugoslavia at the Turning Point of Its Crisis) (Bacevic 1991). These studies pointed to the gradual return of religiosity, a strengthening of nationalism and anomie, a general re-traditionalization of values, the decreasing legitimacy of the League of Communists, and the decline of its integrating role in society as well as the birth of pluralist expectations and demands on the part of citizens. The appearance of political parties and organization in more or less democratic elections (between 1991 and 1993, only four rounds of regular and early parliamentary elections were held in Serbia) contributed to increased interest in public opinion research on the part of political actors. However, the main contractors, financiers, and beneficiaries of these research results were not from Serbia, but various international institutions (media, NGOs, international organizations such as the UN and its agencies, the OSCE, etc.).

It was only later that CPSPOR started getting contracted for public opinion surveys by political parties, their demands ranging from monitoring election campaign results and establishing leader ratings and images to predictions of election results and strategic studies relevant for their long-term positioning. Three waves of CPSPOR surveys on the electoral orientations of Serbian citizens were conducted for the first multi-party parliamentary elections in Serbia in December 1990 (Goati 1994; 1995; Mihailovic 1991; 1994). During the first years of the multi-party system in Serbia, prognoses of election results based on CPSPOR research achieved a high level of precision. This level of accuracy was even surpassed in predicting the election results in Montenegro, conducted by CPSPOR researchers Ljiljana Bacevic, Dragomir Pantic, and Zoran Slavujevic.

Throughout the entire final decade of the twentieth century (until the defeat of Slobodan Milosevic in the presidential elections of 24 September 2000 and the democratic revolution on 5 October), opposition leaders (mostly former dissidents) fought together with ordinary citizens for free and democratic elections. Hence, this period can be considered non-pluralist since democracy was rather formal than existent in practice. In the aforementioned period, CPSPOR conducted a considerable number of public opinion surveys in Serbia and Montenegro, and the majority dealt with election topics. International cooperation was once again established, including, among other things, participation in the comparative project *Cross-Cultural Analysis of Values and Political Economy Issues* coordinated by Dan Voich (1994) at Florida State University. CPSPOR took part in a series of media projects conducted by Intermedia from Washington, D.C, conducting voluminous field studies in both Serbia and Montenegro. The cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences resulted in four conferences and four publications dealing with the different problems of the transition processes in the countries of

Eastern European. The cooperation with UNDP on the project *Early Warning* (eight panel studies in 1999/2000) helped prepare the fall of the Milosevic regime. Owing to the immense support and efforts of Ronald Inglehart and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Serbia and Montenegro were included in the third wave of the World Values Survey in 1996 (field work was financed by the Fund for an Open Society), as well as the fourth wave, also accomplished by CPSPOR. The publication of a volume entitled *Elections to the Federal and Republican Parliaments of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) 1990–1996* (Goati et al. 1998) in the book series *Founding Elections in Eastern Europe* edited by Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Charles L. Taylor at the Berlin Social Science Center was also possible owing to the enormous help on the part of Klingemann personally.

Apart from international cooperation, throughout the non-pluralist period CPSPOR maintained intensive cooperation and contacts with colleagues from other Yugoslav centers that conducted public opinion and similar research, especially with Niko Tos from Ljubljana, Ivan Siber from Zagreb, Sergej Flere from Novi Sad (and later Maribor), Dmtar Mircev from Skopje, and others. There was also close cooperation with colleagues from other institutes and the University of Belgrade, most notably Bora Kuzmanovic (projects on values, social activism, and youth unemployment), Silvano Bolcic (interests), Andjelka Milic (civic engagement), and Marijana Pajvancic, Sinisa Orlovic, and Zoran Stojiljkovic (elections, political parties). Not taking into account the engagement of members of other ISS centers, CPSPOR cooperated with over 120 researchers.

Concluding remarks: Preserving the past, embracing the future

From the mid 1950s until the end of the twentieth century, public opinion surveys enabled the collection of a vast amount of empirical data. One part of the findings was published in the form of reports or monographs immediately after the surveys had been conducted, available to all interested readers. In keeping with their personal and professional interests, CPSPOR researchers published both theoretical and review papers in monographs, journals, and proceedings dealing with the problem areas of the four basic programs. Many of these papers were widely acclaimed in the scientific and professional public, some even winning prizes. They cover various research topics: theoretical papers on the election system and political parties (Goati 2000; 2001; Goati et al. 1995; Pribicevic 2010; Lutovac 2005; 2006; Vukomanovic 1997), the nature of interests (Pantic 1980), information systems and mass communication (Dzinic 1978; Bacevic 2004; Matic 2007), the Biblical concept of propaganda and ancient propaganda (Slavujevic 1993; 1997), political culture (Vasovic 1998; Pantic/Pavlovic 2009; Pavlovic 2009; 2010; 2012; 2013; 2014), values (Kuzmanovic 1995; Pantic 1981; 1990; 1994; Pavlovic 2009), world public opinion (Pavlovic 2007), public opinion (Bacevic 1994; Pantic 2009; Pantic/Pavlovic 2007), ideology (Goati 1997; Boskovic 2006), expressing interests (Bolcic 1998), the ethnology of everyday life (Boskovic 2005), political marketing (Slavujevic 1999), political socialization (Vasovic, 1986a), secular religiosity (Pantic 1988), political legitimacy (Mihailovic 1997; Slavujevic/Mihailovic 1999), parliamentarianism (Goati 1995), youth as a social group (Mihailovic 1985; Mihailovic et al. 1990; Milic/Cickaric 1998), social capital (Ignjatovic 2011), gender equality (Boskovic et al. 2011), religiosity (Flere 1985), and public opinion formation (Lukic 1969). The references published in the period from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s are invaluable since they are the

only preserved evidence regarding the topics analyzed, the employed methods, and the main findings (for more detailed information regarding the ISS publications see Albahari/Jovanovic 2007).

On the other hand, almost all public opinion surveys conducted from the early 1990s until the present are archived in two quite unique research databases: the CPSPOR Research Data (CPSPOR internal archive) and the National Social Science Empirical Data Archive—NEDA (constructed for the consortium of social science institutes in Serbia) (Fajgelj/Ignjatovic 2009).³ The construction of NEDA was coordinated by CPSPOR and funded by UNESCO. Both databases enable searching through all research studies and offer various options of new or additional data processing. The NEDA database contains over one hundred surveys and all relevant pieces of information—raw data, variables, categories etc. Once the NEDA database becomes fully operational (currently it is in the final testing phase), it will create an excellent opportunity for performing longitudinal and trend analyses, repeated, extended, or in-depth analyses, meta-analytic and psychometric analyses.

Both earlier publications and archived data provide the possibility to obtain new or critical insights into the factors, processes, or consequences of some of the key events in the modern political history of Serbia, and thus serve as the best evidence of the turbulent times Serbian society has faced in the past decades. Hence, returning to them again and again will most certainly provide new perspectives and insights on these difficult experiences.

³ Some information regarding data archives can be obtained at <http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?catalog=http%3A%2F%2Fzocat.gesis.org%3A80%2Fobj%2Fcatalog%2FCatalog29&submode=catalog&mode=documentation&top=yes> (accessed 1 August 2014).

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