Support for the Measures in Fighting the COVID–19 Pandemic: The Role of Political Ideology[*]

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There is growing research evidence that political ideology is an important determinant of complying with the rules and recommendations aimed at fighting the coronavirus. This paper analyses the role of the left-right ideology self-positioning in supporting the government measures in fighting the COVID–19 pandemic and practicing the physical distancing guidelines in Serbia. The study was conducted online on a sample of 656 respondents. Two hierarchical multiple regression models with age, the COVID–19 experience, the perception of risk posed by the coronavirus, and political ideology predicting: (1) policy support and (2) physical distancing were tested. The results show that policy support was predicted by increasing risk perception and the right-leaning ideology. Risk perception predicted physical distancing practices, and so did age and the COVID–19 experience. The results also indicate that the relationship between risk perception and both policy support and physical distancing is moderated by political ideology. Perceiving the ongoing pandemic as a greater threat is related to higher policy support and physical distancing among the right-leaning persons only. They seem especially sensitive to the perceived threat.

Keywords: ideology, left-right, political conservatism, COVID–19, Serbia

Highlights:

- Political ideology significantly predicts policy support, but not physical distancing.
- Political ideology moderates the relationship between risk perception and policy support, as well as the relationship between the perception of risk and physical distancing.
- Risk perception is conducive to policy support and physical distancing primarily among the right-leaning persons.

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- Support for policy measures in fighting the COVID–19 pandemic and practicing physical distancing is significantly predicted by risk perception.

The ongoing COVID–19 pandemic is an unprecedented event in recent human history. In less than a year since the pandemic started, there have been over 40 million coronavirus cases and more than a million deaths. Since this is, literally, a matter of life and death, countries around the world reacted by imposing different measures aimed at slowing down the coronavirus transmission. These include the measures that people *should* follow (e.g., personal hygiene, physical distancing), as well as those that are, so to speak, state-*imposed* and prescribed (e.g., closing all the schools, forbidding public gatherings, curfews, lockdowns). Countries themselves differed in the number and strictness of government measures. Further, within-country, individual differences in readiness to comply with the measures and the attitude towards them are also present.

Growing evidence suggests that people's reactions to various aspects of the COVID–19 pandemic are, among other things, determined by their ideology. Understanding how political ideology interferes with the perception, beliefs, and behaviours related to the coronavirus is of both theoretical and practical relevance. In this paper, we aim at analysing the role of political ideology in practicing physical distancing and the support for government measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus in Serbia.

Politicizing the COVID–19: Different Ideology, "Different" Pandemic?

With rare exceptions that show cross-partisan consensus in response to the pandemic (Merkley et al., 2020), recent research consistently reports of the partisan/ideological polarization in public attitudes towards policy measures. A growing number of studies have shown the effects of political polarization on the issue of the COVID–19 pandemic in the USA. Democrats/liberals are, as a rule, more concerned over the pandemic than the Republicans/Conservatives (Gadarian et al., 2020), and more likely to change their behaviour in the ways suggested by the government (van Holm et al., 2020) or follow the social/physical distancing guidelines (Rosenfeld et al., 2020). Measuring a range of relevant variables (e.g., partisanship, 2020 Presidential vote intention, self-assessed ideological positioning), Gadarian et al. (2020) found that political differences were the single most consistent factor that differentiated the Americans' health behaviours and policy preferences.

These pieces of empirical evidence are quite in line with the view that ideology has a strong impact on the ways people think, feel, and behave (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). But what is particularly puzzling is the observed apathy and downplaying of the conservatives, just the group that should be especially sensitive to the threat that the coronavirus undoubtedly poses. Well-known social psychological theories and research support the idea that political conservatism is related to more prominent sensitiveness to threat, such as diseases and

physical threats (Jost et al., 2007; Jost et al., 2003; Conway et al., 2020; Nail et al., 2009). Disgust sensitivity is related to more conservative policy positions and voting intentions (Brenner & Inbar, 2015; Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer et al., 2012; Inbar, Pizarro et al., 2012; Liuzza et al., 2018). Furthermore, a recent study found that manipulating the saliency of COVID–19, i.e., activating thinking about the coronavirus, indirectly promotes social conservatism and the support for more conservative presidential candidates (Karwowski et al., 2020).

Conway et al. (2020) propose two possible explanations of the conservatives' disinterest in the ongoing situation. Conservatives may be uninterested because that is in accordance with their actual experience; they might be less exposed to threats from the disease. Further, it could be the case that motivated political reasoning is at play, making them inclined to view the pandemic as less important. Disinterest can be the result of the pre-existing ideologies skewing the perception of the COVID–19 pandemic, and not the result of differential experience with the disease. In a series of related studies, Conway et al. (2020) have consistently shown that the conservatives' lack of concern for COVID–19 is due to motivated political reasons (COVID–19 specific political beliefs, such as the opposition to government restrictions) more than to experiential reasons (e.g., knowing the people with symptoms). These political beliefs consistently mediated the relationship between conservatism and concerns over COVID–19. In other words, the study has shown that the conservatives' lack of concern about the pandemic is not based on direct experience, but rather motivated by the desired political outcomes (Conway et al., 2020).

Other researchers came to similar conclusions regarding the relevance of ideology, only related to other aspects of health behaviour, primarily social/physical distancing. Several studies have shown that complying with physical distancing recommendations varies with political ideology. In most cases, studies have found that those more prone to self-isolation and distancing are more liberally-oriented individuals (e.g., Brouard et al., 2020; Oosterhoff, 2020; Rosenfald et al., 2020). However, some studies report that that political ideology does not predict social distancing when other relevant variables, such as age, education or concern for others are taken into account (e.g., Leary et al., 2020; Wirz et al., 2020).

Politicizing COVID–19 even Further: The Role of Government (dis) Approval and Elite Disagreement

It is widely recognized that ideology influences the way people see, feel, and behave in different areas of life outside of politics. If so, we could expect that ideology colours the perception of the threat posed by COVID–19, as well as the evaluation of the policy measures in fighting the pandemic and readiness to minimize social contacts. In that regard, there are several important issues that we must bear in mind.

If, generally speaking, conservatives are more sensitive to threats (e.g., Jost et al., 2003), it is reasonable to expect that they support relatively strict

measures that governments implemented just in order to remove the threat. However, being at the specific position on the ideological spectrum generally implies being differently prone to accepting the role of the state in regulating the lives of individual citizens. State regulation is something that the right-wing/conservatives might oppose in general and the left-leaning individuals might be more likely to accept. For example, research shows that trust in major state institutions (such as the Parliament) is higher among those on the left (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005) and that the acceptance of the rightist ideology is related to anti-elitism and suspiciousness about political institutions and actors (Söderlund & Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009). Supporting the measures to combat the coronavirus implies accepting the state's interference with the lives of its citizens. This obviously creates a conflicting situation for the right-leaning individuals: they are *threat-induced* to accept the government measures, but at the same time unwilling to do so because of their more general ideological orientation.

The question of support for *government* measures and ideology gets complicated further. The government is run by parties that are more or less left or right, i.e., liberally or conservatively positioned. Supporting the state measures might imply supporting the decisions made by the government, i.e., parties or coalitions one generally may disapprove of. For these reasons, for example, the left-leaning citizens might oppose the pandemic measures introduced by the rightist/conservative government, although they are generally more in favour of state interventionism. This implies that political ideology and party affiliation can act as an 'independent' motivator in regard to policy compliance.

Finally, public attitudes are highly responsive to cues from parties, especially when it comes to novel issues where citizens are dependent on the news media for information (Mondak, 1993; Zaller, 1992). Previous research in the USA context has already shown that the politicization of COVID–19 may have prompted conservatives to discount mainstream media reports of the severity of the virus, leading them to downplay its health risks and, consequently, comply less with the social distancing protocols (Rosenfeld et al., 2020). Republican officials voiced scepticism about the severity of the pandemic early in the crisis, which could have resulted in heavily polarized public attitudes towards COVID–19 (Kushner Gadarian et al., 2020). When the opposed parties send polarizing and conflicting signals to the public, it may divide citizens and undermine the policies implemented to fight the virus. These issues additionally stress the importance of party affiliation and the accompanying ideology as very important factors, not only in supporting the government's policies regarding the pandemic, but also in personal health behaviours, such as practicing physical distancing.

The Present Study

The situation regarding the COVID–19 pandemic in Serbia justifies the expectation that pre-existing ideology is an important determinant of the support for the state measures and the related health behaviour practices. The Serbian government generally took rather mixed and possibly confusing positions

regarding the ongoing pandemic, downplaying its importance in the beginning and imposing rather strict measures afterwards.

In line with the previous literature, we start with the assumption that risk perception should be an important determinant of the policy support and physical distancing. Those who generally perceive COVID–19 as a greater threat should be those who support the state measures in fighting it. Similarly, more personal or "vicarious" experience (e.g., knowing someone who got infected) with the coronavirus can be expected to be related to a stronger policy support and minimizing contacts with other people. We thus hypothesize the following: H1) Persons with more experience with COVID–19 are more supportive of policy measures and comply more with the physical distancing recommendations; H2) Persons who perceive the coronavirus as a greater threat are more supportive of policy measures and comply more with the physical distancing recommendations.

With somewhat less certainty, we make predictions regarding the role of ideology. In a political context such as the Serbian one, where the ruling coalition is being criticized both from the left and from the right, the opposition to or approval of the state measures cannot be unequivocally treated as a preferred outcome of either the left– or right-leaning citizens. In such circumstances, the attitudes towards policy measures can be less influenced by the pre-existing ideological beliefs and orientations. The current government is ruled by the party that is typically viewed as rightist (Pavlović & Todosijević, 2015) and is supported by more authoritarian citizens (Todosijević & Pavlović, 2020). Put differently, support for the ruling party/coalition in general (which is prominent among the more conservative citizens) can motivate the support for the policy regarding COVID–19 that this party/coalition implements. Still, we must be cautious when making such inferences. The perception of political parties in Serbia by the citizens is underdeveloped and their ideological differentiation is rather low (Pavlović & Todosijević, 2017). The left-right self-placement in Serbia is not politically irrelevant – the registered relationships are in the expected direction – but weakly related to party preferences and socio-structural variables (Tosodijević, 2016). As mentioned earlier, we cannot fully equate political ideology and party preferences in Serbia. Policy support in such circumstances can be motivated by *both* ideology and party preferences or by one of them (and, perhaps, in spite of the other). Still, previous empirical research almost unequivocally showed conservatives' downplaying of the pandemic. Similarly, in more general terms, accepting the measures and recommendations aimed at fighting the COVID–19 means accepting the state's interferences in various aspects of citizens' social life and private affairs, from unhampered economic activities and initiatives to the rules of socializing with other people, which is antithetical to rightist political views. We thus formulate the following hypothesis: H3) Support for policy measures and practicing physical distancing is more prominent among left-leaning citizens.

Additionally, we posit a slightly different role of ideological identity. If the threat is a conservative-boosting condition (e.g., Jost et al., 2003; Karwowski

et al., 2020), then the support for policy measures should be boosted by threat *primarily* among the conservative-minded citizens. This should not be expected among the left-oriented citizens: since they are, hypothetically, more willing to accept the government intervention anyway, the threat should matter little when it comes to their attitude towards the state-imposed COVID–19 measures. We thus propose the final hypothesis: H4) Political ideology moderates the relationship between risk perception and support for government measures.

Method

Participants

The research in Serbia was a part of the Many Labs Project "COVID–19 International Collaboration on Social & Moral Psychology" coordinated by the New York University and conducted in 67 countries (Van Bavel et al., 2020). The data were collected via an online survey in late April 2020. The sample included a total of 656 respondents (unweighted sample: 72% female; Age $M = 41.5$, $SD = 11.8$). Data were weighted to correct the sample for population parameters (gender and age).

Data and Measures

Age

Measured in years since birth.

Policy Support

Measured by five items ($\alpha = .81$) probing for the support for different state measures in fighting the COVID–19 pandemic. This measure included the attitudes towards closing the schools and universities, bars and restaurants, parks, forbidding all public gatherings and non-necessary travel. We treated this scale as a measure of general readiness to accept the policies that were introduced by the Serbian Government (all of these measures were in practise at the moment when the survey was conducted). Items were followed by an 11-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 10 = *strongly agree*). Higher values imply stronger policy support.

Physical Distancing

Measured by five items ($\alpha = .75$) asking for the practicing of the avoidance of physical contact with other people. The respondents were asked whether they stayed at home, visited friends, avoided grocery store visits, kept a physical distance, and avoided handshaking. The included items cover the newly-established rules of socializing. Those were less strictly enforced than policy measures and were not punishable by the law by the state authorities. Items were followed by an 11-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 10 = *strongly agree*). Higher values imply more prominent physical distancing.

Risk Perception

The perception of the risk that the coronavirus presents was measured by the following question: "By April 30, 2021: How likely do you think it is that the *average person* in Serbia will get infected by the coronavirus (COVID–19)?". Respondents estimated the "probability" on an 11-point scale (with 10% step increase), ranging from 0% = *impossible* to 100% = *certain*. It is important to stress that this measure of risk perception does not denote the respondent him/herself but a 'third person'. Recent surveys that included similar measures (e.g., Conway et al., 2020) used the perception of personal risk, which is the difference that could be relevant for our analysis. Yet, we expect that this question wording also provoked

specific emotional reactions related to the sense of feeling threatened and the differences between the two situations are probably a matter of degree, not of substance.

COVID–19 Experience

Respondents were asked two questions: "Have you tested positive for the coronavirus (COVID–19), meaning that you (now or earlier) have had a medically confirmed case of this disease?" (1 = *Yes*, 2 = *No*) and "Has anyone you know well (friend, partner, family, colleague etc.) tested positive for the coronavirus (COVID–19)?" (1 = *Yes*, 2 = *No*). These questions were related to various people, whose personal significance varies (and so do the related differences in COVID–19 experiences). Still, they captured the general "proximity" of personal experiences with the coronavirus well enough. Two questions were averaged and treated as a measure of the experience with the coronavirus. Higher values imply a more direct experience with COVID–19.

Political Ideology

The following, standard question for measuring political ideology was used: "Overall, what would be the best description of your political views?" (0 = *Very left-leaning*, 10 = *Very right-leaning*).

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between the variables included in the analysis. The correlations, although mostly rather low and insignificant, are still very informative. We are primarily interested in the relationship between policy support and physical distancing with the other variables.

Direct COVID–19 experience proves to be an irrelevant factor in risk perception and policy support, and it is not significantly related to physical distancing practices. Policy support and avoiding contacts with other people do not seem to be *experience-based*. Although older citizens in Serbia are/were most heavily struck by the state measures, and have had more direct COVID–19 experience, they are not more (or less) prone to support the state measures in fighting the pandemic. They are, however, more likely to practice distancing (r = .11, p < .01). This finding is quite expected since Serbian citizens older than 65 were forbidden to leave homes until May 6th 2020.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between the variables in the study

	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*	*SE*
1. Age						43.89	14.03	.56
2. Physical distancing	.11**					42.41	9.26	.37
3. Policy support	.02	.49**				40.05	10.61	.42
4. Risk perception	-.01	.13**	.15**			4.23	2.46	.10
5. Political ideology	-.04	-.08*	-.12**	.01		3.87	2.21	.09
6. COVID-19 experience	.09*	-.07	.02	.04	.03	1.16	.233	.01

* p < .05, ** p < .01.

Support for policy measures is, however, significantly related to risk perception, and political ideology. Those who perceive that an average person in Serbia is more likely to get infected are more supportive of the measures

aimed at fighting the coronavirus. That was expected and suggests the "threat-rooted" policy support. Similarly, more likely to follow the physical distancing recommendations are those who perceive the coronavirus as a greater threat.

Physical distancing practices and policy support are highly and positively correlated. Those who are more likely to comply with the distancing measures are those who are more prone to support the state policy regarding the pandemic.

Last, but not least, more right-leaning persons are those who oppose the state-imposed measures to a greater extent and are less likely to follow the physical distancing recommendations. The ideological divide within the Serbian public regarding the policy support and physical distancing guidelines was identified. Less likely to distance themselves from other people and, hypothetically, prevent the coronavirus infections are those on the right. Yet, the relationship between political ideology and risk perception is not significant. Contrary to previous research in other countries, the persons on the opposite sides of the ideological spectrum do not seem to be differently concerned over the ongoing pandemic.

As previously stated, we are primarily interested in the relevance of the enlisted factors as the predictors of policy support and physical distancing and the interplay between the perceived risk and political ideology in that matter. Table 2 summarizes the results of the two hierarchical multiple regression analyses with age, COVID–19 experience, risk perception, and political ideology as predictors and (1) policy support and (2) physical distancing as dependent variables.

The regression model was significant in Model 1, $F(4, 585) = 6.52$, $p <$ .001, showing that policy support is significantly predicted by risk perception and political ideology. Support for the state measures is more pronounced among those who perceive the COVID–19 pandemic as a greater risk for the average citizens in Serbia, as well as among those who are left-leaning ideologically.

Table 2

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting policy support and physical distancing from age, COVID–19 experience, Risk Perception and Political Ideology

Predictor	Model 1: Policy support						Model 2: Physical Distancing					
	B	*SE*	ß	*t*	*p*	ΔR^2	B	*SE*	ß	*t*	*p*	ΔR^2
Step 1						.04						.03
Constant	40.67	2.64		15.38	.000		42.19	2.36		17.89	.000	
Age	.00	.03	.01	.11	.910		.07	.03	.11	2.72	.007	
COVID-19 experience	-1.25	1.85	-.03	-.68	.499		-3.47	1.65	-.09	-2.10	.036	
Risk Perception	.70	.17	.16	4.06	.000		.51	.15	.13	3.28	.001	
Political Ideology	-.59	.19	-.12	-3.06	.002		-.31	.17	-.07	-1.82	.070	
Step 2						.03						.04
Political Ideology x Risk Perception	.28	.08	.38	3.76	.000		.34	.07	.51	4.94	.000	
Total R^2						.07						.07

In order to test the moderating role of political ideology in the relationship between the perceived risk and policy support, the interaction term, Risk Perception x Political Ideology, was added as a predictor in the second step. The second regression model significantly improved the explanatory power, $F(1, 584) = 14.10$, $p < .001$, and proved significant in general, $F(5, 584) = 8.15$, $p < .001$. It showed that there was a significant interaction between ideology and the perception of risk regarding the policy support; the relationship between risk perception and policy support is dependent on political ideology.

The second regression model, predicting physical distancing, was significant as well, $F(4, 578) = 6.20$, $p < .001$. The same as policy measures, physical distancing is also significantly predicted by the risk perception. Seeing the COVID–19 pandemic as a greater risk is related to more prominent physical distancing. Age and COVID–19 experience significantly predict physical distancing as well. Older respondents and those with a more direct experience with the coronavirus are more inclined to avoid meeting other people.

To test the moderating role of political ideology in the relationship between the perceived risk and physical distancing, the interaction term, Risk Perception x Political Ideology, was added as a predictor in the second step. The second regression model significantly improved the explanatory power, $F(1, 576) = 24.37$, $p < .001$, and proved significant in general, $F(5, 77) = 10.03$, $p < .001$. The interaction term was significant, implying that the relationship between the perceived risk and physical distancing is dependent on political ideology.

In order to more closely examine the meaning of the significant interactions, we plotted the standardized predicted values of policy support and physical distancing by risk perception and ideology. To make the data presentation easier to inspect and more intuitive, we recoded the political ideology variables into three categories: the Left, Centre, and Right.

Figure 1 shows data related to the policy support variable. Among those left-oriented, the risk perception is practically unrelated to the level of policy support ($r = -.00$, $p = .96$). Those that are centrist are slightly more inclined to support the state measures if they perceive the current pandemic as a more serious threat, but the relationship is still not significant ($r = .11$, $p = .08$). Yet, among those on the right of the political spectrum, the relationship between risk perception and policy support is clear-cut. As the perception of risk increases, so does the support of the measures aimed at the COVID–19 pandemic eradication ($r = .50$, $p < .001$). It seems that this group of citizens is especially sensitive to threats when it comes to supporting the measures designed to diminish them. The right-wingers who do not feel (personally) threatened are particularly opposed to state-mandated anti-COVID–19 policies. On the other side, the left-wingers' attitudes about the policies are pretty much unaffected by risk perception.

Figure 1
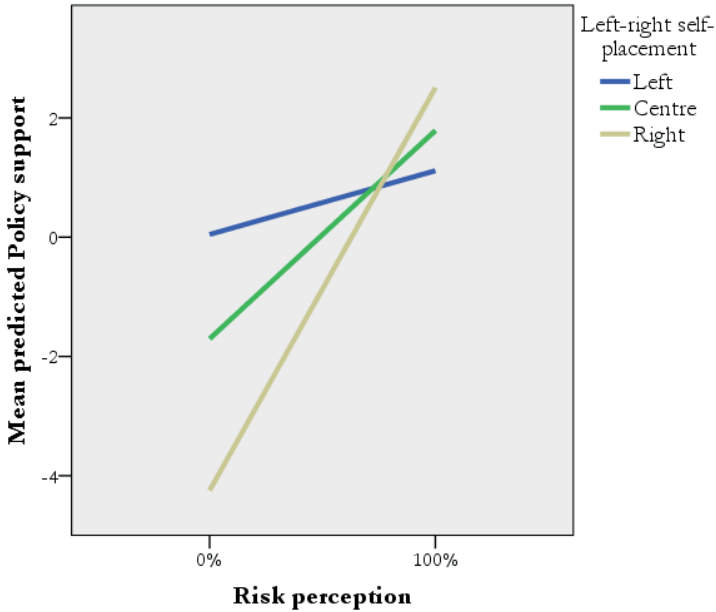*Mean predicted policy support by risk perception and political ideology*

Figure 2 shows analogous data for the physical distancing measures. The observed patterns of the relationship between risk perception and physical distancing among three ideology groups are very similar to those identified in Figure 1. The practices of physical distancing are unrelated to risk perception among those on the left ($r = -.02$, $p = .74$) and among centrists ($r = .07$, $p = .29$), and strongly related among the right-leaning persons ($r = .44$, $p < .001$). Those who place themselves on the right side of the political continuum are more likely to avoid meeting other people if they feel threatened.

Figure 2

Mean predicted physical distancing by risk perception and political ideology
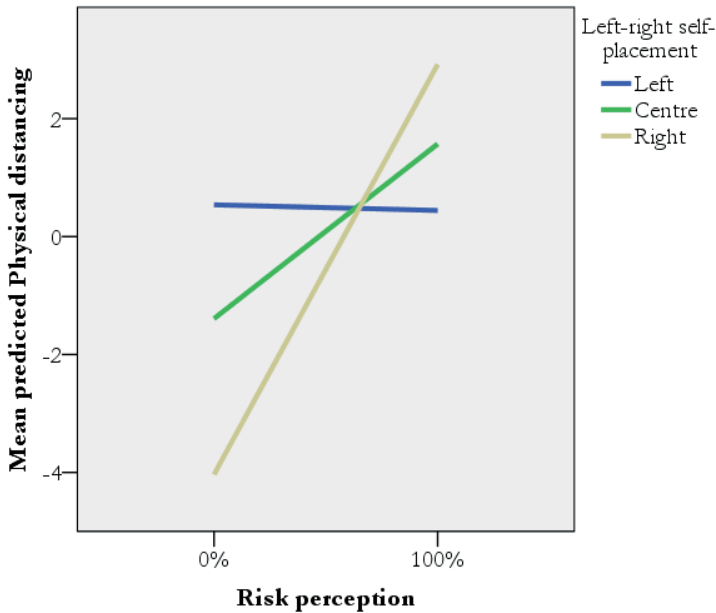
Discussion

We proposed several hypotheses that governed our study. The results confirmed all of them, although some only partially. More experience with COVID–19, in line with H1, significantly predicts physical distancing, but not policy support. H2 is supported by our data as well – the perception of threat is a significant determinant of both physical distancing and policy support. Thus, it can be concluded that the reactions to pandemic measures in Serbia are, at least partly, *experience-based*. It is important to bear in mind that the study was conducted in the early days of the pandemic when the number of the Coronavirus cases was small. A rather low significance of this measure is possibly due to the 'floor effect', since a large number of respondents *did not* have experience with the COVID–19 back then. It would be reasonable to expect that the direct and/or proxy experience with COVID–19 is more relevant these days when far more people have been hit by the illness.

Still, the results of the study have shown that support for the measures aimed at fighting the COVID–19 pandemic is dependent on political ideology, as predicted by H3; the fact that this holds for policy support only is of special relevance. Similarly, our last hypothesis stated that the relationship between risk perception and pandemic measures would be dependent on the pre-existing ideology, which our data have fully supported. In short, variations in policy

support and physical distancing are, partly, due to differences in ideology even when other relevant sources of variation, such as experiences with the coronavirus and age, are controlled for. These findings have several important implications.

We did not find a significant correlation between the perception of risk and political ideology. At least in the Serbian case, it seems that a different ideological orientation is not accompanied by differences in perceiving the ongoing pandemic as being more or less of a threat. Yet, the ideology is still relevant for practicing physical distancing and supporting the state measures. There is more to the importance of political ideology for the support for the measures than skewing the threat perceptions and evaluations of risks associated with the coronavirus.

The individual attitude towards the state measures and health recommendations is thus related to ideology. As shown before, political ideology is a more important predictor of policy support than of physical distancing. The attitude towards the more general issues of state interventions might be at stake, making those leaning towards the right willing to oppose the government measures. That is in line with our main argument that accepting the policy measures implies allowing the state to intervene in the lives of citizens, which is incompatible with the rightist political outlook.

This is even more obvious in the patterns that were identified among the left-leaning citizens. They are not just more eager to "applaud" the government restrictions, but their level of support is not at all "influenced" by risk perceptions. It could be argued that among those on the left (and, supposedly, more liberal ones) the issue of the pandemic is not primarily reasoned in threat/risk notions, but associated with the theme of care/harm, as Haidt (2012) suggests. During a pandemic, even if governed by those who are ideologically different, the role of the state becomes prominent and especially salient to those left-leaning citizens who are specially tuned for such rhetoric and reasoning (Lakoff & Wehling, 2016).

This is not the case among those at the opposite pole of the left-right ideological dimension. Their support for the government measures and other recommendations is highly dependent on the risk perception. In other words, they are willing to support the government-mandated restrictions and comply with physical distancing guidelines only if they feel (personally) threatened by the coronavirus. This piece of evidence is quite in line with the assumption that conservative or right-leaning individuals are more sensitive to threat in a general sense (Jost et al., 2007; Jost et al., 2003; Conway et al., 2020; Nail et al., 2009).

The data have shown that whether one is willing to approve the government regulations and guidelines and whether the perceived risk has a significant role in it, is dependent on one's ideology. Left-leaning individuals are generally more willing to embrace the implemented measures. The pre-existing opposition to them among the right-leaning citizens can be mitigated by framing the pandemic issue as a real and big threat. Risk downplaying and scepticism that the Serbian political ruling elites voiced at the beginning of the pandemic is thus of utmost

importance in its far-reaching consequences. It could have led a significant part of Serbian citizens to the belief that COVID–19 was nothing more but "ordinary flu", making them less willing to accept the measures aimed at fighting the pandemic, thus prolonging the circulation of the virus in the population.

The relationship between ideology and policy support is, however, rather weak and we must be cautious not to overgeneralize the obtained results and bear in mind the specificities of Serbian political context. As stated before, the meaning of the left-right ideology continuum is ambiguous (Todosijević, 2015). Hence, it is difficult to make conclusions related to the major political parties' ideologies (Pavlović & Todosijević, 2017), and the data on parties' ideologies obtained from voters and party documents hardly overlap (Pavlović & Todosijević, 2015). Furthermore, the issue of COVID–19 in Serbia has been highly politicized. There is a high level of disagreement among the elite over the effectiveness and adequacy of the implemented measures, competencies of government bodies etc. But these issues do not necessarily have to be addressed in ideological terms. Pro- and anti-regime sentiment, (dis)trust in state institutions and party affiliations could be divisive criteria that differentiate those who support the policy measures from those who oppose them. And these are only indirectly related to ideology. Ideological confusion and complex relationships between a number of relevant factors can account for the relatively modest relevance of the ideological measure used in this study.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The presented results are generally in line with previous research on the sources, correlates, and consequences of political conservatism. Still, we should bear in mind that instead of a conservatism measure we used the left-right self-positioning. Ideological reasoning in the left-right and (liberalism-) conservatism notions are related, yet separate phenomena (e.g., Aspelund et al., 2013). This could imply that the relationship between the right-leaning self-identification and support for pandemic measures is only partly due to its closeness to underlying conservatism.

As stated previously, it could be expected that the citizens who are more trustful of state institutions, as well as those who feel close to the ruling party, could be those who are more supportive of the introduced measures. Future research should include the measures of trust and party affiliations/identification that should be taken into account.

Previous studies have shown that ideology is related to causal attributions: conservatives are more likely to make dispositional attributions and liberals disproportionally give situational attributions (e.g., Lakoff & Wehling, 2016; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). This would imply that the reasons for ideological differences in the measures aimed at fighting the pandemic are, partly, to be found in different ideas on what the most effective way of fighting the pandemic is: individual or collective actions. Future research should address this issue as well.

Finally, there is a need to additionally clarify the relevance of contextual variables in support for pandemic measures. Most of the cited research was conducted in the USA, currently governed by the Republicans. The answer to the question whether conservatives in the countries ruled by more liberal parties behave similarly in regard to the pandemic is up to some future, cross-national research.

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Podrška merama za borbu protiv pandemije COVID–19: Uloga političke ideologije

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Sve je više podataka koji ukazuju da je politička ideologija važna determinanta poštovanja pravila i preporuka za borbu protiv korona virusa. Ovaj rad analizira ulogu samopozicioniranja u odnosu na levičarsku ili desničarsku ideologiju u podržavanju vladinih mera za borbu protiv pandemije COVID–19 i sprovođenju preporuka za održavanje fizičke distance u Srbiji. Istraživanje je sprovedeno onlajn, na uzorku od 656 ispitanika. Testirana su dva hijerahijska regresiona modela u kojima su uzrast, iskustvo sa COVID–19, percepcija opasnosti koju korona virus predstavlja i politička ideologija bili prediktori: (1) podrške politici (vlade, za borbu protiv pandemije, prim. prev.) i (2) (praktikovanja, prim. prev.) fizičkog distanciranja. Rezultati pokazuju da se stepen podrške politici (vlade za borbu protiv pandemije, prim. prev.) može predvideti na osnovu rastuće percepcije rizika i izraženije desničarske ideologije. Percepcija rizika predviđa održavanje fizičke distance, a predviđaju ga i uzrast i iskustvo sa COVID–19. Rezultati takođe pokazuju da je politička ideologija moderator povezanosti između percepcije rizika s jedne strane i podržavanja politike (vlade za borbu protiv pandemije, prim. prev.) i održavanja fizičke distance s druge strane. Opažanje pandemije kao veće pretnje je povezano sa snažnijim podržavanjem politike (vlade za borbu protiv pandemije, prim. prev.) i fizičkom distancom samo kod desničarski orijentisanih osoba. Čini se da su oni naročito osetljivi na opaženu pretnju.

Ključne reči: ideologija, levica-desnica, politički konzervativizam, COVID–19, Srbija