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## POLITICAL DISAFFECTION AND DISENGAGEMENT IN SERBIA

### Otklon od politike i dezangažman u Srbiji

**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is to examine the extent of political disaffection and disengagement of Serbian citizens from a comparative European perspective, as well as to explore the relationships between two phenomena and determine the effects of several potential predictors (structural inequalities, gender, generational differences, urban environment, political awareness and competences, national and European identification, and political discontent) on different aspects of political disaffection and disengagement. In order to do so, we have used European Social Survey data (9<sup>th</sup> round, 2018), and singled out four different subdimensions of political disaffection and disengagement: assessment of responsiveness of the political system (external political efficacy), institutional trust, assessment of individual interest in politics and capabilities to engage in political processes (internal political efficacy), and the level of actual political engagement (political participation). The aim of the paper is to shed light on different systemic, structural and conjunctural factors that may contribute to shaping political attitudes and patterns of actions in contemporary Serbia and pose several theoretical and research questions that need further investigation.*

**KEY WORDS:** *political disaffection, political disengagement, Serbia*

**APSTRAKT:** *Cilj ovog rada je da se istraži stepen otklona od politike i dezangažmana građana Srbije u uporednoj perspektivi, kao i da se ispita odnos dva fenomena i odredi uticaj nekoliko potencijalnih prediktora (strukturnih nejednakosti, pola, generacijskih razlika, urbanog okruženja, političke osvešćenosti i kompetencija,*

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*nacionalne i evropske identifikacije i političkog nezadovoljstva) na različite aspekte otklona od politike i dezangažmana. U tu svrhu smo koristile podatke prikupljene u okviru devetog talasa Evropskog društvenog istraživanja (2018), i izdvojile četiri različite poddimenzije otklona od politike i dezangažmana: procenu responzivnosti političkog sistema (eksterna politička efikasnost), institucionalno poverenje, subjektivnu procenu individualne zainteresovanosti za politiku i sposobnosti za angažovanje u političkom procesu (interna politička efikasnost) i nivo stvarne političke angažovanosti (politička participacija). Jedan od ciljeva ovog rada je da se osvetle različiti sistemski, strukturni i konjunktorni činioci koji mogu doprineti oblikovanju političkih stavova i obrazaca delovanja u savremenom društvu Srbije, kao i da se otvore teorijska i istraživačka pitanja koja je potrebno dalje istražiti.*

**KLJUČNE REČI:** *otklon od politike, politički dezangažman, Srbija*

## Introduction

A growing body of literature has examined the phenomena of political disaffection and disengagement, pointing to the negative sentiment towards politicians and political institutions, and the resulting exclusion of citizens from political processes, which has reached alarming proportions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is clear evidence of increased public dissatisfaction with politicians, parties, governments and representative institutions, and spread of political disillusionment in North American and European countries since the late 1960s (Pharr et al., 2000), although some authors suggest that this state can be better categorised in terms of “trendless fluctuations” (Norris, 2011). While there is no uniform trend in the old democracies, datasets related to the new democracies, especially third- and fourth-wave democracies, demonstrate a persistently large number of critical and disaffected citizens (Montero & Torcal, 2006). Much as the scepticism towards politicians and political parties has always been a factor in political life, Colin Hay contends that it is difficult to think of a period of modern history in which the term “politics” has accumulated so many negative connotations in public discourse (Hay, 2007), which alone is a reason to devote more attention to the manifestations of citizens’ estrangement from politics.

Based on the European Social Survey data from 2018 (9<sup>th</sup> round), the aim of this paper is to explore the extent of political disaffection and disengagement of Serbian citizens in a European comparative perspective. Furthermore, it seeks to determine the degree of interconnectedness of different dimensions of political disaffection and disengagement in Serbia and provide explanations of specific factors determining attitudes and behavioural elements of a general relationship towards politics and different forms of political engagement. Having this in mind, we will examine how different socio-demographic traits and aspects of individuals’ structural positions, such as the level of education, gender, age, income, work status or place of residence, affect different aspects of political disaffection and disengagement. We will try to explore whether political inequalities, defined as structural differences in influence over political decisions

and outcomes (Lopez & Dubrow, 2020), impact the level of disaffection with politics and consequently the level of political engagement, but also, in what way political competences of citizens (Gaxie, 2014), as well as discontent with the current performances of the government (Linek, 2016) influence general assessment of the political system, institutional trust and subjective aspects of political engagement.

## Theoretical framework

The latest literature provides various, not necessarily mutually compatible, interpretations of political disaffection and disengagement. On the demand side, the “technocratic challenge to representative democracy” (the widely held belief in superiority of technical expertise over political solutions to pressing issues facing contemporary societies) is recognised as one of the key factors leading to a growing number of technocratically-minded citizens, willingly detached from politics (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020). Furthermore, some researchers point to the tendency among citizens to regard politics as something out of their control, believing that political change cannot be achieved, as they perceive political elites as being governed by their own personal or narrow party interest, or as the protectors of business interest (Jennings et al., 2016). On the other hand, while some authors claim that there is a growing number of “critical citizens,” who hold considerably higher expectations of politics and politicians than previous generations (Norris, 1999), others point to the decrease of civic engagement, civic virtues and willingness of citizens to fulfil their civic duties and obligations as the main factors fostering political disengagement and disaffection (Putnam, 2000). Finally, a number of authors argue that the key change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the “stealth populist” understandings of politics, accompanied by increasing number of citizens who prefer “politicians for and of the people,” while at the same time wishing for a more efficient way of governing that does not seek constant popular approval. Perceived as a space of bargaining, “rotten compromises,” an all too slow and complex decision-making process, the current political system is at the centre of widespread negativity and disappointment (Clarke et al., 2018).

Recent developments on the supply side of the political realm have also resulted in disaffected attitudes among citizens. First, as some argue (Merkel, 2014), there is an evident interconnectedness of political elites and big capital, which undermines the fundamental principles of democratic rule: that key decisions in the country can only be made by those who obtain legitimacy through elections, and that “political equality” should be respected or at least not impeded by the unequal distribution of economic and social resources. It is precisely this last that is taking place in the era of neoliberal regulation. Second, other authors point to technocratic-based decision-making and the authorization of “independent” agencies or regulatory bodies to solve social issues, together with consensual procedures and judicial depoliticisation, as crucial factors in the elimination of politics as a space of antagonism and disagreement; the stage was therefore set

for the foundations of the impervious post-political and post-democratic societal landscape (Rancière, 1998; Mouffe, 2005; Crouch, 2004; Žižek, 1999). By the same token, the systemic support of public-private partnerships encourages the lobbying of politicians and government officials, creating opportunities for continuous and reciprocal favour-exchange, thus generating distrust among citizens (Crouch, 2004). Finally, according to Mair (2013), citizens' indifference towards politics can be seen as an effect of transformation of political parties from social to state actors (from catch-all to cartel party) and their decreasing eagerness and capability to engage ordinary citizens.

Political disaffection can be defined as a "certain estrangement of members of the polity from both its core political institutions and, more generally, from politics" (Gunther & Montero, 2006: 49–50). It manifests as a "sense of personal inefficacy, cynicism and distrust, lack of confidence in representative institutions and/or the representatives elected, the belief that political elites do not care about the welfare of their citizens, and a general sense of estrangement from both politics and the political processes" (Torcal & Montero, 2006: 5). The concept of political disaffection refers to a "diffuse set of feelings as a result of which political affairs are seen as distant, unimportant, or meaningless" (Montero et al., 1997: 136). Unlike political discontent, which is a function of current assessments of the performance of government, as well as evaluations of how a country's democracy and economy are working (Linek, 2016), political disaffection is a "reflection of a fundamentally distrusting and suspicious vision of political life and the institutions and mechanisms of democratic representation" (Gunther & Montero, 2006: 49–50). As such, it is more stable and more general in its criticism. In sociological and political science literature (Hay, 2007; Fawcett et al., 2017), disaffection is closely related to the notion of anti-politics, referring to public disengagement. It is associated with declining public participation at elections, declining membership in political parties or engagement in political movements, as well as decreasing support for dominant ideologies or paradigms in public policy. Besides disengagement with institutional politics, the notion of anti-politics invokes disillusionment and disappointment with politicians and political institutions (Clarke et al., 2018); but in contrast to disaffection, it does not assume rejection of politics as such, nor a total estrangement from political processes. Furthermore, some researchers broadly define anti-politics as a challenging alternative to liberal democracy. Understood like this, anti-politics is related to declining support for liberal democracy and increasing inclining towards authoritarian alternatives to democracies (Foa & Mounk, 2016), populist parties and populist leaders (Albertazzi & Mueller, 2013), or indeed to new ways of doing politics marked by different "bottom-up democratic innovations" ('DIY' and 'Pop-Up' democracy) (Flinders, 2015).

The attitude towards politics is a function of the socio-historical context and specific dispositions, i.e., cognitive and statutory political competence (Gaxie, 2014), which is the product of socialisation specific to a particular class position. Statutory, or social competence, i.e., "sense of incompetence and impotence" (Bourdieu, 1984), is reflected in subjective political interest, political salience, the

attitude of self-empowerment, and the feeling of entitlement to express political views publicly. This status-assigned competence to engage in politics and to judge politics, also depends on gender, as due to the persistence of patriarchy, women are less expected to be concerned with politics. Cognitive, or technical competence (mastering basic knowledge, political categories, political discourse, ideological differences and principles of division within the political and intellectual field), formed through education, depends on statutory competence. "Technical competence is to social competence what the capacity to speak is to the right to speak, simultaneously a precondition and an effect" (Bourdieu, 1984: 409). Political competence determines the degree and form of one's political participation. Evidence suggests that the participation gap in established democracies has widened over the decades, with the rising political involvement of the affluent and well-educated, and the stagnation or reduction of political activities of lower socioeconomic groups (Dalton, 2017: 171). Diversification of the forms of political participation and channels of political engagement has only deepened this gap. The effects of the post-political social trend are grafted onto the political context and the structuring and socialising influences of class and gender formation.

Context is most clearly manifested through the institutional distrust and discontent with the ways the political system works, while depoliticisation manifests through the ideological confusion it produces (non-possession of basic ideological benchmarks and misrecognition of objective interest). Ideological self-positioning, as part of cognitive political competence, is the outcome of conditioning related to class position; but ideological indeterminacy can also be seen as a symptom of the post-political situation and pacification of the political scene due to the neoliberal consensus and ideological convergence of political parties. Cognitive competence is context dependent: "In the contemporary period, where political and ideological differences between candidates, parties, governments, and programs have faded, it is more difficult to perceive differences, to make sense, and to find one's way in the course of ordinary events. All things being equal, again, the level of cognitive competence is presently lower than it was in more mobilised past periods" (Gaxie, 2014: 11).

### **Previous research on political disaffection and disengagement in Serbia**

Various empirical endeavours conducted over the past two decades testify to the presence of certain aspects of political disaffection and disengagement in Serbia. One of the first was the qualitative study "Politics and everyday life," carried out in three successive waves between 2002 and 2007 in order to gain insights into citizens' evaluations of the political developments in the Serbian society of that time, with the third wave focusing exclusively on electoral abstention (Jarić, 2005; Spasić, 2005; 2008; Golubović, 2007). Findings of these studies point to the ambivalence of the very notion of politics, commonly viewed in negative terms, together with distrust towards politicians and political parties,

widening of the symbolic gap between “ordinary people” and “politicians,” and desire for politics to be disconnected from the everyday lives of citizens. The first decade of the political transformation of Serbian society after the fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime was marked by political disillusionment, predominantly manifested in feelings of betrayed expectations and disappointment with the realities of the post-socialist transition and political life in the country (Jarić, 2005). Interviewees expressed criticism of the existing political offer and called for a “cleaning up” of the party scene. Namely, in this view, political parties in Serbia did not represent existing social groups or identifiable ideological positions, nor did they act in pursuit of the common good (Pavićević & Spasić, 2003; Spasić, 2005; 2008).

The studies also examine “the paradox of (non)involvement” in Serbia: the double effect of citizens’ acknowledgement of the importance of politics, frustration with the inadequacies of the political system, dissociation from and unwillingness to engage in politics, and in turn looking for “non-political” ways to solve societal problems (Pavićević & Spasić, 2003; Spasić, 2008). In a study conducted in 2010–2011, Spasić and Birešev (2012) write about the “social blockade”, characterised by pervasive moralism and weak legitimacy of politics, which undermines collective action and formulation of innovative political projects. Their analysis also showed that politics was thoroughly discredited and portrayed in extremely negative terms, with politicians seen as the social Others, a closed, immoral, self-serving group.

Both formal and informal political participation in Serbia has been explored in many studies, often focusing on political participation and activism of young people, covering aspects from electoral abstention and membership of the political parties to contemporary political activism (Jarić, 2005; Spasić, 2007; Tomanović & Stanojević, 2015; Pešić, 2017; Todosijević, 2017; Stanojević & Petrović, 2018; Popadić et al., 2019; etc.). Recent analysis of political participation of Serbian citizens shows that “participation in both traditional and newer forms of politics becomes more likely as resources available to individuals increase, both economic and educational” (Petrović & Stanojević, 2019: 365).

Prevailing explanations of political disengagement in Serbia are in line with the “critical citizens” thesis, stating that its main cause is not disinterest in politics, depoliticisation or political apathy. It is rather seen as an expression of the critical stance towards the political reality. However, other interpretations are also well argued, as this disappointment is usually combined with the feeling of being unable to personally contribute to political change or with the perceived lack of competence or authority to engage in politics, particularly understood in its narrow (party politics) sense (Pavićević & Spasić, 2003: 60; Spasić, 2005: 57), which are all elements of internal political inefficacy. On the other hand, Todosijević (2017) shows that negative attitudes toward political parties and lack of political affiliation are not necessarily expressions of political apathy, as the level of recorded external political efficacy (the belief in the responsiveness of the political system and political institutions) is still relatively high.



## Methodology and data

We conducted our analysis of political disaffection based on European Social Survey data obtained within the 9<sup>th</sup> round (from 2018). The total sample of Serbian respondents numbered 2043 units.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the analysis, the cases were weighted by post-stratification weight including design weight.

Following Torcal and Montero's (2006) framework, we have singled out two dimensions – political disaffection and political disengagement. Within the first, *political disaffection*, we have analysed two separate subdimensions: (lack of) confidence in political institutions and assessment of responsiveness of democratic institutions. The first subdimension, *trust in political institutions*, has been operationalised through the index of institutional trust, which was constructed from the items measuring the level of trust in the following institutions: the national parliament, the legal system, the police, politicians and political parties.<sup>5</sup>

The second subdimension, measuring the assessment of responsiveness of democratic institutions (i.e., institutional disaffection), was operationalised through the index of *external political efficacy*. The index comprises items measuring (at five-point Likert scale) the level of agreement with the following statements: “And how much would you say that the political system in Serbia allows people like you to have an influence on politics?” “How much would you say the political system in Serbia allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?” “How much would you say the political system in Serbia ensures that everyone has a fair chance to participate in politics?” “How much would you say the government in Serbia takes into account the interests of all citizens?” and “How much would you say that decisions in Serbian politics are transparent, meaning that everyone can see how they were made?”<sup>6</sup>

Two subdimensions were analysed within the second dimension, *political disengagement*, as well. The first one is related to *subjective political interest* and *internal political efficacy*. The index measuring the lack of subjective political interest and internal political efficacy was constructed from the following questions: “How interested would you say you are in politics?” “And how confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?” and “How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues?” All three items were re-coded in such a way that respondents who declared they were not at all interested in politics, not at all confident in their own ability to participate in politics, and not at all able to take active role in a group involved with political issues, were given the code 1, while all those who expressed even the slightest degree of interest in politics, ability or self-

4 For more on the sampling procedure and the characteristics of the sample, see the website of European Social Survey (<https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=9>).

5 The items were provided as eleven-point scales ranging from complete lack of trust to complete trust. The index ranged from 0 to 50, with 25 being the theoretical mean and Cronbach's Alpha totaling 0.877.

6 The index ranged from 5 to 25, with 15 as the theoretical mean and Cronbach's Alpha 0.807.

confidence to engage in politics were given the code 0. In this way, we got three dichotomous variables, used to construct a scale of internal political inefficacy.<sup>7</sup>

The second subdimension of political disengagement is the lack of *formal and informal political engagement*. Following the suggestion made by Listhaug (2006) to the original Torcal-Montero (2006) operationalisation of attitudinal dimension of disaffection, we have added the behavioural dimension of political (dis)engagement. For this purpose, we have constructed an index of political participation that included items indicating the following forms of engagement (the items were provided as dichotomous variables): voting at the last national elections, working in a political party/action group or another organisation/association, contacting politicians or government officials, posting political content online, boycotting certain products, taking part in lawful public demonstrations, signing a petition, wearing or displaying a campaign badge or sticker, or some degree of affinity towards a particular political party.<sup>8</sup>

In the first part of the analysis, we compared Serbia on all four subdimensions with other European countries by calculating mean scores for four indices. On this point we were not guided by the classic procedure of testing the hypothesis that would refer to long-term depoliticisation processes (primarily due to the lack of comparable data for Serbia), but rather we tried to investigate, in a synchronic perspective, to what extent Serbian citizens differed from citizens of other European countries when it came to political disaffection and levels of political engagement. In particular, we explored whether European countries fell within certain patterns (for example, ex-socialist countries vs non-socialist, or according to wave of democratization), and how Serbia was positioned in relation to them.

The next section is dedicated to the Serbian data and the analysis of the presence and strength of the relationships between four subdimensions measuring political disengagement and disaffection. It should be noted that there is no consensus among researchers about the operationalisation of political disaffection and disengagement, nor regarding the interrelationships of their subdimensions (see: Torcal & Montero, 2006; Listhaug, 2006; Linek, 2016). This analysis, based on an operationalisation that does not fully coincide with any of the proposed ones, aims to investigate whether the data for Serbia support separation and relative independence of the four proposed subdimensions (internal political (in)efficacy, political engagement, external political efficacy and institutional trust). In addition, it looks at whether the fifth dimension – political (dis)contentment with the current functioning of institutions – should be treated as a separate dimension, as an integral part of the subdimension of external political efficacy, or, as we have done, as a predictor of responses on scales representing the previous four subdimensions. Our starting premise is that trust in institutions and evaluation of external political efficacy would be stronger

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7 The index was constructed as a scale (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.696), ranging from 0 to 3, with theoretical mean 1.5.

8 The index was constructed out of ten items, ranging from 1 to 20. The theoretical mean was 10.5, while Cronbach's Alpha was 0.668.



under the influence of evaluation of the ruling regime's performances compared to the assessment of one's own interest and ability in political engagement and political participation. The arguments for extricating political discontent as a separate dimension are that it is a varying factor that may depend on specific party preferences and current regime efficacy (Easton, 1965), and that the other dimensions do not necessarily change with the changes of the ruling parties.

In the third part of our analysis, we used linear regression models in order to examine the statistical significance and strength of different predictors affecting political disengagement and disaffection. For this purpose, we have constructed four linear regression models for each index as dependent variables (representing subdimensions of political disaffection and disengagement). The first model tested the effect of socio-demographic predictors representing different elements of respondents' structural position on political disaffection and disengagement (age, indicator variables for higher education, female sex, urban place of residence, paid work in the last 7 days, and a ten-point scale indicating categories of income). Within the second model, socio-demographic predictors were supplemented by variables measuring cognitive political competences – respondents' ability to articulate their own ideological position (by choosing any of the answers on the scale measuring left-right political orientation)<sup>9</sup> and consumption of political news.<sup>10</sup> The third model added the degrees of emotional attachment to Serbia and Europe, while the final, fourth model contained the predictor measuring the level of political (dis)contentment.<sup>11</sup>

## **Serbia in comparative perspective**

The first segment of our analysis explores the level of political disaffection and disengagement of Serbia's citizens in a comparative European perspective. Namely, a number of scholars have detected the enduring symptoms of disengagement with democracy in the US and Western Europe (for example, Kriesi, 2020), but also in countries that have passed through the third (Rodrigues Sanches & Gorbunova, 2016) and fourth wave of democratization (Hooghe & Kern, 2015; Linek, 2016). As we have shown, there is evidence of political disaffection and disengagement among Serbian citizens, as well.

Political disaffection has been disaggregated into two relatively independent dimensions – trust in political institutions and the assessment of responsiveness of democratic institutions (institutional disaffection) – both of which can be

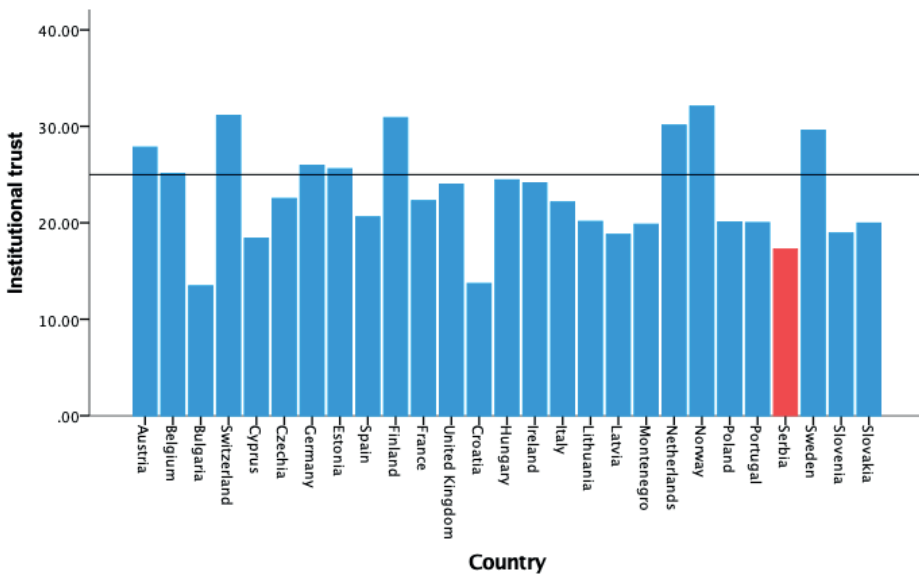
9 The original variable was recorded so that respondents who were not able to provide such an answer – choosing “don't know”, no answer, or refusal – were given code 0, while those who chose any of the offered answers were given code 1.

10 Measured by the minutes respondents spend daily watching, reading, and listening to news on politics and current affairs.

11 This predictor was constructed as an index of political contentment using variables measuring the level of satisfaction with work and functioning of current institutions or institutional systems in Serbia: democracy, government, education, health services and economy. The index of political contentment ranged from 0 to 50, with 25 as theoretical mean and Cronbach's Alpha 0.843.

related to the actual level of political engagement. In terms of institutional trust, Serbia ranks towards the bottom of the European list, exhibiting one of the lowest scores of institutional trust, along with other post-socialist countries, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, and Latvia, but also with Cyprus (Chart 1). Political institutions of these countries, built-up in the three decades since the fall of socialist regimes, have often been the subject of abuse by political elites, remaining fragile and inefficient in meeting the needs of the citizens. To this should be added the prolonged negative effects of the global economic crisis, accompanied by austerity measures, significantly affecting these countries and further weakening citizens' confidence in the ability of political institutions to effectively solve problems.<sup>12</sup> On the other side, citizens of Norway, Sweden and Finland, as well as the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Austria express the highest (above average) level of trust in their national political institutions.

Chart 1. The level of institutional trust in European countries



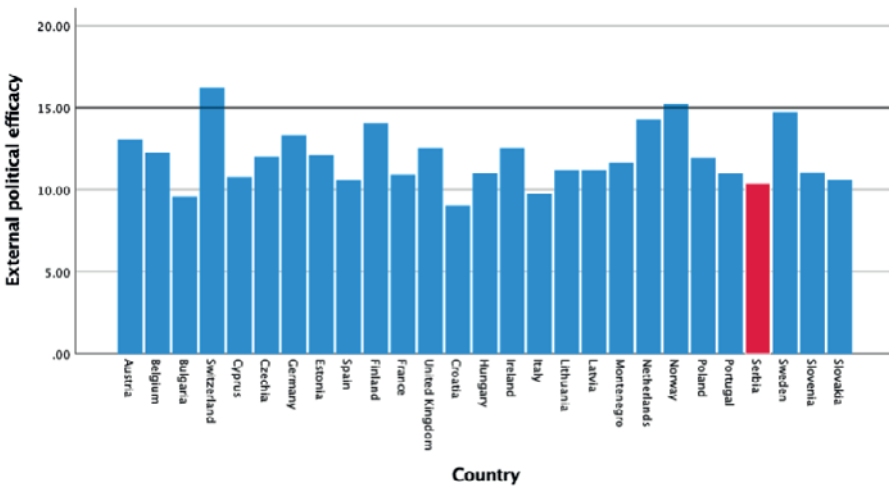
The second subdimension of political disaffection is related to the assessment of responsiveness of political institutions towards political engagement of citizens. It represents a belief that “one cannot influence the political process because political institutions do not respond to people’s demands” (Linek, 2016: 59). It is usually related to situations in which the political system fails to represent citizens’ interests or demands, and it could be associated with distrust in political institutions and politicians (Linek, 2016). As mentioned, we argue that political disaffection is considered a more durable phenomenon, which should not be equated with the degree of satisfaction with a current political regime, although

12 More on the specific characteristics of the political crisis in post-socialist countries, see Spasojević, 2019.

the latter may contribute to the former (which will be examined in the later stages of our analysis).

Along this dimension, Serbia places at the lower end of European ranking. While Bulgarian and Croatian citizens again express the highest level of political disaffection (by assessing their political systems as the least effective, least transparent, and least open to citizens' participation in decision-making processes), Serbia ranks with Italy, Cyprus, Spain, and Slovakia. At the bottom end of this scale, post-socialist countries are joined by south European countries that were democratised in the third wave (with the exception of Italy). Topping this ranking are Switzerland and Norway (also the only two countries whose citizens rate the level of external political efficacy as above average), followed by Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands – the very same countries whose citizens expressed the highest level of institutional trust (Chart 2). These results are in line with previous research findings (Torcal, 2006), indicating the significance of differences in historical origin of political confidence and the importance of the presence of a non-democratic past.

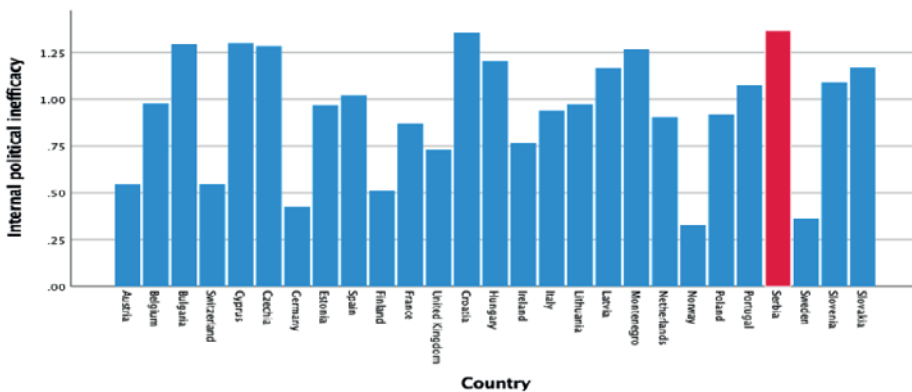
Chart 2. The level of perceived external political efficacy in European countries



The second dimension – political disengagement – is represented and examined through two subdimensions: subjective interest in politics and internal political (in)efficacy on the one side, and political participation on the other. Subjective political interest and assessment of internal political efficacy are related to an individual's feeling of political competence to influence political processes (Listhaug, 2006: 216). Or, as Linek defines it (2016: 53), “a belief in one's ability to understand and participate in politics, and an interest in doing so.” Consequently, internal political efficacy is recognised as an important determinant of political participation (Dimitrova-Grajzl et al., 2010). In this analysis, due to limitations related to the data, we opted not to measure internal political efficacy, but internal political inefficacy.

Serbian citizens exhibit the highest level of internal political inefficacy in Europe, together with respondents from Croatia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Montenegro (Chart 3). If we add to that the finding that the high level of internal political inefficacy is also recorded in Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia and Slovenia, there is a clear indication that citizens from post-socialist countries show the lowest level of interest and feeling of ability to engage in political processes. On the other hand, the lowest levels of internal inefficacy are exhibited by the citizens of Norway and Sweden, accompanied by the German, Finnish, Austrian and Swiss respondents. In explaining these findings, we will return to the thesis about the length of democratic legacy, presence of undemocratic episodes in the history of a country, and the instability of democratic institutions. As Torcal (2006: 178) noted, political disaffection in new democracies is the product of the “democratization process of the past”, where democratization processes were characterised by frequent episodes of failure, manipulation, instability, the use and abuse of institutional settings and accumulated poor performances. Decades of convulsive processes of political exclusion, Torcal (2006: 185) argues, left an enduring imprint on many citizens making them critical of democratic processes, politics and mechanisms of political representation.

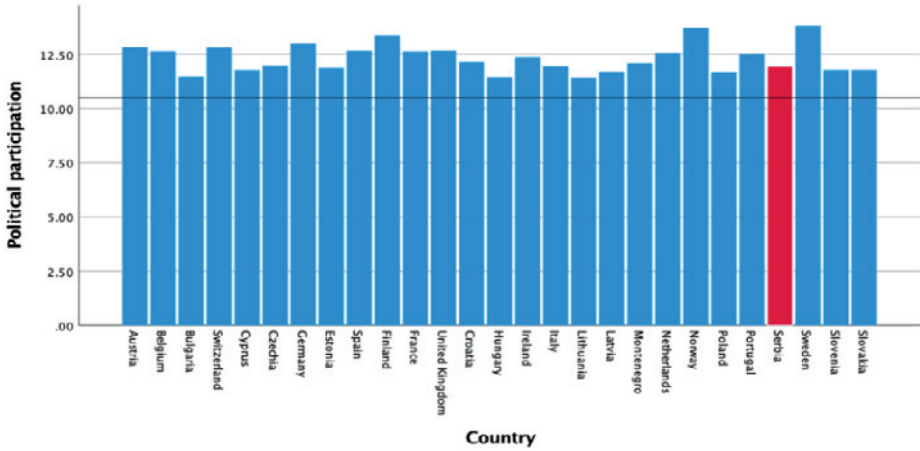
Chart 3. The level of subjective political interest and internal political inefficacy among citizens of European countries



Finally, when it comes to the second subdimension of political (dis)engagement – related to the behavioural element, i.e., political participation – it encompasses different types of formal and informal political participation. It should be noted that inter-country variation was the lowest on this dimension, and that despite the most pronounced degree of internal political inefficacy, Serbia is not at the bottom of the table on this point. Namely, the lowest level of political participation was recorded by the citizens of Lithuania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, followed by Poles, Latvians, Cypriots, Estonians and Slovenes, while the most politically active were citizens of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria and Switzerland (the very same countries whose citizens also showed the lowest degree of internal political inefficiency, Chart 4). Unlike the previous dimensions, where there was a more or

less homologous distribution of countries, at least when it comes to those countries that are at the top and the bottom of the ranking, along this dimension, there were certain shifts, primarily of the former Yugoslav countries, towards the “middle” of the list, indicating that these are highly politicised societies, in which the political mobilization of citizens (even in a latent form) is more or less constantly present. This finding is to some extent in line with Tarrow’s (1994) argument of political opportunity structure, and indicates that political environments provide relatively strong incentives for people to undertake collective actions or to be mobilised for participating in them.

Chart 4. The level of political participation in European countries



### Political disaffection and disengagement in Serbia

In the following segment, the focus will be on data for Serbia. Before concentrating on the factors of political disengagement and disaffection, it is necessary to determine the interrelationship of the four subdimensions. In addition, in this segment of the analysis we introduce another dimension – the degree of political discontent with the functioning of current political and social institutions and subsystems, which is sometimes treated in the literature as one of the segments of political disaffection, although there is no agreement on whether it is an integral part of external political efficacy or a separate dimension (Torcal & Montero, 2006; Linek, 2016). We decided to treat political discontent as a specific dimension, but also examine the potential effect of the degree of satisfaction with the current functioning and performances of institutional systems on different dimensions of political disaffection and disengagement.

The correlation matrix (Table 1) shows a clear and relatively high level of interconnectedness between subdimensions measuring political disaffection – institutional trust and external political efficacy: the more strongly the respondents’ assessed the political system as offering the possibility for political participation or that it takes the interests of citizens into account, the more

pronounced the tendency of trust in political institutions. In line with Listhaug's argument (2006: 217), correlations between the other two subdimensions that measure political disengagement also indicate strong interconnectedness of a) individual (lack of) interest in politics and assessment of subjective (in)ability and (in)competence to engage in political processes; and b) actual political engagement: the higher the level of perception of individual political inefficacy, the lower the overall political engagement. Furthermore, both institutional trust and external political efficacy are correlated (although not so highly) with internal political inefficacy and political participation, indicating the following: a) the higher level of institutional trust sets the ground for a weak, but statistically significant tendency towards more active political engagement; b) the higher the level of institutional trust, the lower the level of perceived internal political inefficacy; c) the more favourable the assessment of external political efficacy, the higher the institutional trust, and d) with a more favourable assessment of external political efficacy, the level of internal inefficacy tends to decrease.

Finally, correlation analysis reveals another important finding: namely, while both dimensions of political disaffection are strongly correlated with the assessment of the performances of current government and other institutional subsystems, the same cannot be said for political disengagement (neither of two subdimensions – attitudinal or behavioural – are related to political discontent). Thus, while political (dis)contentment affects the assessment of the “democratic potential” of a political system and confidence in the ability of institutions to take into account the interests and needs of citizens, it does not at all affect the assessment of the subjective capacity for political engagement, nor the political engagement itself.

Table 1. Correlation matrix – interconnections of subdimensions measuring political disengagement, disaffection and political (dis)contentment

		Political disaffection		Political disengagement		Political contentment
		Institutional trust	External political efficacy	Internal political inefficacy	Political participation	
Political disaffection	Institutional trust	1	<b>.623**</b> (.000)	<b>-.108**</b> (.000)	<b>.049*</b> (.050)	<b>.708**</b> (.000)
	External political efficacy	<b>.623**</b> (.000)	1	<b>-.298**</b> (.000)	<b>.114**</b> (.000)	<b>.649**</b> (.000)
Political disengagement	Internal political inefficacy	<b>-.108**</b> (.000)	<b>-.298**</b> (.000)	1	<b>-.370**</b> (.000)	-.045 (.058)
	Political participation	<b>.049*</b> (.050)	<b>.114**</b> (.000)	<b>-.370**</b> (.000)	1	.001 (.969)
Political contentment		<b>.708**</b> (.000)	<b>.649**</b> (.000)	-.045 (.058)	.001 (.969)	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



### *Determinants of political disengagement and disaffection*

The next segment of the analysis is dedicated to exploration of determinants of disengagement and disaffection. For all four subdimensions we have constructed several linear regression models examining the effects of different predictors. First, we tested the effects of variables representing different elements of structural positions of respondents: the level of education (representing a proxy measure of cultural capital which is one of the key elements for developing statutory and cognitive political competences and class induced political inequalities; see: Bourdieu, 1984 and Gaxie, 2014), age (in order to determine the effect of generational differences in political socialization; see: Mierina & Cers, 2014), gender (exploring the effect of gender differences in political competences and readiness for engagement, following the gender gap hypothesis; see: van Deth, 1990 or Inglehart & Norris, 2003), income and employment status (determining the effect of unequal distribution of material resources, which spills over into political inequalities; see: Lopez & Dubrow, 2020), and place of residence (measuring the effect of opportunities that urban social environments provide for political engagement). Second, we tested the effect of all the predictors of respondents' structural positions when controlling for the effect of cognitive political competence (measured through the ability of respondents to define their ideological position at the left-right scale of political orientations) and awareness of political processes (measured through the use of different media to be informed on politics; see Segatti, 2006). Third, we introduced emotional attachments to Serbia and Europe in the models (in order to control for the effects of national and cosmopolitan identifications), due to the fact that in recent Serbian history these two forms of identification have served as important sources of political affiliations and divisions (Petrović-Trifunović & Spasić, 2014). The fourth model introduced the level of political contentment with the current performance of different institutions and the government (we argue here that political discontent will have a stronger impact on external political efficacy and institutional trust than on internal (in)efficacy and political participation). However, in the case of political participation, we made a fifth model, to explore the effects of internal and external political efficacy and institutional trust, in order to make more accurate predictions of the behavioural dimension of political engagement.

First, we will analyse the predictors of subdimensions of political disaffection, represented by the perceived level of external political efficacy and trust in national institutions.

Regression models (Table 2) show that among the first group of factors, only age and gender are related to external political efficacy: the older the respondents, the more pronounced the perception of the system as efficient (indicating that the older generations were socialised within a political culture that was less cynical towards politics and at the same time more supportive towards the political order); on the other hand, women are less likely than men to perceive the political system as transparent and inclusive. The level of education, income, work status and urban environment – all indicators of the class position of respondents – are not statistically significant predictors of this subdimension of political disaffection. The second model shows the cumulative

effect of respondents' ability to articulate their ideological position, gender and age: namely, the effects of age and gender stay almost unchanged in comparison to the previous model, while political competence also displays its positive effect (the perception of external efficacy tends to rise with the level of competence). The use of media is not a statistically important predictor of this dimension. The third model is also cumulative in its effect: namely, when we introduce the predictors measuring attachment to Serbia and Europe, the effects of age, gender and respondents' ability to articulate its ideological position drop slightly, while identification with Serbia and even more with Europe show a positive effect on the level of perceived external efficacy. Finally, the fourth model changes the situation slightly. The last predictor is the level of contentment with the performances of the current government and functioning of different subsystems. The effects of age, gender and ability to articulate an ideological position are still statistically significant, but declining. However, higher education tends to gain importance in this model (again, this effect is positive – when controlling for the effect of the level of political discontent, the highly educated show a stronger tendency to evaluate political systems as efficient). Attachment to Europe is still a significant predictor, while the effect of attachment to Serbia declines. This model also shows that by far the strongest predictor of the perceived level of external political efficacy is political contentment, opening the research dilemma whether this indicator should be used as a predictor of political disaffection (as in this case), as a separate subdimension, or as an integral part of the index of external political efficacy. Within our analytical model, the findings indicate that the degree to which citizens perceive a political system open to political engagement and responsive to the needs of citizens is largely determined by perceptions of current government performance.

Table 2. Standardised regression coefficients  
for predictors of external political efficacy

External political efficacy	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.000		.000		.000		.000
Highly educated	-.013	.652	-.006	.833	.005	.855	<b>.076</b>	.001
Respondent's age	<b>.161</b>	.000	<b>.156</b>	.000	<b>.146</b>	.000	<b>.097</b>	.000
Females	<b>-.115</b>	.000	<b>-.113</b>	.000	<b>-.121</b>	.000	<b>-.074</b>	.001
Categories of income decile	.045	.279	.019	.502	-.009	.746	-.010	.659
Urban residents	.017	.533	.018	.515	.025	.353	.043	.057
Paid work in the last 7 days	-.046	.116	-.055	.063	-.029	.305	.030	.205
Media use			-.010	.734	.000	.995	-.025	.267
Ability to articulate ideological position			<b>.114</b>	.000	<b>.109</b>	.000	<b>.098</b>	.000
Emotional attachment to Serbia					<b>.147</b>	.000	.039	.085
Emotional attachment to Europe					<b>.174</b>	.000	<b>.100</b>	.000
Political contentment							<b>.607</b>	.000
R Square	.041		.055		.110		.431	

The second dimension of disaffection – trust in national political institutions – is determined by slightly different predictors (Table 3). Most importantly, higher education and paid work (employment status in the last 7 days) now appear as

statistically significant negative predictors of institutional trust, alongside age (exhibiting positive effect). Gender, place of residence, and income level do not play any role in explaining the level of institutional trust. The effects of these predictors remain significant and almost unchanged, even when we control for the effects of knowledge of political processes potentially gained through use of media or ability to ideologically position their political views on the left-right scale. However, political competences exhibit no effect on institutional trust. The third model shows that higher levels of education, respondent’s age, and work status still represent significant predictors when attachments to Serbia or Europe are introduced. The strongest, positive predictor of institutional trust in this model is emotional attachment to Serbia, followed by emotional attachment to Europe (which effect is also positive, but slightly lower). Finally, when the level of political contentment is introduced, the effects of education, age and work status disappear; income level becomes a significant, negative predictor of institutional trust; urban environment starts to affect it positively; and attachments to Serbia and Europe remain important, although not so strong predictors of institutional trust. The level of political contentment displays the strongest (positive) effect, bringing us back to the same research dilemma posed within the previous segment of the analysis.

Table 3. Standardised regression coefficients for predictors of institutional trust

Institutional trust	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.000		.000		.000		.360
Highly educated	<b>-.085</b>	.002	<b>-.082</b>	.002	<b>-.066</b>	.013	-.004	.846
Respondent’s age	<b>.091</b>	.001	<b>.087</b>	.002	<b>.063</b>	.023	.017	.429
Females	-.035	.175	-.035	.187	-.043	.094	.007	.723
Categories of income decile	-.022	.431	-.028	.316	-.052	.061	<b>-.084</b>	.000
Urban residents	-.033	.222	-.030	.261	-.015	.563	<b>.041</b>	.042
Paid work in the last 7 days	<b>-.113</b>	.000	<b>-.116</b>	.000	<b>-.098</b>	.000	-.015	.486
Media use			.013	.634	.026	.337	.000	1.000
Ability to articulate ideological position			.040	.130	.035	.172	.019	.336
Emotional attachment to Serbia					<b>.172</b>	.000	<b>.069</b>	.001
Emotional attachment to Europe					<b>.141</b>	.000	<b>.078</b>	.000
Political contentment							<b>.671</b>	.000
R Square	.045		.047		.099		.508	

When it comes to the predictors of the second dimension – political disengagement – the impact of the political (dis)contentment here is much weaker than in the previous dimension and its subdimensions, while those structural factors are gaining in importance. Regression models for internal political inefficacy, as a dependent variable, reveal that gender represents by far the strongest predictor among the first group of factors: women feel significantly less capable to engage in political processes, indicating that the political socialisation of women takes place within a patriarchal cultural model (Table 4). The feeling of individual incapability for engagement and uninterest in politics declines if the person is highly educated, has better material resources or more

stable employment, or if they come from an urban environment. In other words, determinants of the higher position in the class hierarchy also carry a stronger readiness for engagement in individual or collective political action. The only predictor that is not significant, controlling for the effects of other covariates in the model, is age. In the second model, when we introduced media consumption of political content and respondent ability to articulate their ideological position, almost all factors related to the respondents' structural position became significant predictors of inefficacy. The only change was related to income category, the effect of which was subsequently lost, and age of respondents, which then became a significant factor of internal inefficacy (the older the respondent, the more the level of inefficacy rose). Consumption of media content on politics decreases internal inefficacy, while the same goes for the respondent's political competence (measured by the ability to place themselves on left-right scale), which became by far the strongest predictor. These results indicate that respondents who are able to articulate their political positions develop a stronger inner sense of ability to engage in political processes than those who are unable to do so. The data reveal that this ability is strongly influenced by respondents' education and material position, so that those who have a higher level of education or belong to higher income categories, exhibit higher ability of articulation of their political views. Emotional attachment to Serbia does not contribute to the change in effects of the aforementioned predictors, nor to the level of internal inefficacy itself. However, emotional attachment to Europe reveals that pro-European respondents tend to develop a higher level of internal efficacy than those not attached to Europe. Finally, the last model reveals that political contentment with current government performances and functioning of different subsystems negatively affects the level of internal inefficacy. However, even when controlling for the effect of this variable, political competences and gender remain by far the strongest predictors of a respondent's interest in politics and their capacity for political engagement.

Table 4. Standardised regression coefficients for predictors of internal political inefficacy

Internal political inefficacy	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.000		.000		.000		.000
Highly educated	<b>-.098</b>	.000	<b>-.097</b>	.000	<b>-.096</b>	.000	<b>-.112</b>	.000
Respondent's age	.044	.084	<b>.083</b>	.001	<b>.075</b>	.004	<b>.069</b>	.014
Females	<b>.173</b>	.000	<b>.150</b>	.000	<b>.154</b>	.000	<b>.158</b>	.000
Categories of income decile	<b>-.073</b>	.007	-.047	.071	-.041	.118	-.032	.253
Urban residents	-.085	.001	<b>-.086</b>	.001	<b>-.085</b>	.001	<b>-.058</b>	.029
Paid work in the last 7 days	<b>-.063</b>	.019	<b>-.060</b>	.023	<b>-.073</b>	.006	<b>-.093</b>	.001
Media use			<b>-.095</b>	.000	<b>-.096</b>	.000	<b>-.104</b>	.000
Ability to articulate ideological position			<b>-.219</b>	.000	<b>-.215</b>	.000	<b>-.201</b>	.000
Emotional attachment to Serbia					-.032	.202	-.023	.395
Emotional attachment to Europe					<b>-.092</b>	.000	<b>-.077</b>	.003
Political contentment							<b>-.061</b>	.026
R Square	.078		.136		.144		.135	

The data on the last subdimension – political engagement – also reveal the impact of structural position: those who have more material resources, cultural capital, holding more secure work positions, express stronger readiness to engage in different forms of political actions (Table 5). To this should be added two more factors: urban environment (provides more opportunities for political engagement), and gender (that is, women not only assess the political system as less responsive and their own abilities lower than men’s, but they also display a stronger tendency of disengagement at behavioural level). The effects of media consumption and ability to articulate ideological positions are cumulative: they do not significantly change the impact of aforementioned predictors, but do contribute to the explanation of engagement (the more informed the respondents and able to articulate their political views, the greater the degree of their actual engagement). Emotional attachment to Serbia or Europe, or the level of political (dis)contentment, however, do not play any significant role in explaining political engagement.

Given that this dimension represents a behavioural component of the overall attitude towards politics, for this last model, we introduced the previously examined subdimensions: institutional trust, external political efficacy, and internal political inefficacy. This was done in order to determine whether the actual degree of engagement varies depending on these subdimensions’ influence. The model revealed that previously-noted effects of gender, employment status, media consumption, and ability to articulate ideological positions diminish in importance, while the degree of internal political inefficacy appears now as the strongest predictor (the effects of institutional trust, external political efficacy and political (dis)contentment are not statistically significant). This result also points to another research dilemma: namely, whether media use and the ability to articulate ideological positions should be treated as independent predictors (as we did here) or as integral parts of the political inefficacy dimension. Whatever solution one decides on, there is no doubt that actual political engagement is largely determined by the resources citizens have at their disposal (primarily in terms of cultural and economic capital), and more importantly, by a developed interest in political processes and internal sense of the ability to politically engage.

Table 5. Standardised regression coefficients for predictors of political participation

Political participation	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.000		.000		.000		.000		.000
Highly educated	<b>.107</b>	.000	<b>.105</b>	.000	<b>.100</b>	.000	<b>.113</b>	.000	<b>.075</b>	.013
Respondent’s age	.043	.131	.040	.161	.014	.643	.007	.814	.003	.922
Female	<b>-.092</b>	.001	<b>-.081</b>	.003	<b>-.078</b>	.004	<b>-.080</b>	.005	-.046	.114
Categories of income decile	<b>.109</b>	.000	<b>.099</b>	.001	<b>.092</b>	.002	<b>.106</b>	.000	<b>.090</b>	.003
Urban residents	<b>.097</b>	.000	<b>.095</b>	.001	<b>.106</b>	.000	<b>.103</b>	.000	<b>.096</b>	.001
Paid work in the last 7 days	<b>.078</b>	.010	<b>.074</b>	.014	<b>.081</b>	.008	<b>.074</b>	.020	.045	.163
Media use			<b>.082</b>	.003	<b>.078</b>	.005	<b>.082</b>	.005	.054	.066
Ability to articulate ideological position			<b>.108</b>	.000	<b>.108</b>	.000	<b>.095</b>	.001	.006	.838
Emotional attachment to Serbia					.050	.073	.040	.183	.037	.217
Emotional attachment to Europe					-.006	.833	-.006	.841	-.049	.089

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
Political contentment							.021	.476	-.030	.490
External political efficacy									.010	.808
Institutional trust									.057	.188
Internal political inefficacy									<b>-.318</b>	.000
R Square	.068		.086		.086		.088		.179	

## Conclusions

European Social Survey data show that citizens of Serbia exhibit one of the highest scores of political disaffection in Europe. The country is thus at the bottom of the institutional trust scale, and at the lower end of the external political efficacy subdimension, together with third- and fourth-wave democracies. When it comes to political disengagement, the situation is somewhat different: Serbian citizens exhibit one of the highest levels of internal political inefficacy; however, it does not correspond to the reported level of political participation. Namely, Serbia's ranking in the middle of all European countries indicates the existence of political opportunity structures favourable to political mobilization, as well as different kinds of political involvement. This disproportion between political engagement of the citizens and their assessed individual capability to influence political processes, could be illuminated by the fact that on both subdimensions, Serbia is clustered together with third- and fourth-wave democracies, more prone to processes of political exclusion of important parts of their population, as well as to the presence of erratic and distinctive mobilization episodes in their recent history (Torcal, 2006). The very nature of democratization processes, therefore, could be one of the explanations for the aforementioned asymmetry. However, it should also be noted that participation, which for the most part boils down to periodically giving mass support in election campaigns or by way of protests, does not have empowering effects, as is the case with forms of permanent and active involvement in the entire political process. Although ostensibly nurturing greater participation of citizens and advancement of their political competencies, the idea of civil society, an integral part of post-socialist countries' transformation path, often resulted in the creation of exclusionary, narrow "moral community" (Eyal, 2000). This development contributed to the establishment of an elitist construction of civil society, the spread of moralistic political discourse and the detachment of a large number of people from most facets of organised politics. This suggests that it is necessary to further examine the historical and structural assumptions of political engagement, but also the very experiences of engagement.

The second issue considered in this text is the relationship between the four examined subdimensions of political disaffection and disengagement. The aim was to explore their mutual interconnectedness and the direction of their relationships, thus contributing to a theoretical model, as well as to the operationalisation of these concepts. In building this theoretical model, a key



issue was whether behavioural disengagement fosters disaffection or disaffection leads to disengagement. Although we opted for the second hypothesis, the regression model clearly showed that political participation is not significantly influenced by the extent of political disaffection (i.e., by institutional trust and institutional alienation), but primarily by an individual's interest in politics and assessment of their ability to take an active role in political processes. These results, obtained on the data for Serbia, point to a preliminary conclusion that political disengagement and disaffection are two mutually independent dimensions.

Another issue that arose within theoretical debates on political disaffection and disengagement is related to political discontent: namely, we were faced with a problem whether political discontent should be treated as third, separate independent dimension, as an integral part of the political disaffection dimension, or as a predictor of the two aforementioned dimensions and their subdimensions. We opted for the last, treating political discontent as a predictor, guided by an argument that it represents a varying condition (referring to specific support – see: Easton, 1965) that could have an effect on more durable phenomena of political disaffection and disengagement (diffuse support). The results showed that trust in institutions and evaluation of external political efficacy (i.e., political disaffection) are strongly influenced by the evaluation of current regime's performances; however, internal political (in)efficacy and political participation remained unrelated.

The third research dilemma that emerged from the analysis is related to indicators measuring respondents' ability to articulate their ideological views (by positioning themselves on the left-right scale) and their awareness of political issues (measured by use of different media presenting political content). Although we used these two variables as predictors of the explored subdimensions, they could easily be treated as an integral part of the subdimension of internal political (in)efficacy, something which needs to be further explored and subjected to metric analyses.

Finally, we posed several hypotheses on the effects of different predictors of the explored subdimensions of political disengagement and disaffection. The most important finding is that factors related to structural positions of respondents (age, education, income, employment status, place of residence and gender) affect political disengagement more strongly than disaffection, while the "soft" predictors, measuring competences and identification, provide better explanations of disaffection than disengagement. To this should be added the aforementioned finding that the strongest predictor of both dimensions of political disaffection is the level of contentment with the current regime, while the same factor does not affect the level of political engagement significantly.

The gender gap hypothesis proved more consistent along the dimension of political disengagement than the dimension of disaffection (women are more likely to assess their own abilities for engagement as low, as well as to be less engaged in different forms of political action). In line with this finding, women are also less likely to assess the political system as open and responsive to citizens'

needs. Generational differences, on the other hand, do not seem to persist across examined subdimensions: namely, although internal political inefficacy increases with age, there is no evidence that these generational differences are reflected in actual political engagement (younger generations do not engage more often than older ones in individual or collective actions). Structural (class) political inequalities prove relatively consistent: those of comparatively higher education, more material resources, and stability of employment tend to assess their individual abilities for engagement as higher, as well as be engaged more frequently. In addition, they tend to trust less in institutions, although this does not apply to external political efficacy. The data indisputably confirm the thesis that economically and culturally induced inequalities spill over into political inequalities, lowering the dominated classes' chances of being active participants in political processes. Another important finding is that the ability to position oneself ideologically, as a measure of political competence, affects the results across all subdimensions, except institutional trust: those able to position themselves ideologically, rate their own engagement capabilities as greater, participate more often in various forms of engagement, but, at the same time, they assess the political system as more responsive. On the other hand, consumption of political media content only affects political engagement (both in attitudinal and behavioural aspects), not disaffection. Thus proving, in line with Bourdieu's and Gaxie's arguments, that the two most important resources to possess in capitalist society, material and cultural, also enable the acquisition of statutory competences for political engagement. Finally, both national and European identifications have a stronger (positive) impact on institutional trust and assessing the political system as efficient than on engagement. In addition, stronger European identification raises the internal capacities for engagement.

In lieu of definite conclusions, we would like to offer a set of research questions to be answered in the future. First of all, further comparative study of the pervasive sense of political disaffection and disengagement is needed in order to determine whether it is an acute or chronic condition and identify systemic, structural, and conjunctural factors that condition the phenomenon of political estrangement (in its attitudinal and behavioural components). The question remains whether aversion towards politics, distrust, doubt in one's own political capacities, and declining levels of formal and informal political participation should be attributed to prevailing cultural patterns (pre/post-transformational political culture, patriarchal gender regime) or politically endogenous factors related to current political and economic performance. Indeed, they could also be the result of systemically established political structures, institutional mechanisms, and complementing political discourses, which provide a solid foundation for production and legitimation of depoliticisation, regardless of specific political option in power. In addition to the question of what generates deep-seated negativity towards politics, a key question is whether the negativity hides the possibility of political articulation and through what political program it could be expressed. Do citizens really just want different politicians – trusted, more decisive, more consistent, and/or more accessible? Do they expect that

political representation should be replaced by expert authorities and expert political judgement? Or, do they hope for participatory democracy that would enable more active engagement and real politicisation, not exclusively the result of clientelist and pressure groups; do they not believe in a process of organised struggle for fundamental social and class interests? Further research is needed, both quantitative and qualitative, in order to answer these questions.

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