

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES – QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

The study of social and political attitudes has become one of the central areas of contemporary sociology. In a period in which European societies are affected by multiple crises – the economic downturn, rising inequalities, labour-market insecurities, and the rise of the far right – analyses of this kind allow us to understand how individuals and groups respond and, in turn, how they actively reshape subsequent changes in the political, economic, and cultural fields. This dynamic operates through several mechanisms, and addressing them constitutes our central motivation in editing this special issue of *Sociologija*.

The primary importance of public attitudes lies in their ability to mirror structural transformations, serving as key indicators of perceptions of inequality or feelings of economic and existential security. Second, social and political attitudes mediate between economic conditions and political behaviour, as already indicated in much previous research. Ideological polarization may explain how rising inequalities and insecurities, stagnation of real incomes, and frustration among the lower and middle classes directly affect political action. Third, public attitudes are at the very core of social cohesion or its erosion. The widening gaps are strongly manifested in declining generalized and institutional trust, rising support for authoritarian and populist parties, ideological polarization, and reduced solidarity within and between groups. Fourth, social and political attitudes are crucial for understanding cultural conflicts that often unfold beneath the surface of political processes. They are thus at the core of the dynamics of Inglehart's "silent revolution in reverse" – the flipped shift from postmaterialist to materialist values, in which authoritarian and traditionalist attitudes return in the context of economic insecurities. Finally, public attitudes about migration, social protection, family policy, taxation, or the environment shape institutional responses, which is why research on such attitudes provides an empirical basis for decision-making.

This special issue begins with Zoran Pavlović's article, which situates political participation within the broader framework of Schwartz's value theory. Drawing on nearly 40,000 respondents from the European Social Survey's 11th wave, the study focuses on Schwartz's higher-order values and demonstrates that value orientations are powerful predictors of both conventional and unconventional forms of political participation. Importantly, the study reveals systematic moderation effects of national freedom levels. In countries with more civil liberties and political rights, Self-Enhancement is negatively associated with conventional participation, whereas in partly free countries it becomes a positive motivator. Pavlović's additional findings reveal that Self-Transcendence and

Openness to Change positively predict unconventional forms of participation, whereas Self-Enhancement and Conservation discourage them. Such findings highlight that political action is always embedded in institutional contexts – what motivates participants in consolidated democracies may function differently in environments with restricted political rights or fragile civil liberties.

Moving from values to ideology, Marko Vladisavljević examines how individuals' left–right self-placement translates into their preferences for redistribution. Using European Social Survey data spanning over two decades and more than 30 European countries, his analysis indicates that left-leaning individuals clearly show higher demand for redistribution in Northern and Western Europe, where political competition around welfare policies is long established. In contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe – and especially in the Western Balkans – the link between ideology and redistribution preferences is markedly weaker or even absent. Vladisavljević argues that this pattern reflects the legacy of socialism and the persistence of low ideological polarization on the issue. A particularly valuable contribution of the article is the finding that expansive state interventions during the recent pandemic crisis were followed by a decline in demand for redistribution and a widening left–right divide in this respect. This suggests that short-term crises can have long-lasting consequences for the ideological structure of public opinion, challenging the assumption that redistribution preferences are stable or slow-moving.

Continuing within a comparative European framework, Irena Petrović and Milica Vesković Anđelković shift the focus to intergroup relations and public perceptions of migration. Drawing on ethnic competition theory and three waves of European Social Survey data, their analysis confirms that anti-immigrant attitudes remain widespread across Europe, yet vary substantially across both national contexts and individual-level characteristics. In line with the core assumptions of ethnic competition theory, the authors conclude that perceived competition over resources is indeed present, with the availability of resources and the relative competencies of competing groups significantly shaping the intensity of intergroup tensions. Their findings also reinforce earlier research demonstrating that anti-immigrant attitudes are most commonly expressed by older, less-educated men living in rural areas who lack personal migration experience. Finally, contrary to much previous research, the immigration rate in a given country proves to be an insignificant predictor of anti-immigrant attitudes among citizens, probably due to the still-limited integration of immigrant populations across many European societies.

The issue then turns to quantitative analyses of social and political attitudes within the Serbian population. Marko Jovanović and Ksenija Marković revisit the “modern gender gap” – the widely documented tendency for women to position themselves slightly to the left of men. Drawing on more than three decades of public opinion data collected by the Institute of Social Sciences, the authors examine whether this pattern persists in a post-socialist context. Their findings offer an important nuance to the standard narrative: although

women in Serbia indeed appear somewhat more centre-left in their ideological self-placement, this shift does not reflect stronger identification with the left. Rather, it results from a lower likelihood of self-positioning on the right and a heightened tendency to choose centrist positions, often accompanied by greater political ambivalence or weaker ideological crystallization. This offers a valuable corrective to assumptions that generalize Western European patterns to post-socialist societies and underscores how differences in historical experience and political socialization may shape gendered political identities.

The special issue continues with Branka Matijević, Jovana Zafirović, and Bojan Todosijević's examination of political sexism and its role in shaping support for Serbia's leading populist party, the Serbian Progressive Party. This contribution advances international scholarship on gendered attitudes and populism by demonstrating that the relationship between sexism and populist support is not independent but is mediated by broader authoritarian orientations. Although the authors find that individuals with higher levels of political sexism are more likely to support the Serbian Progressive Party, consistent with prior research in Western countries, this effect diminishes once authoritarianism is taken into account. This finding aligns with recent work showing that sexism often operates as part of a larger authoritarian worldview rather than as a standalone political disposition. By demonstrating the interdependence of these constructs, the authors help clarify the psychological underpinnings of populist support in the Serbian context, marked by strong leader-centric politics.

The final contribution, authored by Nemanja Zvijer, Aleksandra Marković, and Marija Radoman, turns to the 2024–2025 student occupations of faculties in Serbia. Drawing on an extensive dataset of 929 banner photographs collected during the occupations, spanning 35 occupied faculties across five universities, the study examines both the content and formal characteristics of protest slogans as potent communicative tools – and thus simultaneously symbolic and political acts. Based on a detailed coding analysis, the authors show that the most prevalent category concerns agency, appearing in more than 20% of the analysed slogans. This emphasis is fully consistent with the character of the student protests, which called for immediate personal and collective action aimed at transforming existing structures and the broader political system. Furthermore, the nearly equal distribution of the subcodes of proactivity (slightly above 50%) and reactivity (slightly below 50%) indicates that students were equally concerned with motivating others toward more active engagement and continually reminding the public of ongoing events.

Through the contributions included in this special issue, we hope to have at least partially answered the question of what quantitative analysis can tell us about the sources, structure, and consequences of social and political attitudes today, and how quantitative empirical evidence can contribute to understanding the social tensions and political realignments that define societies across Europe. As editors of this special issue, we would like to express our gratitude to the authors

for their thoughtful and empirically rich contributions. We also thank the editor-in-chief of *Sociologija*, Ana Pajvančić-Cizelj, for supporting the development of this issue and recognizing the importance of empirically grounded engagement with social and political attitudes. Our appreciation extends as well to the reviewers and colleagues whose careful readings and suggestions helped refine the articles presented here.

Special issue editors:

Vladimir Mentus
Bojan Todosijević
Institute of Social Sciences