
Political Tolerance

Paradox of Political Tolerance in Croatia

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Summary

Although victims of aggression, Croats have been labelled as intolerant and aggressor as imperilled. Several independent studies of tolerance have shown a relatively high level of political tolerance in Croatia. Since such results were contrary to the expected, in an American study data pointing to the toleration paradox were interpreted as inconsistent toleration. Also, some incidents that occurred in Croatia pertaining to the toleration paradox were used as indicators of the lack of tolerance.

Whenever Croats insisted on their cultural and political identity in the former Yugoslavia, Serbian propaganda on Croatian inclination to genocide, fascism and intolerance would gain momentum. Serbs, who dominated in all areas, spread such propaganda abroad through their legations. The results of such propaganda have in various ways negatively affected Croats, both those living in Croatia and those living abroad. Some of these consequences will be discussed in more detail, particularly those related to political tolerance and its paradox.

Political tolerance is readiness to accept and tolerate those political options and their operationalization that we do not accept and towards which we have a negative attitude (Mendus, 1988; Sullivan, 1989). However, in order to tolerate something there must be a reason for that, so a politically tolerant person is always torn between rejecting the program of some political option and accepting its right to take part in political competition on equal terms. It is a conflict of personal interest and a general rule, of the ego and the super ego. In this conflict those who are tolerant choose the general rule, and those who are not the personal interest.

The point of toleration is not putting up with and tolerating due to the existence of a different interest, but in rational acceptance of the right of any interest to be realized on equal terms, regardless of our personal preferences. A politically tolerant person respects the democratically elected government even then when their party has lost in elections. Respecting the rules of the game is more important for a tolerant person than winning by breaking them. A tolerant person has more difficulty putting up

with broken rules that accepting defeat in a fair competition. For them the freedom of choice is more important than personal choice.

A politically tolerant person opposes attempts to impose a ban on a political party even in cases when they do not at all approve of its program. They are against banning such party from appearing in the media. On the other hand, a politically intolerant person will be in favor of banning a party they do not approve of and will oppose its appearance in the media.

However, when defining and researching political tolerance the toleration paradox should be taken into account. The toleration paradox lies in tolerating the intolerance which restricts freedom. Are we tolerant if we tolerate extreme social groups like fascists, Yugoslavs, communists, ustashas? As the negation of negation is not a negation, intolerance of fascists, Yugoslavs, communists and ustashas is not an indication of political intolerance.

In the study on political tolerance in Croatia (Vujević, 1996), subjects were required to name a Croatian political party they least agreed with and to state their agreement or disagreement with banning it or banning it from appearing in the media. The subjects were also supposed to name a politician who they least liked and express their agreement or disagreement with banning his/her appearance in the media. Apart from this, a number of other indicators such as the subjects' attitude to capital punishment, abortion, changes in the language etc. were applied. Also, a political tolerance scale was devised.

Out of the total of 772 subjects, the majority would not ban the political party they least agree with, not would they ban such a party from appearing in the media. Also, most subjects were against capital punishment, against banning abortion, in favor of changes in the language and in favor of fostering dialects. On the political tolerance scale most subjects chose statements suggesting satisfactory political tolerance. All indicators suggested a relatively high level of political tolerance in Croatia (Vujević, 1996). Such results were not expected after long years of totalitarianism and in the midst of the war in Croatia.

One year later Americans conducted a survey in several European countries including Croatia. Some questions pertained to political tolerance, but the interpretation of the data on minority acceptance is disputable, which is why they are shown in Table 1.

Croatian public opinion of Krajina Serbs is extremely negative (94%), the most negative in relation to all European countries covered in the study. However, Croatian public opinion of Serbs living in Croatian cities is more on a positive side (52%) and equals the public opinion of immigrants among European nations in developed democracies. The difference between Croatian public opinion of Serbs living in Krajina and of those

living in Croatian cities was interpreted by American researchers as inconsistent tolerance. This is, however, not about inconsistency, but about the toleration paradox.

Table 1: Public opinion of majority nations on minority groups in some European states

Majority	Minority	Acceptance (in per cent)	Unacceptance (in per cent)
Croats	Krajina Serbs	6	94
	Urban Serbs	48	52
Serbs	Albanians	11	83
Macedonians	Albanians	28	65
Albanians	Greeks	47	49
Bulgarians	Turks	52	39
Romanians	Hungarians	50	40
Slovaks	Hungarians	43	53
Latvians	Russians	46	43
French	Immigrants	47	46
British	Immigrants	40	41
Germans	Immigrants	47	52

Source: *Public Opinion in Croatia*, USIA, 1995

As has already been emphasized, the paradox of tolerance involves the intolerance of intolerance. Upon the multi-party elections, when the democratically elected Croatian Parliament (Sabor) declared Croatian independence of Yugoslavia, Krajina Serbs opposed this decision by force of arms. Although independence is a legitimate right of any nation, Croats were also granted this right under the current Yugoslav constitution. At the referendum on independence, 94% of Croatian citizens voted in favor of independence. After that, Krajina Serbs, who made 4% in the population in Croatia, aided by the JNA occupied 25% of Croatian territory. Krajina Serbs engaged in atrocities, persecutions and massive destruction, eliminating all Croatian traces in the historically Croatian area, which had been internationally recognized as part of the Croatian state. Due to all this, it is quite understandable that Croats could not accept Krajina Serbs, which does not suggest their political intolerance. Those who do otherwise are intolerant (6%).

Data on the unacceptance of Krajina Serbs coincide with the data on the referendum on Croatian independence. If 94% of Croatian citizens voted for Croatian independence, it stands to reason to expect that an equal number of Croatian citizens (94%) would not accept Krajina Serbs, who opposed the referendum results by force of arms. In other words, the

above unacceptance figure (94%) does not suggest ethnic exclusivism. If it were ethnic exclusivism, the acceptance of Krajina Serbs and Serbs living in Croatian cities would be the same. However, although considering the same ethnic group, only 6% of Croats accept Krajina Serbs and as many as 48% accept urban Serbs.

The latter figure equals that on immigrant acceptance in Western European countries. Considering the fact that the Croatian data were obtained in circumstances of war, in which 4% of Krajina Serbs occupied 25% of Croatian territory, then 48% of acceptance of the same ethnic group living in Croatian cities undoubtedly suggests a relatively high ethnic tolerance. Most Serbs living in Croatian cities have relatives among Krajina Serbs, and have not, according to the majority of Croats, distanced themselves enough from the actions of their Krajina kinsmen. Still, Croats do not resent them at a percentage higher than that at which Western European nations resent their minorities!

Similar conclusions are also suggested by some other data from the American study. In the following table comparative data on public opinion of one-nation state are shown.

Table 2: One-nation state preferences in some European states

State	per cent of respondents
Rumania	14
Croatia	22
Slovakia	22
Germany	35
Great Britain	35
France	38
Poland	40
Bulgaria	51
Macedonia	59
Albania	80

Source: *Public Opinion in Croatia*, USIA, 1995

Even so, national exclusivism has been imputed to Croatia, particularly at the beginning of the war. According to some analysts, national exclusivism was the cause of the war in Croatia. However, results of various independent studies show a relatively high level of tolerance in Croatia, which is in some aspects even higher than in Western European democracies that are supposed to serve as a role model. Even so, some incidents have been accounted for by a low level of tolerance in Croatia.

Armed conflicts in the area of former Yugoslavia have also been accounted for by insufficient tolerance. However, in his commentary on the findings of the study on national tolerance conducted by the Yugoslav Association of Institutes for Social Studies in 1989 and 1990 Županov, among others, says: “In the republics which became battle-fields, the index of tolerance exceeded the statistical mean, which suggests that it is not intolerance that led to violence”. (Županov, 1995:219)

Liberation of occupied areas has been accounted for by Croatian lack of tolerance, although it took place after numerous attempts to resolve the problem peacefully with the aid of the international community. While Croatia was being praised for its cooperation by some, others were emphasizing its lack of tolerance expecting Croatia to tolerate indefinitely the occupation of its vital territory.

The exodus of Krajina Serbs which resulted from the liberation of occupied areas was used as a proof of Croatian national exclusivism, although it was a result of exclusivism demonstrated by Krajina Serbs, who were not willing to accept Croatia as their country. Even today they are setting conditions for their return which deny Croatian sovereignty.

Tolerance does not rule out banning the return to those Serbs who do not accept the Republic of Croatia as their country. Citizenship is not just a geographical concept, it is also a political concept. A citizen of a state cannot be someone who does not accept that state. Croatian Serbs have to accept the Republic of Croatia as their country if they want to live there as its citizens. Croatia must grant them all civil and ethnic rights to ensure their national identity in Croatia, but in a patriotic sense.

Indeed, imposing a ban on the return of those who do not recognize the Republic of Croatia is not an act of intolerance. Their return does not imply returning to the same political reality. Political situation on the former territory of the Socialist Republic of Croatia has been changed by the establishment of an independent state, the Republic of Croatia. A large number of Serbian refugees do not want to return to such a Croatia. Toleration of those who do not tolerate the Croatian state is not tolerance.

In other words, tolerance includes both acceptance and unacceptance, but we must make sure that the acceptance is not suicidal, and the unacceptance inhuman. It would be suicidal to allow those who do not accept the Republic of Croatia to return, and it would be inhuman to ban the return of those who were misled, but now accept the Republic of Croatia. Tolerant behavior implies banning the return of those who do not accept the Republic of Croatia, punishing those who have committed crimes, forgiving those who were misled, but did not commit crimes during the rebellion against the Republic of Croatia on condition that they now accept Croatia as their country.

Collective amnesty is as unjustified as collective guilt. Horrible crimes have been committed on the territory of Croatia. Those who committed them have names. Croatia has the obligation to name them. Most of them fled Croatia, some would like to return but do not recognize the Republic of Croatia. Croatia must not let them return for its own security, for the crimes they have committed and for those they would commit in the future if they were allowed to return to the country. A mass return of Serbian refugees would be suicidal for Croatia, and imposing a ban on the return of all Serbs would be unjust, even if there was just one person entitled to return. This is why the issue of the return of Serbian refugees has to be tackled distriminately.

Collective guilt should be distinguished from blaming everyone. Collective guilt implies blaming everyone for belonging to a collective body which committed a particular crime, and not for participating in the crime. When a discriminate approach is applied, those who did not participate in a crime are cleared of responsibility. Such an approach can also lead to the conclusion that all members of a collective body are to blame. However, all need not be equally guilty, nor should they be held equally responsible. All of them need not be tolerated equally, either.

Criminals must be tried for war crimes against humanity according to international laws. For the war crimes against the Republic of Croatia they should be tried according to the laws of the Republic of Croatia. Tolerance implies forgiveness, and Croatia has passed a law on amnesty, but all cannot and must not be forgiven. There are some conditions that one must fulfil to be forgiven even the forgivable. You cannot be forgiven unless you admit your guilt. Those who admit their guilt can be partly forgiven, and those who do not are prepared to commit crimes again. Forgiving those who do not admit to crimes encourages new crimes. Tolerance does not imply turning a blind eye, overlooking crimes.

Tolerance is supposed to help lower the crime rate and prevent crime. In order for the crime rate to drop and to prevent crime, they should be well explained. The better a crime is explained the lesser the urge for revenge and the readier we are to forgive. Both the criminal and the victim create the conditions for tolerance. If there is no admission of guilt, there is no basis for forgiveness. Without admission, we do not know who the criminal is, nor who the victim is. Only the victim can forgive, but even they have no right to revenge. Victims, too, must respect certain legal and moral codes in order to make the difficult situation easier for both the victim and the criminal.

Tolerance is not just a character trait. It includes the ability to reason and act in accordance with the highest level of human personality. Man is a being that can control their temper and discipline it. Tolerance is about effective control of the id and the ego by the superego. It is, before all, a moral trait aimed at “transcending or overcoming the present condition in general human terms” (Filipović, 1984:217).

We have seen Croats emphasizing Catholic moral codes such as “Forgive!”, “Do not hate!” and “Love your enemy” even in the midst of the war. On the other hand, the aggressors tended to emphasize the Orthodox principle “Revenge is better than sainthood”. The difference between the two is quite obvious and the conduct of the two religious groups differed even more, since revenge is not right even if there is a reason for it. Armed aggression against Croatia as a revenge was an “act of retaliation for the pains, insults, losses” (Anić, 1991:429), that Serbs suffered due to the fact that Croats established their independent state on their own territory and within internationally recognized borders.

Even when faced with armed aggression, Croats made a point of maintaining moral discipline, defending themselves from those whose evil deeds demonstrated the absence of any form of discipline. If this had not been so, they would not have resort to arms when the Croatian democratically elected parliament declared Croatian independence after the referendum at which 94% of Croatian citizens voted in favor of it. The brutality of the aggressor in the war against Croatia is a result of the absence of moral discipline.

The outcome of the war suggests that morality prevails over immorality. The unrestrained aggressor was armed to the teeth, and the Croats were practically unarmed. Nevertheless, they won due to the kind of strength that is not gained from mere physical force, but due to their spiritual power, the kind of power that at critical times made most Croatian defenders put spiritual needs before biological needs in an unequal fight to survive.

Even so, Croats have been labelled as intolerant, although compared to other European states they demonstrate the lowest level of national exclusivism. This can be explained by the fact that many people are not acquainted with the concept of the toleration paradox, but also by the fact that there are quite a few others who cannot come to terms with the break-up of the former state.

Even though enslavement of a nation is the worst of all crimes (Toynbee), such crimes were suppressed, and those resulting from attempted enslavement exaggerated. This is how the myth about Jasenovac came into being. In this myth the number of victims was exaggerated to the extent that it exceeded the total number of World War II victims in all Yugoslavia (Tudman, 1990). Blowing up the figures had the purpose to prove that Croats are genocidal, particularly at times when Croats sought independence.

This was the case just before the democratic elections, and the satanization of the Croatian people reached its peak after the referendum on independence and the decision made by the democratically elected Parliament on Croatian independence. This was followed by armed aggression on Croatia. The actual situation could by no means justify the aggression,

but it was given certain connotations in order to have a pretext for the aggression. Indeed, when a situation is defined as a real situation, it is real in its consequences (Thomas, 1967). Serbs defined the establishment of the independent Croatian state as an act of creating a fascist state of a genocidal nation and, unfortunately, acted as if this had been the case. They even managed to convince a part of the world.

In the beginning, when they had a big advantage, Serbs unrestrainedly destroyed all Croats calling them genocidal people, fascists and ustashas, levelling their houses, churches and all that was even remotely Croatian. When the tables were turned, they all fled either in panic or in an organized way. A mass exodus was organized in order to prove that Croats were genocidal. Serbs left in such huge numbers because some wanted to escape punishment for the crimes they had committed, and those who had not committed crimes ran away for fear because they believed Croats were genocidal. Those who are not well informed and who do not favor Croats are still emphasizing that Serbian brutality and their mass exodus were a result of Croats' national exclusivism.

In spite of the armed aggression and the brutality displayed by Krajina Serbs in their fight against Croatian independence, the majority of Croats accept the idea of Croatia as a multi-ethnic state where minority groups are represented in the parliament, where they are free to establish political parties that will protect their rights and where they have the right to establish organizations that will protect and develop their traditions and culture. (*Public Opinion in Croatia*, USIA, 1995:7) Regardless of these and such research results, some still believe that Croats are bad guys and Serbs good guys, because they adopted the preconceptions about genocidal Croats, and still believe they are real.

In order to prove that Croats lack tolerance, it is often pointed out that the fascination with the state neutralizes the opposition and disrupts the development of democracy (Mirić, 1996). Croats are indeed fascinated with their state. Every political party of some importance has emphasized this in their program and name. As many as 94% of Croatian citizens voted for the independent Croatian state at the referendum. The democratically elected Croatian parliament made the decision on the establishment of the independent Croatian state. Indeed, the Croatian state is undoubtedly a paramount value in Croatian political life.

However, the state is not a super-value. If it were, Croats would have equally loved all the states they lived in. Croats do not want their own state for its own sake, but for the aim it is supposed to achieve. The existence of any nation without a state is threatened, and establishing their own state represents an effort to ensure national continuity. Therefore, the state is an instrumental value which is indispensable for national continuity, and this is, indeed, a super-value without which no other value can be realized.

State is an instrumental value and national continuity a target value. There is no democracy without the state. There is no democracy without free opposition, but a distinction should be made between opposition against the Croatian state and opposition against Croatian government. Opposition against the Croatian state denies Croatian continuity, and therefore cannot be tolerated (toleration paradox), and opposition against the Croatian government must be tolerated in a society striving for democracy.

However, the distinction between the words 'state' and 'government' is often not made and at times even deliberately confused, which allows the weakness of the Croatian government to be used as a pretext for making statements about the weakness of the Croatian state. Also, criticism of government policy is interpreted as an attack on the Croatian state. The state represents the people (citizens) living in a certain area who are politically organized. Government is a form of political organization. The German state did not cease to be the German state just because it was transformed from a fascist to a democratic state. In other words, "opposition" against the Croatian state is a struggle against the continuity of the Croatian people, but opposition against the Croatian government isn't.

Moreover, when speaking of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH - Croatian state during World War II), a distinction should be made between describing it as a criminal state (Goldstein) and a state with a criminal government, although every nation should to a certain extent be held accountable for its government. The majority of Croats opposed the fascist government of NDH, but did not oppose an independent Croatian state. Croatian partisans, too, fought for the political independence of the Croatian people. This is why they were criticized and persecuted by the federal communist government of Yugoslavia. For many people NDH was a criminal state, but because it was Croatian, rather than because it was fascist. The Republic of Croatia is treated likewise by some people.

The "opposition" against the Croatian state resents the expression "our state". They emphasize: "The state is not good because it is ours, but it should be ours because it is good!" (Mirić, 1996:101). However, the state cannot be good, unless it is ours, but it is not good only because it is ours. Aren't the tragic examples of nations without their own states speaking for themselves? It is of utmost importance to have our own state, but the fact that it is ours does not guarantee democracy and freedom. It is true, though, that the word "our" can be and is used to cover up for some weakness of the government.

The essence of political tolerance should be clearly distinguished from its manifestations, since the intolerance of the intolerance is tolerance. Not tolerating the aggression on Croatia, those who deny the Croatian state and those who do not respect the democratically elected government is not an indication of the lack of tolerance (toleration paradox).

According to a large number of independent studies, the level of political tolerance in Croatia is significantly higher than expected. This fact might have come as surprise, which is not a toleration paradox, but a wrong hypothesis. Some manifestations of intolerance in Croatia are not indicators of the lack and tolerance and its inconsistency, but are related to the toleration paradox.

Croatian culture is extremely diverse, which is why a high level of tolerance should be expected as a result. Tolerance allows for differences, and differences increase tolerance. However, “tolerance is not always desirable, and intolerance is not always something to be avoided (Kasachkoff, 1994:300), because “tolerance has made this world even worse than necessary by allowing preventable evil” (Horton, 1994:253). This is why Croats could not tolerate the occupation by Krajina Serbs, the denial of their state and the disrespect for the democratically elected government. It is about the toleration paradox, and not its inconsistency, as it might have seemed to the American researchers. (*Public Opinion in Croatia*, 1995:8) It is neither about the lack of tolerance, as it seems to those opposing the Croatian state.

Croatia must not allow a mass return of Serbian refugees, since most of them do not accept Croatia as their country. They define the situation in Croatia within the framework of Great-Serbian ideology and would act again in accordance with that ideology. If they are going to return, they must abandon their key positions and base their attitude towards Croats on actual circumstances, and not myths which made them instruments in the attempted realization of Great-Serbian ideology.

Despite the prejudices resulting from Serbian propaganda, the findings of most independent studies suggest a relatively high level of political tolerance in Croatia compared to European countries which have a long tradition of democracy. The unacceptance of Krajina Serbs, the liberation of occupied territories, ban on a mass return of Serbian refugees, all these are not indicators of the lack of tolerance in Croatia, but of the toleration paradox. The paradox of toleration lies in the intolerance of intolerance, and Croats could tolerate neither the aggressors and the occupation nor can they now tolerate the return of the defected aggressors who do not recognize the Republic of Croatia.

Conclusions:

1. Whenever Croats insisted on their cultural and political identity, Serbian propaganda on Croatian inclination to genocide, fascism and national exclusivism would gain momentum.

2. Results of most independent studies suggest a relatively high level of political tolerance in Croatia, which is by some indicators even higher than in European nations with a long democratic tradition.

3. However, the way people act is not determined by facts, but by the way they see the facts. Serbian perspective of Croats as genocidal, fascist-like and nationally exclusive people led to their aggression on Croatia in which they acted as if Croats actually were genocidal, fascist-like and nationally exclusive, because preconceptions are real in their consequences.

4. Croats could not accept the aggressors and the occupation of their territory, which is why they engaged in actions aimed at liberating those territories. During these actions Krajina Serbs fled Croatia in huge numbers. Here too, their preconceptions on Croats as genocidal people were real in their consequence - their mass flight.

5. Unacceptance of Krajina Serbs, fighting to liberate the occupied Croatian territories and the ban on mass return of Serbian refugees who do not recognize the Republic of Croatia, these are not indicators of the lack of tolerance, but of the toleration paradox, the tolerance which is manifested in the intoleration of intolerance.

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