

Research paper

Received: 19 March 2021

<https://doi.org/10.20901/pm.58.4.05>

Voided Ballots in the 2012 Parliamentary Election in Serbia: Abstention, Protest, Irrationality, or Manipulation?

UROŠ LAZIĆ

Independent Researcher

Summary

The “white ballots” campaign in the 2012 parliamentary election in Serbia was accompanied by a change in the portion of invalid ballots, but also in their correlation with socio-demographic variables. When the percentage of invalid votes in the three previous elections is analyzed using the generalized least squares (GLS) multiple regression analysis, the percentage of inhabitants with incomplete primary education represents the best predictor. The percentage of individuals with primary education is also statistically relevant, just in the opposite (negative) direction, and less predictive. When GLS is applied to invalid votes in the 2012 election, incomplete primary education is positively, and primary education is negatively correlated with the criterion. The percentage of illiterates, the share of people over 65 years of age and the degree of urbanization are significantly, but negatively related to the criterion. The consequences of the 2012 election outcome were considered in the light of the regression to competitive authoritarianism.

Keywords: Invalid Ballots, “White Ballots” Campaign, Protest Voting, Express Voting, Competitive Authoritarianism

Introduction

Invalid ballots is a heterogeneous, multifaceted, multiform, and multiconditioned, that is, an extremely complex phenomenon. The very lexical dissemination of this term through a large number of synonymous, or semantically related, terms in itself is one of the confirmations of this claim.¹ Furthermore, this phenomenon can be

¹ We come across the following determinants: invalid ballot, voided ballot, spoiled ballot, white ballot/blank ballot/empty vote, null ballot, NOTA (“None of the Above”), protest vote, expres-

viewed from a number of different theoretical perspectives.² In this paper, the socio-demographic paradigm, as the dominant core science research practice, was applied to address the issue of invalid election ballots.

The notion of electoral behavior exhaustively subsumes the notions of electoral participation and electoral orientation. Understood in such a framework, the invalid ballot phenomenon is, in many ways, a specific form of electoral behavior. Although in most cases it reflects electoral abstinence and lack of electoral orientation (Knack & Kropf, 2003b), it is difficult to classify it unambiguously, comprehensively and exhaustively, since it appears in different socio-political contexts, often representing a manifestation of completely opposite conceptual classification modalities. Stiefbold (1965) identifies the main causes of invalid ballots being protest; cross-pressures;³ unfamiliarity with voting techniques, lack of attention/electoral skills/electoral experience/information, confusion, fatigue, illiteracy, handicap; apathy, indifference, alienation from the political system, negativistic-nihilistic attitude towards political subjects (Stiefbold, 1965).⁴ Based on the combined effects of these motivating factors, and their interaction with relevant socio-demographic characteristics, Stiefbold (1965) derives a typology of invalid votes. The first type consists of highly politicized individuals who want to express dissatisfaction with the current political offer or express some other form of protest.⁵ The second type is formed by so-called apathetic voters characterized by underdeveloped interest in politics and insufficient involvement/integration into the political system.⁶

sive vote, BNS vote (blank, null, or spoiled vote), negative vote, unrecorded vote, informal vote, residual vote, weak protest vote, borderline form of abstinence, roll-off, error rate, undervote, overvote and the like.

² Rational choice theory, fatigue theory, lack of desirable choice theory, media salience theory, protest theory, information theory, ballot design theory, etc.

³ Inability to decide between equally attractive alternatives, ambivalence.

⁴ The increase in the frequency of the last two categories is also influenced by a certain type of social conformism (especially in smaller communities), as well as the understanding that voting is a moral duty of every individual.

⁵ This type is characterized by a higher socio-economic status embodied in a significantly higher level of literacy, information, educational level and personal income (Stiefbold, 1965; Kim & Koh, 1972).

⁶ They are also characterized by skepticism, cynicism, hostility, apathy, as well as ignorance of election procedures. Creating the borderline form of electoral abstainers, they are also named as weak protest votes. The most common causes of this type of invalid ballots are disinterest, carelessness, lack of voting experience, lack of information, ignorance or cross-pressure (Stiefbold, 1965; Wattenberg *et al.*, 2000; Knack & Kropf, 2003a). When this type of invalid votes is at stake, most studies suggest their increased prevalence among older (Darcy & Schneider, 1989; Kimball *et al.* 2004), lower-income (Darcy & Schneider, 1989; Nichols & Strizek, 1995; Kimball *et al.*, 2004) and less educated voters (Nichols, 1998; Nichols & Strizek, 1995).

In a number of studies (Aldashev & Mastrobuoni, 2019; Herron & Sekhon, 2005; Knack & Kropf, 2003a; Mott, 1926; Sinclair & Alvarez, 2004; Driscoll & Nelson, 2014; Stiefbold, 1965) the fundamental difference between these two types can be seen in the intellectual capacity of voters on the one hand and their political motives on the other.⁷ This distinction is quite analogous to Blondel's (1978) suggestion that electoral abstinence should be divided into "negative abstainers" and "positive abstainers". If Stiefbold's typology was viewed from the aspect of intentionality of the act of ballot voiding, it would be recognized that all types of unintentionally voided ballots reflect electoral participation, but not the validity of manifested electoral orientation.⁸ Apparent voter turnout might consist of invalid ballots ensued from cross⁹ or environmental pressures¹⁰, so that the latter ones could aim to forcibly direct abstinence-oriented voters toward electoral turnout and, possibly, toward quite a specific political preference.¹¹ On the contrary, the type of intentionally voided ballots that originates from expressing a political attitude, demand, protest, dissatisfaction with the political crisis, permanent preservation of the status quo, regime, officials, corruption, political offer, electoral system as a whole, reflects, it seems, active electoral participation, and often an ideologically defined electoral orientation that cannot be expressed within the existing political order/sys-

⁷ Zulfikarpasic (2001) points out that voters who practice inserting an "empty vote" are interested in political events and very demanding, while they show either specific or structural disappointment in relation to politics through their voting. By inserting "empty votes", they want to send a message and hope for change. What separates them from abstainers is that they are not so young, they are better integrated into the social fabric, better educated and more politicized. According to this author, such voting is akin to abstinence primarily in the case of rural areas, where the burden of mutual knowledge and social control leads voters to vote "empty", instead of abstaining. "Empty voting", he concludes, corresponds to two types of behavior: the traditional rural one, which reflects hidden abstinence, and the one that is more urban and represents a political expression.

⁸ In addition to the characteristics of the voters themselves, the frequency of this phenomenon depends primarily on the complexity of the electoral system (Knack & Kropf, 2003a; Posner, 2001; Brady *et al.*, 2001; Montgomery, 1985; Shocket *et al.*, 1992; Sinclair & Alvarez, 2004), but also on voting technologies (Alvarez *et al.*, 2001; Brady *et al.*, 2001; Knack & Kropf, 2003a; Ansolabehere & Stewart III, 2005), holding multi-level elections (Brady *et al.*, 2001; Kimball *et al.*, 2001), too few (Knack & Kropf, 2003a) or too many options (Power & Roberts, 1995; Power & Garand, 2007), and ballot design (Kimball *et al.*, 2001; Kimball & Kropf, 2005; Herron & Sekhon, 2005; Darcy & Schneider, 1989).

⁹ Double attraction or rejection conflict.

¹⁰ Direct or indirect.

¹¹ This presumed phenomenon should be sought primarily within smaller communities and less democratic regimes. It is to be expected that it should be related to electoral abstinence in its correlates.

tem.¹² When, on the other hand, the intentional voiding of the ballot is not the result of cross or external pressure, and at the same time does not express a political position, requests, dissatisfaction, or protest, it represents electoral participation without a developed political orientation. For example, it could be assumed that a certain number of voters consistently go to the polls and purposefully invalidate the ballot in the belief that in this way they prevent possible fraud with their vote.¹³ Another example could be individuals who spoil the ballot by adding/drawing non-political content for fun. Among many other indications, this trial grouping¹⁴ clearly indicates a complex phenomenon, but also the so-called “dirty” variable. Therefore, a flexible case-by-case approach is necessary when addressing this topic. A meta-analytical study (Lysek *et al.*, 2020) found that, of all socio-demographic characteristics, only the literacy rate and the existence of an interwar democratic tradition are robust predictors of invalid votes. However, other variables, such as democratic society, economic development, progress in the transition process, complexity of the electoral system, and simultaneous holding of elections at several electoral levels, have proved to be much more relevant. Still, many studies mention other factors.¹⁵

According to Bojović (2012), the event that initiated the “white ballots” campaign in Serbia was an interview with Srbijanka Turajlić¹⁶ (Kostić, 2011) in the weekly *Vreme* in November 2011.¹⁷ If this date is taken as a reference, it is estimated

¹² Analyzing the motivation to protest through invalid votes, Cohen *et al.* (2017) cite three groups of motives: anti-systemic motivation, motivation embodied in dissatisfaction with the concrete policy results, and alienation motivation.

¹³ It is intuitive to expect that this presumed phenomenon could be particularly pronounced in societies where there is a perceived danger of electoral theft.

¹⁴ It primarily refers to electoral systems in which voting is not mandatory. It is up to future research to check to what extent it corresponds to empiricism.

¹⁵ Education, urban environment, economic status, age (especially belonging to the category of 65 years or older), belonging to racial/ethnic minorities, party identification, party affiliation, socio-political alienation, protest, institutional arrangement, too few/too many options on the ballot, election technology, election uncertainty, compulsory voting, existence of NOTA/write-in option on the ballot, existence of straight-party choice solution, quality of media coverage of the election campaign (media salience), corruption, quality and stability of democracy, existence of political/revolutionary violence, authoritarianism, and military administration (Power & Garand, 2007; Driscoll & Nelson, 2014; Knack & Kropf, 2003b; Mott, 1926; Stiefbold, 1965; Power & Roberts, 1995; Kimball *et al.*, 2001; Kimball & Kropf, 2005; Bowler *et al.*, 1992; Pothier, 1987; Bullock III & Dunn, 1996; Wattenberg *et al.*, 2000; Ansolabehere & Stewart III, 2005; Brown, 2011; McAllister & Makkai, 1993). Power and Garand (2007) classify all these factors into socio-demographic, institutional, and political.

¹⁶ A retired professor at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering.

¹⁷ On that occasion, Turajlić called on the citizens to cross out their ballot paper and thus demonstrate their dissatisfaction, anticipating that invalid ballots would “win” in this election.

that the entire campaign lasted about five months, although there is no absolute consensus on this issue. There is no agreement in the literature about the nature of this phenomenon, and about its representational and socio-political consequences. Bojović (2012), for example, claims that it was a silent rebellion or civil disobedience directed against the entire political elite, i.e. a way to tell them that they are all the same, reducing it to protest abstinance and citing a cross-national study as reference (Van Deth *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, he accepts Pavićević's (2011) assessment that "this action seems encouraging in the context of the development of democratic citizenship". He adds: "In order to have a deeper meaning and a more serious impact on increasing democracy and accountability of politicians, it must continue through various forms of civil disobedience or constant pointing out of the shortcomings of the political system" (Bojović, 2012: 67). Rakić-Vodinelić (2011) states: "'White vote' is a voter's decision to go to the poll, take a ballot, but return it to the ballot box without giving a vote to anyone, or to modify it so that it becomes invalid", implying that it was a participatory, protest, and subversive phenomenon. She states that most politicians assessed this as a defeatist idea that goes in favor of retrograde political parties and movements. One could, moreover, say that she agreed with the politicians when estimating the consequences of voided ballots, as she states: "it could be expected that a more pervasive 'empty voting' will weaken the Democratic Party (DS), and perhaps the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and to actually be a vote for the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)", while expressing fear of a war epilogue. Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) see the ballot voiding campaign as a "case study" in which its protest nature is manifested in several ways. They even talk about a real social movement analogous to some of the global movements¹⁸ theoretically explaining it as an "episode of conflict" (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010) and interpreting it as a new form of political participation, especially in the context of the crisis of representative democracy (Nugent, 2012), which is characterized by a low level of public trust in key institutions and a lack of formal political participation.¹⁹ Although admitting that several voters wanted to punish pro-European liberal parties by invalidating ballots,²⁰ Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) do not

¹⁸ Such as "Occupy" and "Anonymous".

¹⁹ As general characteristics, Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) state: fluid non-hierarchical organization; the agenda is not explicitly articulated; spontaneous onset; the composition is dominated by young urban voters; activism based on civic engagement; subversiveness; playing with established rules and procedures; questioning the legitimacy of official institutions; reliance on the Internet and social networks; a combination of heterogeneous individuals and social groups that address heterogeneous issues (Obradović-Wochnik & Wochnik, 2014; Biekart & Fowler, 2013; Milanović-Hrašovec, 2012).

²⁰ In the mentioned interview (Kostić, 2011), Turajlić also called for punishment, and she called for punishment during the campaign for the 2020 election as well, when the entire opposition,

see this “episode of conflict” exclusively as a crisis of political parties, but also as a crisis of representative democracy and concern for much broader topics.²¹ Yet, they are convinced that these were not protest votes in the traditional sense, as they say, conceptualized in the literature (Bowler & Lanoue, 1992), since the goal was not to punish one party by voting for another. These elections were an occasion when political parties became aware of the presence and strength of social movements, but they nevertheless implicitly acknowledged their protest nature²² while quoting post-election statements by key political actors.²³ On the flip side, these co-authors deny that this phenomenon belongs to the electoral abstinance category, among other things, because the voiding of the ballot on occasion represents, as they say, the choice of an individual not just to escape from the political establishment (Uggla, 2008), but to deal with it simultaneously. Consequently, they are convinced of its intentional character, stating the following argument: If the act of a ballot invalidation is unintentional,²⁴ then the percentage of voided ballots shows a tendency to remain approximately the same from year to year, i.e. it is unlikely that there will be peaks in certain elections and locations.²⁵ According to them, therefore, it is unequivocally an electoral participation issue, but conducted in an informal and inventive manner through the violation of established participatory rules.²⁶ They note that the Internet and social networks have been used to articulate and expand the protest narrative

contrary to her call, boycotted the election process in an attempt to challenge the legitimacy of the authoritarian ruler.

²¹ Like the electoral process, corruption, clientelism, elitism, unemployment, poverty and general systemic illegitimacy.

²² But also disproportionate political consequences.

²³ For example, contrary to Driscoll and Nelson’s (2014) claim that leaders often abruptly reject invalid votes, shifting the blame to poorly educated voters, misinformed publics or widespread apathy, Boris Tadić said, and some political analysts agreed, that his defeat in the presidential election was a direct consequence of a large number of such ballots, while Dragan Đilas pointed out: “We did not expect that there would be so many of them (invalid ballots)” (Milanović-Hrašovec, 2012).

²⁴ Error result.

²⁵ Goati (2015) also agrees that the fact of the number of invalid ballots in 2012 being twice as high as in the 2008 election – but also the elections held in 2007, 2003 and 2000 (Table 1 on pp. 113-114) – cannot be interpreted as an accidental “cumulation of election omissions”. According to him as well, it was a protest against the “election menu”. The slightly higher share of invalid ballots in the parliamentary election and the first round of the presidential election (4.87% and 4.37%, respectively) compared to the second round of the presidential election (3.09%) is interpreted as accidental omissions resulting from a larger number of lists. However, he states that the share of invalid votes in the second round of the presidential election was still significantly above the usual values, so he does not dispute their predominantly intentional-protest nature.

²⁶ For example, by writing messages on the ballot, taking photos and publishing them on social media pages created for that purpose.

just as it was done during similar campaigns in Italy (Turner, 2013) and Egypt (Barons, 2012), and explicitly claim that this was the first post-October-the-5th election in Serbia in which citizens could “afford” abstinence or a ballot invalidation.²⁷

Based on the content analysis of messages written on spoiled ballots and published on the Internet, they identify the reasons for dissatisfaction²⁸ in their foundations²⁹. These authors estimate that invalid ballots were not a marginal phenomenon in this election, supporting this claim with the fact that this was their largest recorded share since the 2002 election,³⁰ as well as with the statement that they achieved a “better election result” than some traditional political parties without mentioning which ones. Referring to the Republic Bureau of Statistics as the source of data, they state that the highest percentages of invalid ballots correspond to the richest urban areas, which are also characterized by the highest literacy rate. In addition to theoretical views and the results of empirical analysis, they also provide a detailed description of the course of the campaign.³¹ The review of the emphasized

²⁷ As an argument, they cite the assessment that the outcome of this election was not perceived as crucial for the state orientation, since the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) was divided into, as they say, still extreme SRS and populist SNS, which was allegedly built as pro-European. Goati (2015), however, warns that the sharp programmatic and political turn of the SNS in 2008, in relation to the SRS, is clearer on a declarative-normative level than in reality. As one of the reasons for that, he states that it is difficult in a large organization, such as the SNS, to radically change – in a short time – the mental structure and way of acting of tens of thousands of middle and lower-level leaders, members and sympathizers. He emphasizes that it is not only about time that cannot be accelerated, but also about the fact that converts in politics, as well as in religion, inevitably retain some beliefs and patterns of behavior from the earlier period. This, he concludes, is the reason why the processes of fundamental party change take a decade or more, often an entire generation (Goati, 2008).

²⁸ But also disappointment, frustration and anger.

²⁹ Lack of the right choice; belief that all political entities are the same; low level of trust in institutions; deep disappointment in the early years of democracy; corruption; weak economic indicators; low standard of living.

³⁰ In fact, if only parliamentary elections are observed, a higher share of invalid ballots has not been recorded since 1992 (Table 1 on pp. 113-114). The reasons for the high percentage of invalid ballots during the early 1990s should probably be sought in the fact that the Communist Party disintegrated, leaving many without party identification (but without a desirable electoral option as well), then there was a change in the socio-political system, the electoral experience of citizens was limited as pluralist elections were not held lately, social pressures on individuals to go to the polls could be high (extremely high turnout could suggest this), and the coverage of the education system was certainly narrower.

³¹ Unlike Bojović (2012), they see the beginning of the campaign in the criticism that a number of Belgrade intellectuals directed at Boris Tadić for forming a coalition with Milošević’s Socialists, which according to them (intellectuals) led to all parties being the same, to there being no choice, and to choosing between bad and worse. They report that publicly exposed intellectu-

media that dealt with this topic is quite long,³² and includes the so-called mainstream media.

In this context, Kaliterna (2012) speaks neither of the movement nor of the election campaign, but of social action. She does not call into question the prevailing view that invalid ballots are, in this case, a predominantly participatory and protest phenomenon, but points not only to the possible heterogeneity of this variable,³³ but also to the heterogeneity of the reasons for protesting, suggesting the need to look more conservatively at the severity and scope of this phenomenon's impact. Beside claiming that the "white ballots" campaign was "carried out" by the female politically literate population, she also argues that these ballots were the response of the angry, not the reasonable, that they were characterized by a lack of civic courage, that they were unethical, defeatist, meaningless, pointless, masochistic, and self-destructive, that they raised the electoral threshold for small and minority parties, and that they will encourage emigration. Similarly, anticipating the formation of the so-called "red-black" coalition, which ruled in a slightly modified form from 1998 to 2000, Goati (2015) sees the results of these elections as a sufficient condition to enter a period that will, more drastically than before, be marked by the reduction of all economic and social benefits, declining wages, rising unemployment and an increase in the number of citizens below the poverty line.

Similar to Bojović (2012), and in contrast to Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014), Goati (2015) and Kaliterna (2012), Kovačević (2012) recognizes the "white ballots" campaign as a form of abstinence, only he sees it as an example of organized, political, electoral abstinence. He claims a high level of organization despite the heterogeneous composition of those involved, and demonstrates it by pointing to petitions³⁴, performances, gatherings, forums, online debates, websites, blogs, social networks, and radio and TV stations through which this type of influence has been spread. Unlike Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) who talk about the social movement, but also Bojović (2012) who talks about the political campaign, Kovačević (2012) brings the understanding closer to the one presented by Kaliterna (2012) and Pavićević (2011),³⁵ just using a more descriptive term: the action of an

als such as Srbijanka Turajlić and Vesna Rakić-Vodinić, but also public figures such as writer Marko Vidojković and playwright Biljana Srbljanović, joined the action, as well as the hacker groups "Anonymous Serbia" and "Zero for zeros".

³² Peščanik (website and radio), B92 (website), weekly *Vreme, Blic, Kurir, Telegraf*, Radio Free Europe and Kanal 9.

³³ Consequence of error, environmental or cross-pressure, etc.

³⁴ The beginning of the action is recognized in the petition of the MI17 Initiative and the requests for change of, in their opinion, bad legal regulations related to the elections.

³⁵ Understanding that it is a social action.

organized political force. Considering the political consequences of the action in question, he also states that a large part of the public spoke about the indirect influence on the election result of the “Preokret” coalition, the coalition around the DS, as well as the influence on Boris Tadić’s defeat in the presidential election. Considering the scope of this, as he says, action of an organized political force, he points out that it attracted public attention, that it opened discussions on democracy and democratic processes in Serbia, but also that it did not take away legitimacy from the current political scene in Serbia and did not encourage them to make changes in the election legislation, which were allegedly its primary goal.

Although the “white ballots” campaign is a novelty on our political scene, this type of political action, of course, is by no means original and idiosyncratic in the global context. Campaigns that in many respects resemble this one appear relatively often, especially in recent times.³⁶ Sometimes they are initiated and conducted by individuals, in certain cases by political parties, and most often by citizens gathered in movements (Rakić-Vodinečić, 2011). In addition to ad hoc political campaigns, a number of political parties have been established in various countries that either allude to protest voting in their names, or advocate the idea in a proclaimed political program.³⁷ Numerous cases of related manifestations of this kind have been recorded, ranging from eccentric and bizarre individual actions, through anti-systemic and destructive intentions characteristic of anarchist and communist organizations, then instrumentalist manipulations in order to achieve lucrative goals, all the way to the attempt to express dissatisfaction within the existing political system with the quality and offer of existing political organizations and candidates, partocracy or

³⁶ Examples in the literature are the elections in: Argentina in 1957 (24% of invalid ballots), Germany in 1961 (20% of invalid ballots), Peru in 2000 (30% of invalid ballots), France in 2002 (5.4% of invalid ballots), Ecuador in 2006 (as much as 40% of invalid ballots), Morocco in 2007 (19% of invalid ballots), Algeria in 2007 (15% of invalid ballots), Indonesia in 2009 (15% of invalid ballots), Austria in 2010 (7.1%), Greece in 2010 (10% of invalid ballots) and Spain in 2011 (historical maximum of 4.2% of invalid ballots), but also in Belgium, Egypt, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Alvarez *et al.*, 2018; Driscoll & Nelson, 2014; Ben-Layashi, 2007; Obradović-Wochnik & Wochnik, 2014; Bosco & Verney, 2012; Verney, 2012; Rakić-Vodinečić, 2011). A large number of protests of this kind focused on corruption scandals, and were often carried out through blogs and social networks on the Internet (Rakić-Vodinečić, 2011).

³⁷ “None of the offered answers”, a political party registered in Serbia, belongs to political entities whose name is only associated with a protest vote. In addition, it was registered as a party of the Vlach national minority, although it did not point out any members of this national minority on its electoral list. All in all, the use of a suggestive (possibly misleading) name of a party, abuse of the name of a national minority and the related abuse of the legal provision on the natural threshold provided for national minority parties certainly constitutes circumvention of election regulations, if not deliberate election malversation.

abandonment of the welfare state (Rakić-Vodinelić, 2011). In order to prevent these kinds of manipulations, the establishment of political parties that contain the phrase “None of the Above” in their name has been legally prevented in Great Britain.

Quite opposite, in a number of countries, the possibility of this type of protest voting has been institutionalized, thus becoming part of the standard election procedure. Such a ballot option (NOTA) has existed in Nevada since 1976, was used in Russia, and is still used in Ukraine, France, Spain, Colombia, and several Asian countries (Weinberg *et al.*, 1982; Zulfikarpasic, 2001; Damore *et al.*, 2012; Rakić-Vodinelić, 2012).³⁸

Spanish economist Troumpounis (2010) offers a revolutionary innovation in the context of the problem of the representation of invalid votes by proposing an alternative proportional electoral system. The essential change that this theorist advocates is that the number of votes that are recorded as invalid within the election results should be turned into a corresponding number of seats in the parliament that would remain vacant in that convocation. Analyzing the implications of this hypothetical model, he concludes that it could lead to an increase in the quality of candidates, but also of the programs that parties offer to voters, as well as facilitate the electoral participation of citizens. Since the interests of political parties and voters regarding the implementation of this model are in direct conflict, he states that it is illusory to expect the institutionalization of the electoral system based on the empty chair rationality through the parliamentary procedure, but does not rule out the possibility of reaching it through a plebiscite.³⁹

The central problem of this study concerns the empirical determination of possible quantitative and structural changes in the manifestation of the invalid votes

³⁸ Damore *et al.* (2012) state that proponents of the NOTA option on the ballot defend their position with the following arguments: NOTA will enable citizens to express their dissatisfaction in an institutionalized way, which in turn will enhance the democratic health of society by increasing voter participation in the electoral process. Besides, political actors will be forced to increase the quality of election campaigns by reducing the share of negative messages aimed at political competition and by increasing the substantive campaign. Opponents of the NOTA option, on the other hand, primarily invoke claims that, after initial euphoria, voters will eventually return to their original habits of electoral behavior, so that NOTA will become redundant. They also state that NOTA will divert the votes of smaller political entities that are trying to provide voters a credible alternative to the big parties, which will result in their unfair sub-representation in parliament.

³⁹ In light of the implications of this model, it seems appropriate to assume that its eventual implementation in Serbian (or any other) electoral legislation could lead to: objectification of electoral legitimacy by means of an exact indicator, maximization of electoral participation of citizens, incentives for improving the quality of political elite and forcing political entities to cooperate with each other on a smaller number of undisputed priorities.

phenomenon after the “white ballots” campaign in Serbia, as well as the economic and socio-political consequences of the outcome of these elections. The research was conducted with the following goals: to determine whether the “white ballots” campaign was accompanied by a significant increase in the share of invalid ballots compared to previous election cycles; to determine whether this campaign has led to a change in the structure of the relationship between the share of invalid ballots on the one hand and socio-demographic indicators on the other; to analyze the economic and socio-political consequences of this electoral outcome using Republic Bureau of Statistics’ (Republički zavod za statistiku), OECD Secretariat’s, Transparency International’s (Transparency International), Reporters without Borders’ (Reporters without Borders) and Freedom House’s (Freedom House) variables.

Method

According to its key design features,⁴⁰ this research belongs to the group of ex post facto studies⁴¹. The percentage of invalid ballots⁴² in the 2003, 2007, 2008 and 2012 parliamentary elections were studied as DVs. All IVs covered by the draft, except for average net earnings, were also percentages: age⁴³, gender⁴⁴, education⁴⁵, disability⁴⁶ and degree of urbanization⁴⁷.

When it comes to the simultaneous holding of elections at several levels, in 2007 only parliamentary elections were held, in 2003 there were parliamentary elections together with presidential elections, while in 2008 and 2012 elections were held at all levels. However, the Serbian electoral system is a simple electoral system (Shugart & Taagepera, 2017). The election law has undergone certain changes, but these variations should not have decisive consequences.

When it comes to the number of electoral options, in 2003 there were nineteen electoral lists on the ballot, in 2007 twenty were approved, in 2008 there were

⁴⁰ Looking back and studying the independent variable (IV), an attempt is made to establish the relationship between the IV and the dependent variable (DV), with no possibility of manipulating the IV, or random distribution of subjects and treatment (Ristić, 1995).

⁴¹ Also known as “natural experiments”.

⁴² Calculated in relation to the turnout, i.e. to the number of ballots in the ballot boxes.

⁴³ Share of the age category of 65 years and older in the municipal population.

⁴⁴ Share of female gender in the municipal population.

⁴⁵ Percentage of people with incomplete primary education (persons without any education and persons with incomplete primary school), percentage of people with primary education and percentage of people with higher education – in the municipal population.

⁴⁶ Percentage of individuals with disabilities in the municipal population.

⁴⁷ Percentage of urban settlements within the municipality.

twenty-two, and in 2012 eighteen electoral lists were recorded. Thus, it is noticeable that the number of options on the ballot shows even less variability than the simultaneous holding of elections at different levels, and thus less potentially confusing effect on results.

The analysis of interdependence was conducted at the municipal level of aggregation and included 161 municipalities (N = 161).⁴⁸ Due to the specific situation, municipalities from the area of Kosovo and Metohija were not included in the analysis. The ecological and intrinsic validity can be verified by a meta-analysis of pre-election questionnaire-type research.

The website of the Republic Bureau of Statistics (Republički zavod za statistiku) was used as a data source. Therefore, publicly available data were used, which ensured full replicability of the procedure. The data are characterized by a certain degree of multicollinearity, but not to a more drastic extent. Of the techniques for statistical data processing, proportions, relative percentages, product-moment correlation coefficients and weighted multiple regressions⁴⁹, were used, where each municipality was weighted by the number of voters cast.⁵⁰

Results

Descriptive analysis

The mean obtained by averaging the percentages of invalid ballots in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 parliamentary elections (Table 1) equals 1.68%. Thus, the share of invalid ballots in 2012 more than doubled compared to the average of the previous three cycles, more precisely, it increased by 158%.

Table 1. Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Serbia 1990–2020

Year	Voters who voted	Turnout %	Number of invalid ballots	% of invalid ballots
1990.	4996108	71.49	204018	4.08
1992.	4713767	69.72	275861	5.85

⁴⁸ The municipalities covered by the survey have from 1663 to 341625 inhabitants (Mean = 45305.5, St. deviation = 51329.3).

⁴⁹ GLS regression.

⁵⁰ In an analogous case (when individual differences between entities are large and the criterion distribution is positively skewed) Kimball *et al.* (2002) warn that the use of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression on aggregated data would lead to heteroskedascity, which in turn produces an unsuccessful assessment and biased standard estimation error.

Year	Voters who voted	Turnout %	Number of invalid ballots	% of invalid ballots
1993.	4297568	61.34	171824	4.15
1997.	4136716	57.40	164307	3.97
2000.	3750649	57.64	89800	2.39
2003.	3824557	58.75	49755	1.30
2007.	4032800	60.62	65468	1.62
2008.	4139384	61.35	88148	2.13
2012.	3910312	57.80	170995	4.37
2014.	3590717	53.09	114001	3.17
2016.	3775821	56.07	107906	2.86
2020.	3218763	48.93	118155	3.67

* The results shown in Table 1 are taken from the website of the Republic Statistical Office www.stat.gov.rs

Intercorrelation analysis

Looking at Table 2, it can be concluded that the relative share of the age category of 65 years and older is consistently positively correlated with the percentage of invalid votes registered in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 elections, while this coefficient for 2012 did not reach the level of statistical significance. The share of women is negatively correlated with the share of invalid votes in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 elections, and positively when it comes to 2012. The relative frequency of the population with incomplete primary education is positively and consistently correlated with the percentage of invalid votes in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 elections. Higher education, on the other hand, is positively correlated with the percentage of invalid votes in the 2012 election. The percentage of illiterates is positively and consistently related to the percentage of invalid votes in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 elections, but also negatively to the percentage of invalid votes in the 2012 election. When it comes to disability, an identical pattern of connection has been established. In contrast, the degree of urbanization and the level of average net earnings were negatively related to the percentage of invalid votes in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 elections, but at the same time were positively related to the analog indicator for the 2012 election.

Table 2. Relationship between Socio-demographic Characteristics and Percentage of Invalid Ballots in 4 Election Cycles – Product Moment Correlation Coefficients

IV	Invalid ballots 2003 %	Invalid ballots 2007 %	Invalid ballots 2008 %	Invalid ballots 2012 %
65 years and older %	.553**	.317**	.325**	-.084
Women %	-.372**	-.189*	-.385**	.364**
Incomplete primary education %	.701**	.451**	.507**	-.103
Primary Education %	.356**	.087	.266**	-.296**
High education %	-.463**	-.227**	-.430**	.340**
Illiterate %	.450**	.219**	.315**	-.366**
People with disabilities %	.553**	.221**	.316**	-.203*
Urban settlements %	-.431**	-.248**	-.337**	.181*
Net earnings	-.233**	-.105	-.204*	.312**

* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Weighted Multiple Regression (GLS) Results

In order to examine the independent contribution of each of the IVs in explaining the criterion variance, as mentioned, a weighted multiple regression model was used. All 4 multiple regression coefficients (R) are statistically significant at a level much lower than $p < 0.01$. Their values vary in the range from 0.59 to 0.83, while the proportion of the explained variance (R^2) ranges from 0.35 to 0.68 (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of Regression Models – DV: Percentage of Invalid Votes in the 2003, 2007, 2008 and 2012 Parliamentary Elections

	Invalid bal- lots 2003 %	Invalid bal- lots 2007 %	Invalid bal- lots 2008 %	Invalid bal- lots 2012 %
Multiple R	.827	.596	.637	.636
R^2	.685	.355	.405	.405
Adjusted R^2	.666	.316	.369	.369
Stand. error of estimate	31.303	4.038	5.868	8.606
Log. function value	.023	-56.666	-114.658	-177.075

The percentage of individuals with incomplete primary education proved to be the most predictive in terms of the percentage of invalid votes in the 2003 election (Table 4), with the beta coefficient being high (0.76) and positive. The percentage of people with primary education also proved to be a statistically significant predictor, except that the beta coefficient in this case is lower (-0.3) and negative.

Table 4. Standardized Beta Coefficients – DV: Percentage of Invalid Votes 2003

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	p
	B	Stand. error	Beta	Stand. Error		
(Constant)	1.679	1.694			.991	.323
65 years and older %	.015	.011	.135	.095	1.430	.155
Women %	-.018	.034	-.067	.125	-.536	.593
Incomplete primary education %	.070	.017	.764	.186	4.107	.000
Primary Education %	-.017	.006	-.304	.103	-2.945	.004
High education %	-.011	.006	-.255	.146	-1.747	.083
Illiterate %	-.027	.025	-.105	.094	-1.117	.266
People with disabilities %	.021	.014	.118	.082	1.435	.153
Net earnings	.006	.000	.120	.065	1.832	.069
Urban settlements %	-.005	.001	-.003	.088	-.034	.973

In terms of the percentage of invalid votes in the 2007 election (Table 5), the percentage of individuals with incomplete primary education proved to be the most predictive, with the beta coefficient even higher (1.01) and positive. The percentage of people with primary education reappears as a statistically significant predictor in the model, and the beta coefficient is lower (-0.54) and negative in this case as well.

Table 5. Standardized Beta Coefficients – DV: Percentage of Invalid Votes 2007

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	p
	B	Stand. error	Beta	Stand. error		
(Constant)	3.522	2.433			1.447	.150
65 years and older %	.004	.015	.036	.142	.254	.800
Women %	-.031	.049	-.094	.152	-.623	.534

Incomplete primary education %	.102	.024	1.001	.235	4.295	.000
Primary Education %	-.036	.009	-.542	.128	-4.229	.000
High education %	-.005	.010	-.082	.182	-.454	.650
Illiterate %	-.071	.034	-.265	.129	-2.065	.041
People with disabilities %	-.023	.022	-.122	.115	-1.059	.292
Net earnings	.006	.000	.047	.086	.544	.588
Urban settlements %	-.001	.002	-.056	.114	-.491	.624

Even when the percentage of invalid votes in the 2008 election (Table 6) is analyzed as DV, the percentage of individuals with incomplete primary education is again the most predictive, with the beta coefficient still high (0.61) and positive. Also, the percentage of people with primary education again proved to be a statistically significant predictor, and the beta coefficient in this case is slightly lower (-0.36) and negative once more.

Table 6. Standardized Beta Coefficients – DV: Percentage of Invalid Votes 2008

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	p
	B	Stand. error	Beta	Stand. error		
(Constant)	10.484	3.493			3.001	.003
65 years and older %	.008	.022	.051	.137	.373	.710
Women %	-.161	.070	-.331	.145	-2.278	.024
Incomplete primary education %	.092	.034	.606	.225	2.689	.008
Primary Education %	-.037	.012	-.365	.122	-2.987	.003
High education %	-.016	.015	-.191	.174	-1.098	.274
Illiterate %	-.077	.049	-.194	.124	-1.571	.118
People with disabilities %	-.014	.031	-.048	.111	-.432	.666
Net earnings	.005	.000	.160	.083	1.926	.056
Urban settlements %	-.003	.002	-.127	.109	-1.165	.246

When, on the other hand, the percentage of invalid votes in the 2012 election is analyzed as DV (Table 7), a significantly different structure of connections is observed in comparison to the three previous election cycles. In this case, too, the most predictive is the percentage of individuals with incomplete primary education,

while the beta coefficient is still extremely high (0.96) and positive. Furthermore, the percentage of people with primary education proved to be a statistically significant predictor, and its beta coefficient was slightly lower (-0.37) and negative. However, the percentage of highly educated is also statistically significant, but in this case positively (0.53) related to the criterion. The percentage of illiterates, contrastingly, is negatively (-0.65) correlated with DV, just like the degree of urbanization (-0.29), and the representation of the category of the population older than 65 years (-0.3). The amount of net earnings is positively related to the criterion (0.16), but at a marginal level of significance.

Table 7. Standardized Beta Coefficients – DV: Percentage of Invalid Votes 2012

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	p
	B	Stand. error	Beta	Stand. error		
(Constant)	4.072	5.168			.788	.432
65 years and older %	-.071	.033	-.299	.136	-2.190	.030
Women %	.020	.104	.028	.145	.193	.847
Incomplete primary education %	.216	.051	.957	.225	4.263	.000
Primary Education %	-.056	.018	-.371	.122	-3.038	.003
High education %	.066	.022	.529	.173	3.057	.003
Illiterate %	-.382	.073	-.649	.124	-5.252	.000
People with disabilities %	.017	.047	.042	.111	.374	.709
Net earnings	.005	.000	.158	.083	1.904	.059
Urban settlements %	-.010	.004	-.291	.108	-2.684	.008

Discussion

A simple calculation shows that the share of invalid ballots in the 2012 election more than doubled compared to, conditionally speaking, the baseline,⁵¹ which has already been pointed out by Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) and Goati (2015). Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) are convinced of the intentional character of the ballot voiding in this election. If the act of invalidating the ballot is unintentional,⁵² then the percentage of invalid ballots shows a tendency to remain approximately the same from year to year, they conclude. Goati (2015) also agrees

⁵¹ More precisely in relation to the three previous election cycles.

⁵² The result of an error.

that this finding cannot be interpreted as an accidental “cumulation of electoral omissions”. Moreover, Ansolabehere & Stewart III (2005) find that electoral technologies based on the paper-pencil principle, as in this case, generate the lowest rate of invalid votes.

Much less attention was paid to the fact that the increase in the share of invalid ballots was at the same time accompanied by a negligible decrease in the turnout percentage. Discussing a similar 2007 election outcome in Morocco,⁵³ Ben-Layashi (2007) notes that even in stable democracies turnout is relatively low, as citizens feel more or less satisfied with the political situation and believe that those who vote will convey a general opinion. In such a case, significant changes on the political map do not usually occur, and even if the government shifts its political orientation from left to right or vice versa, the general direction remains the same. In a healthy democracy, therefore, poor participation is not necessarily a sign that the political establishment is in danger. Instead, in the young Moroccan democracy a low turnout can, according to him, only indicate a lack of democracy. Furthermore, this author estimates that inserting “empty” ballots or refusing to vote was an act of passive protest with the aim of punishing the regime and expressing general dissatisfaction. He also states that many observers believe that the results of this election again pointed to the existing gap between the people and the state.

In addition to being accompanied by the quantitative changes discussed a moment ago, the “white ballots” campaign also had a noticeable effect on the structure of the connection between the share of invalid votes and socio-demographic characteristics. When this change in the correlation pattern is analyzed without statistical control, it is noticed that the percentage of invalid votes in the three election cycles that preceded the 2012 election is higher if the participation of the category of inhabitants over 65 years of age is higher, and the same regularity applies for the share of people with incomplete primary education, the share of illiterates and the share of individuals with disabilities. Moreover, municipalities with a higher degree of urbanization, female representation and average net earnings are characterized by a lower relative frequency of invalid votes in the three elections. Nevertheless, such municipalities are characterized by a systematic increase in the relative representation of invalid ballots in the 2012 election. Besides, the share of highly educated individuals corresponds in an identical way to the percentage of invalid ballots in 2012. It could, therefore, be said that these findings, among other things, confirm Kaliterna’s (2012) assessment that the campaign of “white ballots” was “carried out” by the female politically literate population, as well as the thesis of Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) on youth and urban population at its center.

⁵³ A similar situation was also observed in Chile (Carlin, 2006).

When these relations are examined with the usage of statistical control, it is first noticed that the percentage of individuals with incomplete primary education consistently proved to be the most predictive in terms of the percentage of invalid votes in the 2003, 2007⁵⁴ and 2008 elections, which is close to the findings of Lysek *et al.* (2020), but also completely coherent with the findings of Nichols (1998) and Nichols and Strizek (1995). Furthermore, the percentage of people with primary education also proved to be a statistically relevant factor, only in the opposite direction and with less predictability. Based on the reviewed literature, the last finding seems quite specific, and a possible explanation could be that in simple electoral systems, which have not undergone dramatic changes for a long time, only the most severe forms of educational neglect act as a determining factor in filling in the ballot. Accordingly, it is likely that invalid ballots in the 2003, 2007 and 2008 elections predominantly represented the borderline form of abstinence. The most common causes of this phenomenon are indifference, carelessness, lack of voting experience, lack of information, ignorance or cross-pressure (Stiefbold, 1965; Wattenberg *et al.*, 2000; Knack & Kropf, 2003a). The findings of Nichols (1998) and Nichols and Strizek (1995) further confirm this.

On the other hand, when the identical methodology is applied to the percentage of invalid votes in the 2012 election, a much more complex structure of linkages is observed. Namely, the same pattern is applied here as in the case of 2003, 2007 and 2008, i.e. incomplete primary education is also positively, and primary education is negatively correlated with the criterion. However, in this case, the percentage of highly educated proved to be predictive, so that the increase in the percentage of highly educated individuals corresponds to the increase in the percentage of invalid ballots. In addition, the percentage of illiterates, the share of inhabitants over 65 years of age and the degree of urbanization are also significantly, but negatively correlated with DV, which means that environments with a higher share of illiterate population as well as people over 65 years of age in this case generate a lower percentage of invalid ballots, while a lower degree of urbanization was accompanied by a slight increase in the percentage of invalid ballots. This latter finding contradicts the notion of the predominantly urban character of the “white ballots” campaign (Obradović-Wochnik & Wochnik, 2014), but also Zulfikarpasic’s (2001) findings, as it has been shown that in the case of controlling relevant variables such as education and material status, the degree of urbanization not only loses its positive sign from the matrix of intercorrelations, but even takes on a negative one. It could be stated, therefore, that this campaign, by all accounts, had a somewhat bet-

⁵⁴ The reason for the extremely high beta coefficient for the variable “incomplete primary education” when it comes to the 2007 election should most likely be sought in the fact that voters were faced with only one ballot, and therefore with an “easier” task than usual.

ter response in rural areas, of course, provided that other factors are kept under control. In contrast, the claim that the effects of the campaign were better when it comes to the younger population received its indirect empirical confirmation. This whole pattern, which reflects the increased representation of the highly educated and the reduced representation of the illiterate and over 65 years of age as good predictors of the share of invalid votes in the 2012 parliamentary election, is quite similar to the findings of Stiefbold (1965), Kim and Koh (1972) and Zulfikarpasic (2001), so it seems appropriate to conclude that a large number of invalid ballots in the 2012 election came from highly politicized voters. As is known, this type is characterized by a higher socio-economic status embodied in a significantly higher level of literacy, information, educational level and personal income (Stiefbold, 1965; Kim & Koh, 1972), which is fully confirmed by the presented intercorrelations and partly through GLS.

The fact that two theoretically disparate patterns of correlation coexist within one regression model could represent a confirmation of Kaliterna's (2012) belief in the heterogeneity of this phenomenon, as well as the need to view its impact more conservatively. However, one cannot ignore the knowledge that the "white ballots" campaign coincided with a drastic change in the frequency of this phenomenon, just as in the pattern of connections between the share of invalid ballots on the one hand and socio-demographic characteristics on the other. Moreover, it seems that this ad hoc campaign radically changed the latent structure of a manifestly identical phenomenon for a very limited time. Still, an analysis of invalid ballots in parliamentary elections in post-communist countries by Lysek *et al.* (2020) shows that, as a rule, protest behavior strongly shapes the frequency of invalid votes in less democratic states. The main difference between invalid ballots in the 2012 election and invalid ballots in previous election cycles is very likely reflected in the classic distinction between voter capacity and political motivation.

The mere fact that there is an unexpectedly small degree of agreement in the literature on the nature of this campaign could, among other things, reflect the controversy of the subject matter. There is a broad consensus only about the fact that the campaign was predominantly conducted over the Internet, and that it was characterized by very good organization, despite the noticeable heterogeneity of the composition. In addition, the prevailing belief is that it was based on dissatisfaction, as well as the perception of the predominantly intentional-protest nature of invalid ballots in the 2012 general election. Nevertheless, this does not mean that "white ballots" were necessarily anti-systemic behavior (Cohen, 2018).

Bojović (2012) claims that invalid ballots in this case can theoretically be reduced to protest abstinence. Similarly, Kovačević (2012) uses the term organized, political, electoral abstinence. However, the participation of these rather nume-

rous voters in all prescribed phases of the election procedure by itself, but also the prominent conative component based on different types/degrees of dissatisfaction, are convincing reasons not only for protest, but also the participatory phenomenon. The literature even discusses a new form of political participation, especially in the context of the crisis of representative democracy (Nugent, 2012), which is characterized by a low level of public trust in key institutions and a lack of formal political participation (Obradović-Wochnik & Wochnik, 2014), that, by all accounts, was the case here also.

Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) express their conviction that these are not protest votes in the traditional sense, as they say, conceptualized in the literature, since the goal was not to punish one party by voting for another, and cite Bowler and Lanoue (1992) as a reference. On the other hand, Alvarez *et al.* (2018) find the existence of as many as five different patterns of voting behavior that can be characterized as protest voting.⁵⁵ According to their classification, the phenomenon that this paper deals with indisputably falls under the category of BNS protest voting, but it also has certain characteristics of organized protest voting. The belief that this is not a protest vote in the traditional sense is a consequence of the fact that Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) provisionally reduce the notion of protest voting exclusively to tactical protest voting in their discussions.

Besides, in this case, it is easy to discern all three groups of motives for expressing protests through invalid votes in the classification of Cohen *et al.* (2017).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Instead of voting for one of the main, conventional political options, voters vote for anti-establishment, unorthodox and/or ideologically extreme political entities, i.e. for options that we identify as rebel. According to that, they mark this type of voting as a protest vote for rebel parties. In order to convey their dissatisfaction with some aspect of the thematic positioning of their preferred party, voters cast their vote for a less desirable party. This choice is based on tactical considerations, and is defined as tactical protest voting. Instead of voting for one of the listed options, voters insert invalidated (BNS) ballots. Such behaviors are therefore called BNS protest voting. In response to disenfranchisement or for other political reasons, political elites sometimes run campaigns to encourage protest voting – the so-called organized protest voting. In recent years, a number of states and jurisdictions have begun to offer NOTA voters a choice on the ballot. Voters who choose this option are characterized as participants in the officially prescribed protest voting.

⁵⁶ This campaign communicated, among others, with voters who express doubt or even opposition to some fundamental democratic institutions such as elections, but above all with voters who are disappointed with the way democracy works in our country, believing that political institutions are inefficient or corrupted and the electoral process put-up. Furthermore, the motivation embodied in dissatisfaction with the concrete results of the policy is noticeable in the tendency to punish officials in the moments when it was realized that the economy was going badly, with the implicit expectation that the opposition would have a better performance in power. Both of these incentives are consistently run through the narrative of the “white ballots” campaign, most

This diversity of motivation is another indirect, but very suggestive indicator of the heterogeneity of the campaign itself, as well as its participants and sympathizers, i.e. its broad communication intervention.

When it comes to the dilemma of whether this was a social movement, a political campaign or a social action, it seems that most of the arguments support the thesis of a political campaign⁵⁷ par excellence, as Bojović (2012) argues, because if it was a social movement⁵⁸, a clear common goal would be emphasized, the organization would necessarily be at a lower level, and the citizens' response⁵⁹, which is otherwise respectable, would probably be even higher. On the other hand, the scope of the notion of social action⁶⁰ – neglecting its atomistic connotations in sociology – seems too narrow to fully encompass this phenomenon. Besides, the unambiguous communicative-persuasive character strongly indicates that the term “political campaign” is still the most adequate descriptor. Although the issue of funding remained unresolved in this case,⁶¹ there is a clear regularity according to which each political campaign has its own message⁶², organization, techniques and effects. In this regard, even a cursory search of the Internet makes it possible to notice the presence of reinforcing, offensive and refuting messages that are invariably characteristic of almost all modern political campaigns.

evidently manifested in the public call for punishment and the categorical refusal to vote for a lesser evil. It also seems that the campaign, at least in part, included the so-called alienation motivation, as individuals who feel alienated from politics often believe that their votes are “irrelevant” or “will not make a difference”. Such individuals' belief that none of the election options is good fits into the same pattern.

⁵⁷ Under the political campaign Pfau and Burgoon (1988) imply organized persuasive activity undertaken with the aim of influencing electoral behavior (attitudes, decision-making). Each political campaign has its own message, organization, funding, techniques and effects. In doing so, contemporary political campaigns rely almost exclusively on three message placement strategies. Reinforcing messages promote positive candidate attributes or thematic positions, and provide an answer to the question: why should a voter support a candidate? In contrast, offensive messages try to draw attention to shortcomings in the opponent's character or thematic positions. They answer the question: why should a voter not support an opposing candidate? Finally, the refutation messages are designed to respond to the opponent's attacks, answering the question: why are the attacks of the opponent's candidate false or irrelevant?

⁵⁸ A social movement is a poorly organized effort by a large group of people to achieve a particular goal, usually social or political (Scott & Marshall, 2009).

⁵⁹ I.e. election result.

⁶⁰ The notion of social action is defined as a joint coordinated activity based on the assumption of joint commitments, which is undertaken in order to achieve a common goal (Clark, 2006).

⁶¹ I.e. it was not even mentioned.

⁶² Usually triple, as in this case.

Although the existence of the NOTA option in some legislations was mentioned in the context of this campaign (Rakić-Vodinelić, 2011), the explicitly articulated request for the introduction of the NOTA or write-in option within its agenda was not publicly stated, while the request to convert invalid votes into vacant parliamentary seats according to Troumpounis' (2010) model of institutionalization of protest voting was not even mentioned.⁶³ Moreover, although issues of the electoral system and electoral legislation were among the main topics, no official proposal for electoral reform was made, which should not be too surprising given the diversity of actors involved in the campaign.

When it comes to its representative consequences, the prevailing assessments are that the DS and the LDP were the biggest losers in this election (Rakić-Vodinelić, 2011; Kovačević, 2012; Obradović-Wochnik & Wochnik, 2014), which is completely coherent with Todosijević's (2016) findings. Discussing the robust effects of certain socio-demographic variables on party preferences, this author especially emphasizes the effect of education. Namely, sympathies towards the SNS, the SRS, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) are negatively correlated with education, while sympathy for the LDP is weakly positively correlated with education. He finds that age is another important factor related to party sympathies. Older respondents, namely, show sympathy for the SNS and the SPS more often, while younger ones are more positive towards the DS, the LDP and the SRS. Gender also shows an interesting influence; female respondents seem to be more positive towards the parties that are considered losers in the 2012 election – the DS and the LDP. The remaining significant effects are generally weaker and specific only to some parties. For example, material status seems to differentiate between sympathies with the SNS and the DS – support for the SNS is more common among the poor, while the opposite tendency characterizes the DS. When these findings are taken into account, it seems appropriate to once again conclude that the political preferences of voters who deliberately invalidated ballots in 2012 are far closer to the DS or the LDP than to the SNS, the DSS or the SRS. In addition, education and socio-economic status are important factors in electoral participation (Blais *et al.*, 2004; Topf, 1995; Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2001), and this regularity could easily be, if not the main one, certainly an important additional factor in both the defeat of the DS in the parliamentary election and of Boris Tadić in the second round of the presidential election.

When it comes to the socio-political consequences of the “white ballots” campaign and the election outcome connected with it, things are much more unambiguous. The prediction made by Rakić-Vodinelić (2011) according to which one could expect a massive “empty voting” to weaken the DS and the LDP is coherent with

⁶³ True, this model has not been tested in any world country, but neither did self-governing socialism (and still does not) have an adequate counterpart in the world.

both the findings presented here and Todosijević's (2016) findings, while the victory of Tomislav Nikolić in the second-round presidential election brings even more certainty. Nevertheless, her fear of a war epilogue in the case of the SNS coming to power, at least for now, has proved to be unfounded.

Kovačević's (2012) assessment that this campaign attracted the attention of the public and opened debates on democracy and democratic processes in Serbia, but that it also did not deprive the Serbian political scene of its legitimacy and that it did not encourage changes in electoral legislation, seems appropriate. However, the very fact that such a campaign, which obviously harmed the then authorities, gained so much exposure in so many media, indicates a discrepancy regarding the freedom of the media in relation to the current situation.

Goati's (2015) fears that after this election the country would enter a period marked, more drastically than before, by a reduction in all economic and social benefits, falling wages, rising unemployment and increasing the number of citizens below the poverty line were, fortunately, not completely corroborated. On the contrary, in April 2012, the unemployment rate was 25.5%, and it fell to 9% by the third quarter of 2020. Similarly, in April 2012, an average salary of 58465 dinars was recorded, while, after the initial reduction of income in the public sector, in September 2020, the average salary was 82515 dinars (Republički zavod za statistiku). However, in this context, one should keep in mind Donno's (2013) warning that good economic performance strengthens authoritarian regimes, as high incomes and economic growth are negatively⁶⁴ associated with democratization. The literature (Howard & Roessler, 2006) also warns that economic growth should allow an authoritarian leader to hold on to power, as he will very likely be able to secure electoral victory⁶⁵ under more favorable economic circumstances.

This statement suggests that, unfortunately, something happened that even Goati (2015) did not explicitly predict in his dark projections. Namely, according to estimates recently published by the OECD Secretariat, emigration from Serbia has taken on a galloping growth. The average annual number of emigrants from this country to OECD member states alone, in the period from 2005 to 2014, was 31000. In 2014, 57000 people emigrated, and in 2015, that number reached a record 60000, which puts Serbia 31st on the ranking list of the 50 world's countries with the largest number of emigrants. It is not known how many of them returned, since such information is not available in this publication, as retired university professor Vladimir Grečić told the newspaper *Danas* (Stevanović, 2017). Moreover, according to Transparency International's ranking, this country dropped from 80th place

⁶⁴ Although this correlation is weak.

⁶⁵ Either legitimately or through electoral fraud.

in 2012 to 91st place in 2019⁶⁶ in terms of the index of perceived corruption. Also, when it comes to media freedoms, only in the period from 2018 to 2020, Serbia dropped from 76th to 93rd place according to the Reporters without Borders (Reporters without Borders) list. On top of all that, according to the categorization of Freedom House (Freedom House), this country was marked as a free state in 2012, while in 2020 we find it classified in the category of partially free, which is characterized by limited respect for political rights and civil liberties, corruption, weak rule of law, and a political landscape in which one party enjoys dominance despite a certain presence of pluralism.

In this regard, since coming to power, Vučić has established a regime in which he has become the center of a small network of close allies who control key institutions, influence the media and work closely with the business elite (Link, 2015). Although highly regarded and often praised as a reform-oriented pro-European prime minister by European leaders, who want to see him as a cornerstone of stability and peace in the region,⁶⁷ he nevertheless established full control over legislation,⁶⁸ attacked critically oriented media as traitors and Western conspirators, and closely associated with Vladimir Putin's Russia (Keil, 2018).

Despite the growing concern expressed by international organizations about the deterioration of democracy in this country, the literature on the "crisis of democracy" has somewhat neglected Serbia, notes Castaldo (2020). Using a combined qualitative-quantitative research strategy to detect changes in regime types,⁶⁹ he empirically confirms, as he says, the recent regression of Vučić's Serbia to the competitive authoritarianism of the Milošević era. It seems to him that the peculiarities of this case – the double transition to and from democracy in less than two decades – support the pessimistic prospects for the future of democracy in this country.

As is well known, competitive authoritarianism is a special type of hybrid regime.⁷⁰ Although scholars have characterized many such regimes as partial or "diminished" forms of democracy, Levitsky and Way (2002) agree with Linz (2000) that they could be better described as a (diminished) form of authoritarianism,

⁶⁶ Yet, the absolute score on the Perceived Corruption Index remained unchanged from 2012, according to both Transparency International and V-DEM Institute.

⁶⁷ Milošević was also perceived as a factor of stability for some time after the signing of the Dayton Agreement.

⁶⁸ Including frequent elections.

⁶⁹ Including various V-DEM measures and over three dozen indicators derived from a competitive authoritarian framework.

⁷⁰ These are regimes that have acquired some of the institutions and procedures characteristic of democracy, but not others, and at the same time have either retained some authoritarian traits or have lost some democratic elements and acquired some authoritarian ones (Morlino, 2008).

whereas in democracies elections are fair, political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of association and freedom to criticize the government without retaliation, are widely protected, and elected representatives enjoy legitimacy.⁷¹ In contrast, in competitive authoritarian regimes, violations of these criteria are both frequent and serious enough to create an unequal “playing field” between the government and the opposition. Although elections are held regularly and are largely free of mass fraud, authorities routinely misuse state resources, denying the opposition adequate media coverage, abusing opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulating election results. Journalists, opposition politicians and other government critics can be spied on, threatened, harassed or arrested. Opposition members can be imprisoned, persecuted, or – less often – even attacked or killed. Regimes characterized by such abuses cannot be called democratic, Levitsky and Way (2002) conclude. When this alarming state of our socio-political reality is taken into account, Pavićević’s (2011) assessment that the “‘white ballots’ action seems encouraging in the context of the development of democratic citizenship” seems extremely cynical from this perspective, just like the claim of Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) according to which this was the first post-October 5 election in which citizens could “afford” abstinence or voiding of the ballot.

Analyzing invalid ballots in the regional election in Italy, Brighenti (2003) found that some of them are characterized by emotionally charged⁷² messages that voters wrote. This is one of the examples of voluntary invalidating of ballots based on negative emotions. Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) find completely identical results in our case. Therefore, the explanation offered by Aldashev and Mastrobuoni (2019) using the concept of so-called expressive voting (Brennan & Lomaski, 1993; Schuessler, 2000) seems plausible. In their view as well, if voters want to express general dissatisfaction with the political system, they could put a voided ballot in the ballot box in protest. At the same time, each of these voters could have a political preference for a certain party, just as it was indirectly established in this paper. In addition, there is a regularity when invalidating ballots for the sake of expressing dissatisfaction: The more uncertain the election race, the higher the “price to be paid” in terms of possibilities, which could be one of the reasons why the effects of the “white ballots” campaign were not even more massive.⁷³ Further clarification is provided by Damore *et al.* (2012) warning that, in the

⁷¹ Serbian opposition boycotted the June 2020 election and the turnout was 48.9% (Republički zavod za statistiku).

⁷² Usually negative.

⁷³ The 2012 general election was highly polarized and uncertain, as evidenced by the election results (Table 1).

context of making a binary political decision, as in the case of the second round of the 2012 presidential election, protest voting has the perverse consequence of helping to reach a less desirable outcome, since it requires either ambiguous action,⁷⁴ or voting against one's preferred party (Bowler & Lanoue, 1992) by voting negatively⁷⁵ (Kernell, 1977; Fiorina, 1981). This is, of course, as well a factor that had a suppressive effect on the "white ballots" campaign.

Taking everything into account, it seems quite possible to agree with Kaliterna's (2012) assessments that the "white ballots" were not only emotionally charged and expressive, but also irrational,⁷⁶ perverted, masochistic and self-destructive, while her prediction of how to encourage emigration seems somewhat prophetic. Acceptance of her assessments also implies that higher education does not always represent a sufficient defense against irrationality. Who and in whose interest managed to get enlightened, highly politicized voters to vote for their own harm? Did this campaign really start spontaneously as Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik (2014) claim? Did it have sources of funding, and if so, by whom? Unfortunately, all these questions will remain unanswered for the time being and with them the dilemma of whether, perhaps, there was a deliberate political manipulation behind this campaign.

REFERENCES

- Aldashev, G., Mastrobuoni, G. (2019). Invalid ballots and electoral competition. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 2(7), pp. 289-310.
- Alvarez, M. *et al.* (2001). Residual votes attributable to technology: an assessment of the reliability of existing voting equipment, Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project. Retrieved from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/96539>
- Alvarez, M. *et al.* (2018). A taxonomy of protest voting. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21(1), pp. 135-154.
- Ansolabehere, S., Stewart III, C. H. (2005). Residual votes attributable to technology. *The Journal of Politics*, 2(67), pp. 365-389.

⁷⁴ Abstention or invalidation of ballots.

⁷⁵ At the same time, it is "more expensive" to vote negatively than to invalidate a ballot or abstain.

⁷⁶ Galais (2014) showed on the example of Spain that expressive voting does not necessarily have to be irrational. As he reports, the protest even achieved the effect of socialization there, which led people to look at the election more positively. Studying the identical phenomenon, Superti (2014) finds a strong positive correlation between BNS voting and political sophistication.

- Barrons, G. (2012). 'Suleiman: Mubarak decided to step down# egypt# jan25 OH MY GOD': examining the use of social media in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 1(5), pp. 54-67.
- Ben-Layashi, S. (2007). Morocco's 2007 elections: a social reading. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 4(11), pp. 72-78.
- Biekart, K., Fowler, A. (2013). Transforming Activisms 2010+: Exploring Ways and Waves. *Development and Change*, 44(3), pp. 527-546.
- Blais, A. et al. (2004). Where does turnout decline come from? *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(2), pp. 221-236.
- Blondel, J. (1978). *Political parties: a genuine case for discontent?* London, Wildwood House.
- Bojović, J. (2012). Uzroci i posledice političke neodgovornosti u Srbiji nakon 2000. godine. In Cvjetičanin, T., Forić, S. (eds) *Politička odgovornost u BiH: teorijski i praktički pristupi*. Sarajevo, Udruženje za političke nauke u BiH & UG Zašto Ne, pp. 63-72.
- Bosco, A., Verney, S. (2012). Electoral epidemic: the political cost of economic crisis in Southern Europe, 2010–11. *South European Society and Politics*, 17(2), pp. 129-154.
- Bowler, S. et al. (1992). Ballot propositions and information costs: Direct democracy and the fatigued voter. *Western Political Quarterly*, 45(2), pp. 559-568.
- Bowler, S., Lanoue, D. J. (1992). Strategic and protest voting for third parties: the case of the Canadian NDP. *Western Political Quarterly*, 45(2), pp. 485-499.
- Brady, H. E. et al. (2001). *Counting all the votes: The performance of voting technology in the United States*. Berkeley, University of California.
- Brennan, G., Lomasky, L. (1997). *Democracy and decision: The pure theory of electoral preference*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Brighenti, A. (2003). L'impatto del Voto Elettronico sull'Elettorato Trentino: Un'Indagine sulle Schede Nulle. University of Trento. Retrieved from: <https://elezioni.provincia.tn.it/>
- Brown, A. R. (2011). Losing to nobody? Nevada's "none of these candidates" ballot reform. *The Social Science Journal*, 48(2), pp. 364-370.
- Bullock III, C. S., Dunn, R. E. (1996). Election Roll-off: A Test of Three Explanations. *Urban Affairs Review*, 32(1), pp. 71-86.
- Carlin, R. E. (2006). The decline of citizen participation in electoral politics in post-authoritarian Chile. *Democratization*, 13(4), pp. 632-651.
- Castaldo, A. (2020). Back to Competitive Authoritarianism? Democratic Backsliding in Vučić's Serbia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72(10), pp. 1617-1638.
- Clark, H. H. (2006). Social actions, social commitments. In Levinson, S. C., Enfield, N. J. (eds) *Roots of human sociality: Culture, cognition and interaction*. Oxford, Berg Press, pp. 126-150.

- Cohen, M. J. (2018). Protesting via the null ballot: An assessment of the decision to cast an invalid vote in Latin America. *Political Behavior*, 40(2), pp. 395-414.
- Cohen, M. J. *et al.* (2017). Electoral Volatility and Political Fractionalization in Latin American Party Systems. *Working Paper*.
- Damore, D. F. *et al.* (2012). Unhappy, Uninformed, or Uninterested? Understanding “None of the Above” Voting. *Political Research Quarterly*, 65(4), pp. 895-907.
- Darcy, R., Schneider, A. (1989). Confusing ballots, roll-off, and the black vote. *Western Political Quarterly*, 42(3), pp. 347-364.
- Donno, D. (2013). Elections and democratization in authoritarian regimes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), pp. 703-716.
- Driscoll, A., Nelson, M. (2014). Ignorance or opposition? Blank and spoiled votes in low-information, highly politicized environments. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(3), pp. 547-561.
- Fiorina, M. P. (1981). *Retrospective voting in American national elections*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Freedom House. Retrieved from: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>
- Galais, C. (2014). Don't Vote for Them: The Effects of the Spanish Indignant Movement on Attitudes about Voting. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 24(3), pp. 334-350.
- Goati, V. (2008). *Političke partije i partijski sistemi*. Podgorica, Fakultet političkih nauka, Univerzitet Crne Gore.
- Goati, V. (2015). Opšti izbori u Srbiji 2012, korak napred ili status qua ante? *Mediterranski politikološki dijalozi*, 65(1), pp. 73-81.
- Herron, M. C., Sekhon, J. S. (2005). Black candidates and black voters: Assessing the impact of candidate race on uncounted vote rates. *The Journal of Politics*, 67(1), pp. 154-177.
- Howard, M. M., Roessler, P. G. (2006). Liberalizing electoral outcomes in competitive authoritarian regimes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2), pp. 365-381.
- Kaliterma, T. (2012). Beli listići – bela zastava. *Helsinki povelja*, No. 163-164, pp. 16-18.
- Keil, S. (2018). The business of state capture and the rise of authoritarianism in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. *Southeastern Europe*, 42(1), pp. 59-82.
- Kernell, S. (1977). Presidential popularity and negative voting: An alternative explanation of the midterm congressional decline of the president's party. *American Political Science Review*, 71(1), pp. 44-66.
- Kim, J., Koh, B. C. (1972). Electoral behavior and social development in South Korea: An aggregate data analysis of presidential elections. *The Journal of Politics*, 34(3), pp. 825-859.
- Kimball, D. C. *et al.* (2001). Who's Afraid of an Undervote? In *Annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association*.

- Kimball, D. C. *et al.* (2002). Unrecorded votes in the 2000 presidential election. *Working Paper*.
- Kimball, D. C. *et al.* (2004). Unrecorded votes and political representation. In Watson, R. (ed.) *Counting the Votes: Lessons from the 2000 Presidential Election in Florida*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, pp. 1-28.
- Kimball, D. C., Kropf, M. (2005). Ballot design and unrecorded votes on paper-based ballots. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69(4), pp. 508-529.
- Knack, S., Kropf, M. (2003a). Voided ballots in the 1996 presidential election: A county-level analysis. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(3), pp. 881-897.
- Knack, S., Kropf, M. (2003b). Roll-Off at the Top of the Ballot: International Undervoting in American Presidential Elections. *Politics & Policy*, 31(4), pp. 575-594.
- Kostić, S. (2011). Intervju: Srbijanka Turajlić, profesor: Ne dam im glas za nastavak korupcije. *Vreme*. Retrieved from: <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1024882>
- Kovačević, D. (2012). "Beli listići" na izborima 2012. *Politički život*, (5), pp. 87-92.
- Levitsky, S., Way, L. A. (2002). Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), pp. 51-65.
- Link, J. (2015). The Road Not Yet Taken: An Assessment of Aleksandar Vucic. *Harvard Political Review*. Retrieved from: <http://harvardpolitics.com/world/road-yet-taken-assessment-aleksandar-vucic>
- Linz, J. J. (2000). *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*. Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lysek, J. *et al.* (2020). Turning out but not voting: invalid ballots in post-communist parliamentary elections. *Comparative European Politics*, 18(2), pp. 190-214.
- McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. (2010). Ballots and barricades: On the reciprocal relationship between elections and social movements. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(2), pp. 529-542.
- McAllister, I., Makkai, T. (1993). Institutions, society or protest? Explaining invalid votes in Australian elections. *Electoral Studies*, 12(1), pp. 23-40.
- Milanović-Hrašovec, I. (2012). Posle Izbora: Beli protiv ostalih listića. *Vreme*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1051531>
- Montgomery, M. (1985). Voting Systems and Disenfranchisement. *Election Politics*, 2(3), pp. 16-19.
- Morlino, L. (2008). Hybrid regimes or regimes in transition. *Working Paper*.
- Mott, R. L. (1926). Invalid ballots under the hare system of proportional representation. *American Political Science Review*, 20(4), pp. 874-882.
- Nichols, S. M. (1998). State referendum voting, ballot roll-off, and the effect of new electoral technology. *State and Local Government Review*, 30(2), pp. 106-117.
- Nichols, S. M., Strizek, G. A. (1995). Electronic voting machines and ballot roll-off. *American Politics Quarterly*, 23(3), pp. 300-318.

- Nugent, D. (2012). Commentary: Democracy, temporalities of capitalism, and dilemmas of inclusion in Occupy movements. *American Ethnologist*, 39(2), pp. 280-283.
- Obradović-Wochnik, J., Wochnik, A. (2014). Invalid Ballots and the "Crisis of Representative Democracy" 1: Re-inventing Protest at the 2012 Serbian Elections. *East European Politics and Societies*, 28(4), pp. 808-835.
- Pavičević, V. (2011). Fasadna demokratija: ima li izlaza. *Peščanik*. Retrieved from: <http://pescanik.net/2011/11/fasadnademokratija-ima-li-izlaza>
- Pfau, M., Burgoon, M. (1988). Inoculation in political campaign communication. *Human Communication Research*, 15(1), pp. 91-111.
- Posner, R. A. (2001). *Breaking the deadlock: The 2000 election, the constitution, and the courts*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Pothier, J. T. (1987). Drop-Off: the Vanishing Voters in On-Year Elections and the Incumbency Advantage. *American Politics Quarterly*, 15, pp. 123-146.
- Power, T. J., Garand, J. C. (2007). Determinants of invalid voting in Latin America. *Electoral Studies*, 26(2), pp. 432-444.
- Power, T. J., Roberts, J. T. (1995). Compulsory voting, invalid ballots, and abstention in Brazil. *Political Research Quarterly*, 48(4), pp. 795-826.
- Rakić-Vodinelić, V. (2011). Prazni glas. *Peščanik*. Retrieved from: <https://pescanik.net/prazni-glas/>
- Reporters without Borders. Retrieved from: <https://rsf.org/en>
- Republički zavod za statistiku. Retrieved from: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/>
- Ristić, Ž. (1995). *O istraživanju, metodu i znanju*. Beograd, Institut za pedagoška istraživanja.
- Schuessler, A. A. (2000). *A logic of expressive choice*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Scott, J., Marshall, G. (eds). (2009). *A dictionary of sociology*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Shocket, P. A. et al. (1992). The effect of voting technology on voting behavior in a simulated multi-candidate city council election: a political experiment of ballot transparency. *Western Political Quarterly*, 45(2), pp. 521-537.
- Shugart, M. S., Taagepera, R. (2017). *Votes from seats: Logical models of electoral systems*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Sinclair, D. B., Alvarez, M. R. (2004). Who overvotes, who undervotes, using punch-cards? Evidence from Los Angeles County. *Political Research Quarterly*, 57(1), pp. 15-25.
- Stevanović, M. (2017). Emigracija iz Srbije dobila galopirajući trend. *Danas*. Retrieved from: <https://www.danas.rs/ekonomija/emigracija-iz-srbije-dobila-galopirajuci-trend/>
- Stiefbold, R. P. (1965). The significance of void ballots in West German elections. *The American Political Science Review*, 59(2), pp. 391-407.

- Superti, C. (2014). Vanguard of the discontents: blank and null voting as sophisticated protest. *Midwest Political Science Association*.
- Todosijević, B. (2016). Left-right ideology: Its meaning and effects on party preferences in Serbia. *Sociološki pregled*, 50(2), pp. 161-178.
- Topf, R. (1995). Beyond electoral participation. In Klingemann, H. D., Fuchs, D. (eds) *Citizens and the State*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 52-91.
- Torney-Purta, J. et al. (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: Civic knowledge and engagement at age fourteen*. Amsterdam, IEA Secretariat.
- Transparency International. Retrieved from: <https://www.transparency.org/en/>
- Troumpounis, O. (2010). Suggesting an Alternative electoral System. Blank Votes Count. *Working Paper*.
- Turner, E. (2013). The Grillini in Italy: New horizons for internet-based mobilization and participation. *Social Movement Studies*, 12(2), pp. 214-220.
- Ugla, F. (2008). Incompetence, alienation, or calculation? Explaining levels of invalid ballots and extra-parliamentary votes. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(8), pp. 1141-1164.
- Van Deth, J. W. et al. (eds). 2007. *Citizenship and involvement in European democracies: A comparative analysis* (Vol. 17). London, Routledge.
- Verney, S. (2012). The Eurozone's first post-bailout election: the 2010 local government contest in Greece. *South European Society and Politics*, 17(2), pp. 195-216.
- Wattenberg, M. P. et al. (2000). How voting is like taking an SAT test: An analysis of American voter rolloff. *American Politics Quarterly*, 28(2), pp. 234-250.
- Weinberg, L. et al. (1982). The Electoral Consequences of a New Ballot Choice: The Case of "None of These" in Nevada. *State & Local Government Review*, 14(3), pp. 117-120.
- Zulfikarpasic, A. (2001). Le vote blanc: abstention civique ou expression politique? *Revue française de science politique*, 51(1), pp. 247-268.

Mailing Address:

Uroš Lazić is an independent researcher based in Novi Sad.

E-mail: lazicuros@yahoo.com