

## Book Review

Kosta Bovan, Daniela Širinić,  
Višeslav Raos (editors)  
**Hrvatski birači: 30 godina  
političkog ponašanja i mišljenja**

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The publication that is bespoken in this review is an important milestone in the development of Croatian political science. In order to underpin this claim, it is necessary to describe the relevant context in which it has been produced, namely to give a brief outline of the specific development of political science in Croatia.

Unlike most other socialist countries that were part of the Soviet bloc, where establishment of political science as an academic discipline and a genuine research field was not possible because of ideological reasons, socialist Yugoslavia (and Croatia as one of its constituent republics) introduced political science as an academic discipline in the 1960s. In Croatia, the Faculty of Political Sciences at Zagreb University was founded in 1962. It became the main institution of scientific research and academic study in the field of political science in Croatia, and it remained the only such institution in Croatia until today. Although individual Croatian political scientists have been working at other domestic and foreign academic centres and produced significant pieces of research, development of political science remained

essentially tied to the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb. In the socialist period, the main body of Croatian political science was theoretical and strongly influenced by Marxism. It was in this specific context that a small group of researchers at the Faculty founded empirical research of voters' behaviour. In the late 1970s and 1980s, first research studies on attitudes and behaviour of voters in non-competitive elections were produced.

After the transition to multi-party democracy in 1990, based on experience accumulated through previous research, it was possible to establish a research project on voters' behaviour in competitive elections. This research project was continued, under different labels, until today and its main characteristics have remained the same: on the occasion of parliamentary elections in Croatia, empirical surveys are carried out through face-to-face interviews, based on a representative sample of voters. Until today 11 such surveys have been organized, 10 as pre-election or post-election polls, and only one survey (in 2018) was conducted between the elections. Thirty years of research of voters' behaviour have produced a substantial quantity of empirical data. In the first decade of the research project, along with individual papers, a few important synthetic studies have been published. Three should be mentioned here: Grdešić *et al.*, *Hrvatska u izborima '90* (1991), a comprehensive analysis of the first free elections in Croatia; Ivan Šiber (ed.), *The 1990 and 1992/93 Sabor Elections in Croatia* (1997), a genetic and comparative analysis of the first two cycles of Croatian parliamentary elections, published as part of an international project on "founding elections"

coordinated by Hans-Dieter Klingemann; Mirjana Kasapović (ed.), *Hrvatska politika 1990.-2000.* (2001), a synthetic analysis of the first decade of democratic electoral politics in Croatia. After this last publication no attempts at research synthesis were undertaken for more than 20 years. The awareness of this deficit sparked the idea to produce a synthetic publication covering 30 years of research on voters' behaviour in Croatia and resulted in the volume presented here. The initiative for the publication came from the three editors. They also prepared empirical data for statistical analysis by streamlining original data sets from 11 surveys and additionally by merging all data into one master data base (including answers from more than 15 000 respondents) which allows for analysis of diachronic trends from three decades of research.

In order to understand the genesis and importance of this publication, it is important to point out that the continuation of the electoral research project at the Faculty of Political Sciences over more than three decades was only possible due to a successful succession of three generations of researchers. The first generation, which founded the project, were researchers born before 1960. The author of this review belongs to this generation and is the only one among them who co-authored a chapter in this volume. The intermediate generation are researchers born in the 1960s and 1970s, who took over from the founding generation and today are project coordinators. Four of them contributed to this volume. The youngest generation are researchers born in the 1980s or later. The three editors of this volume belong to this generation, while additional five members

of the generation contributed to the publication.

After explaining these background information about the research project which generated data analysed in this volume, let us turn to its content. Apart from the introduction and afterword there are 12 thematic chapters written by 13 authors, who all come from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb. All chapters are structured along guidelines prepared by the editors: chapters include discussion of theoretical approaches relevant for the topic, overview of previous empirical research and presentation of results of statistical analysis, using data from the research project. We will describe some of the main findings in this volume.

In the chapter on voters' behaviour, written by Kosta Bovan, Daniela Širinić and Višeslav Raos, four explanatory models are compared: sociological, socio-psychological, economic-rational and cognitive-informational. These models are based on different clusters of variables from the data set. The sociological model combines socio-economic and demographic variables with family political history (position in WWII) and level of religiosity; the socio-psychological model is based on left-right self-identification, party alignment, party membership, trust in political parties, specific support for democracy and attitude towards abortion; the economic-rational model looks at evaluation of one's own and the country's state of economy; the cognitive-informational model combines variables indicating use of different sources of information and level of interest in elections. The highest percentage of variance is explained by the socio-psychological model, in particular the variables of

left-right self-identification, attitude towards abortion, party alignment, party membership and satisfaction with democracy. An additional part of variance is explained by the sociological model, especially the variables of religiosity and family political history. The other two models are not relevant for the explanation of political behaviour in Croatia.

Against the background of declining electoral participation, Daniela Širinić and Danijela Dolenec analyse the variables that determine lower or higher participation in elections. They confirm insights of several previous studies which detect age and level of education as key predictor variables for lower participation: younger generations and citizens with lower level of education are less inclined to take part in elections. Beyond these socio-demographic variables, a number of socio-psychological factors influence the inclination towards electoral participation. Party alignment and interest for politics have been consistent predictor variables for higher participation throughout the 30 years period, while left-right self-identification and support for democracy have been important factors only in some electoral cycles. Mobilizing factors, such as media consumption, and higher levels of religiosity influenced higher inclination towards participation only at certain points in time.

Berto Šalaj and Goran Čular analyse factors which influence two variables that are important for the vitality of democracy: principal support for democracy as a system (in opposition to support for authoritarian leaders), and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Croatia. Support for democracy was slowly but consistently growing since the elections in

2003 until 2018, but then dropped in 2020. On the other hand, 30 to 40 percent of Croatian citizens prefer strong political leaders to democracy. The authors emphasise that Croatian experience demonstrates that exposure to democratic practice does not increase support for democracy.

Kosta Bovan is author of the chapter on trust, which covers both social trust (trust in other people) and trust in different social and political institutions for the period of two decades (1999 to 2020). Empirical data show that both social trust and trust in institutions have been low and declining in the observed period. The highest levels of trust are expressed towards security institutions (army and police), while the lowest trust levels are directed at political parties, parliament and courts. In the observed period, social and institutional trust are positively correlated. Other predictor variables of social trust are age, level of education and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. On the other hand, predictors of institutional trust are stronger and less volatile. These include satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Croatia and with the economic situation in the country, interest in politics and membership in political parties.

Višeslav Raos analyses ideological self-identification on a left-right scale. For the whole observed period (1999 to 2020), ideological self-identification has been constant and close to the average value of 5.5 (on a 1 to 10 scale). No correlation between age and self-identification was detected. Most important predictors for ideological self-identification are attitude towards abortion, religiosity and level of education. The author also analyses inclination towards ideological traditions of so-

cial democracy, Christian democracy and liberalism. One of his interesting findings is that younger generations are less inclined towards social democracy.

Goran Čular, Kosta Bovan and Daniela Širinić analyse party alignment of Croatian voters. They show that this concept, originally developed in the American political research dealing with American electoral politics, cannot be fully applied in Croatia. This is shown in particular by the fact that party alignment of voters was highest at the beginning of multi-party electoral politics. In the period from 1995 to 2020, party alignment varied between 56% (in 1995) and 27% (in 2018). The authors also show that party alignment has a positive effect on voters' participation and thus stabilizes the political system. However, they are not able to say whether party alignment contributes to consolidation of democracy.

We will just mention that the remaining chapters in the book deal with political knowledge, authoritarianism, social distance, economic attitudes and conspiracy theories.

In conclusion, it can be said that this book offers a valuable synthesis of research on voters' behaviour and attitudes in Croatia in the period of three decades. The book chapters which cover a wide range of themes are all based on good knowledge of relevant theories, they give an informed overview of previous empirical research in Croatia and demonstrate a high level of methodological sophistication. The book is addressing an expert audience, since its reading requires a certain level of theoretical and methodological knowledge. It is thus a solid starting point for generations of future researchers, who will hopefully continue electoral research in Croatia.

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