

DID SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGES IN SERBIA CHANGED THE LEVEL OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND ETHNOCENTRISM OF CITIZENS?

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The subject of this paper is the comparison of the results of the survey of public opinion before and after the change of the regime in Serbia as of 5th October 2000. Both researches (May 2000 and June 2001) were field researches, reaching for households, using random sample of the citizens of Serbia, without Kosovo.

The obtained results show that the change of regime in Serbia was followed with the change in the sense of decreased expression of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism after one year of democratic rule. However, the question which still remains is - whether the registered change is the result of social-political circumstances, and whether it is the reflection of essential changes of value systems, or just different experience of social desirability of particular attitudes.

Key words: Authoritarianism, Ethnocentrism, Serbia

From the beginning of national conflicts in former Yugoslavia, ups to now, two theses are opposed to each other in public discussions. One, that nationalistic and war propaganda contributed to the extension of extreme nationalism and, consequently, to the conflict and, the other, that "the war among Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks/Muslims was inevitable", for nationalism, as well as "long-time hatred among these nations", has always existed (and in Tito's Yugoslavia, it was only successfully repressed).

May value system be changed and could political atmosphere, created and supported by controlled media, actually create war? The significance of this question does not only refer to the issue of the causes of war, but also to the fact that affirmative answer to it would mean that opposite propaganda – the propaganda of reconciliation and ethnic tolerance, could contribute to the creation of different relations among

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conflicted nations, and, of course, to bringing the Balkans closer to European social values and standards.

The underlying results of the study of the social (ethnic) distance among Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks (called Muslims at that time) in Bosnia and Croatia as of 1990, that stand in favour of the changeability of value orientations, say that this ethnic distance was quite minor (Pantić, 1991), which casts serious doubt into the existence of “hatred” among these nations – before the war. Of course, the war took its tribute and the ethnic distance among the nationalities that were in war has drastically increased. According to the findings of Šiber (1997), the ethnic distance of Croats to Serbs and Bosniaks (Muslims) significantly increased (in comparison with 1990) in his research from 1995, and then it slightly decreased in the research from 1997. As a comparable example, we will take an item from Bogardus’ Scale² for measuring Ethnic Distance: “Would you accept that a member of a nation become your son-in-law or daughter-in-law?” Only 18% of Croats would accept “blood” relationship with Serbs and Bosniaks in 1995, and in 1997, this percentage moves to 21% regarding Serbs, and 23% regarding Bosniaks.

Also, the research in Serbia from 1993 (Kuzmanović, 1994) shows similar changes: only 25% of Serbs would accept “blood” relationship with Croats, 19% with Bosniaks and 16% with Albanians. However, in our research from 1997 (Biro, 1997), we obtained the significant decrease of the ethnic distance (comparing with the results from 1993): 54% of Serbs was ready to have family relationship with Croats, 41% with Bosniaks/Muslims, while the lowest percentage (32%) was registered with Albanians.

Theoretical discussion, which we commenced, is also contributed by our paper (Biro et al, 2000) on the impacts of media to political attitudes and value orientations of the citizens of Serbia. According to the results of this research, national media in Serbia 2000 succeeded to, with reference to politics (and values), direct a part of population, but only that part which did not have or had loose value systems. Contrary to this, media did not have impact to citizens with stable values, rather they chose media that were appropriate to their orientations!

Taking into account dramatic political changes that occurred in Serbia on 5th October 2000, it was interesting to see whether these changes brought changes in the value orientations of the citizens of Serbia.

Since the above mentioned research was done in May 2000, and that the change of regime in Serbia was done on 5th October of the same year, we had a specific experimental situation and the possibility to, through repeated study after one year, “measure” changes occurred as the consequences of changes in the political atmosphere and information and value messages sent by national media and (new) political elite.

² Bogardus’ scale, which is, with various modifications, used for the research of the ethnic distance, has 7 items, and the item according to which, as a rule, the highest distance is obtained, is the item about the readiness for blood relationship.

PROBLEM

The subject of this research is the comparison of the results of the survey of public opinion before and after the change of the regime in Serbia as of 5th October 2000, i.e. the comparison of results using the instruments that were aimed at registering the existence of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism.

METHOD

Both researches (May 2000 and June 2001³) were field researches, reaching for households, using random sample of the citizens of Serbia, without Kosovo. The sample was representative in relation to region and size of inhabited place, and the representation in relation to gender, education, and age was provided through post-stratification. The research from 2000 and 2001 included 1100 and 1513 subjects, respectively. For analysis of ethnocentrism, only the citizens who stated that they were Serbs or Montenegrins were included (902 in 2000, and 1348 in 2001).

The research was made in the form of standardised interview, and it was performed by trained interviewers from the agency SMMRI.

The questionnaire, besides demographic data, contained two scales, as well as several additional questions that referred to the attitudes to democracy, followed by xenophobia and nationalistic attitudes. The Authoritarian Scale (13 items) covers three clusters of attitudes: authoritarian submissiveness, authoritarian aggressiveness and conventionalism, according to the Altemeyer's (1996) concept. The Ethnic Distance Scale contained of four items – readiness to accept the members of 10 different nationalities as: a citizen of Serbia, neighbor, boss, and son-in-law/daughter-in-law.

RESULTS

Authoritarianism

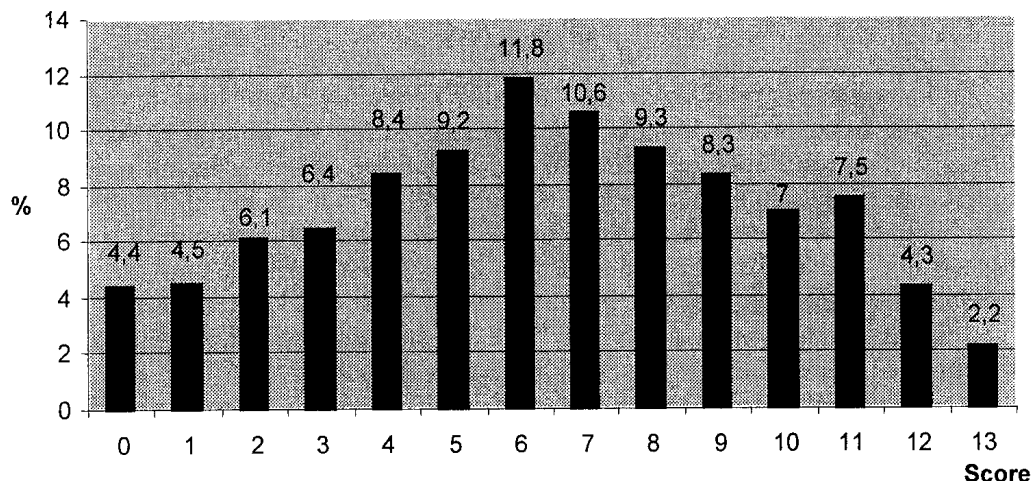
Table 1. Difference in scores on Authoritarian Scale

2000	2001	M1	M2	t-test	p
N=1100	N=1513	7.17	6.42	-5.28	.000

³ This survey was part of the international project "Justice, Accountability and Social Reconstruction in Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia", funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Eric Stover and Harvey M. Weinstein, University of California at Berkley, Principal Investigators

As seen from Table 1, the average score on the Authoritarian Scale, obtained in 2001, is statistically significantly lower than the one obtained in 2000.

Graph 1: Distribution of scores on the Authoritarian Scale in 2001



Nevertheless, the score distribution⁴ points out to the fact that two-thirds of the citizens of Serbia are still in the category of “high authoritarianism” (score 6 and higher).

Although the average score is, of course, the best indicator, we will also show the results on one of the items that well illustrate the change we discuss.

Table 2.: “In order for a state to be stable, the Assembly should be dismissed as unnecessary, and the President of the Republic should be given high authorities”

	YES	NO
2000	22.7%	77.3%
2001	17.6%	82.4%

Chi-square = 0.03; p = 0.86

⁴ Reader may find the score distribution on the Authoritarian Scale from 2000 in the quoted paper (Biro et al, 2000).

Ethnocentrism

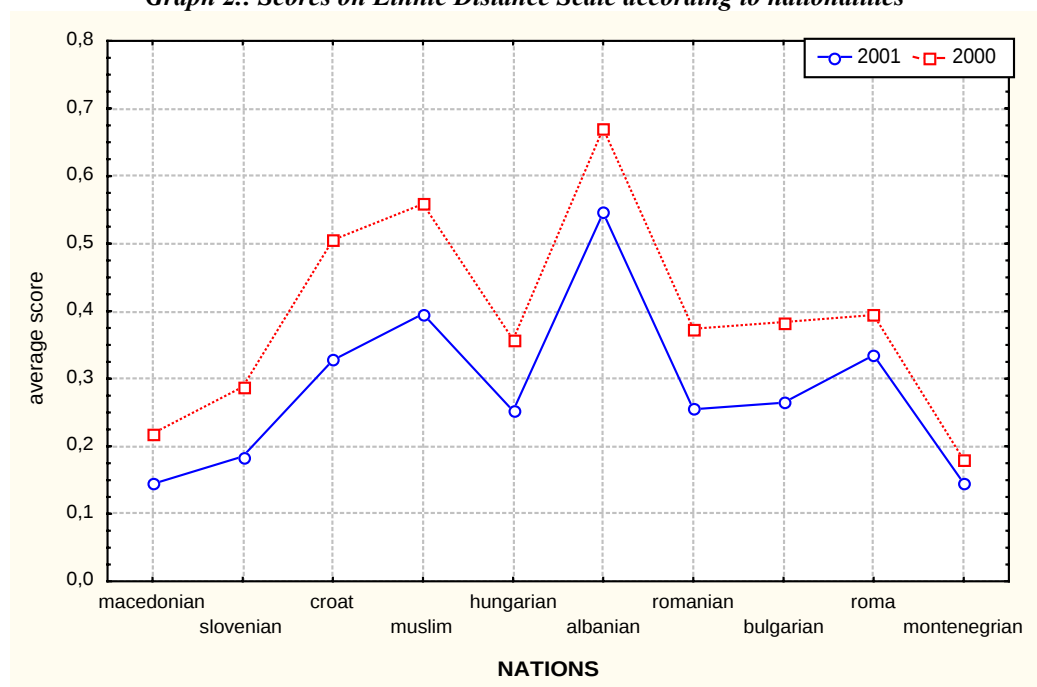
As the basic indicator of ethnocentrism, we used the results on the Ethnic Distance Scale, and we supported these results with the results regarding individual statements with reference to nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes.

Table 3.: The difference of total scores (10 nations x 4 relations) on the Ethnic Distance Scale

2000	2001	M1	M2	t-test	p
N=902	N=1348	17.27	11.76	-11.89	.000

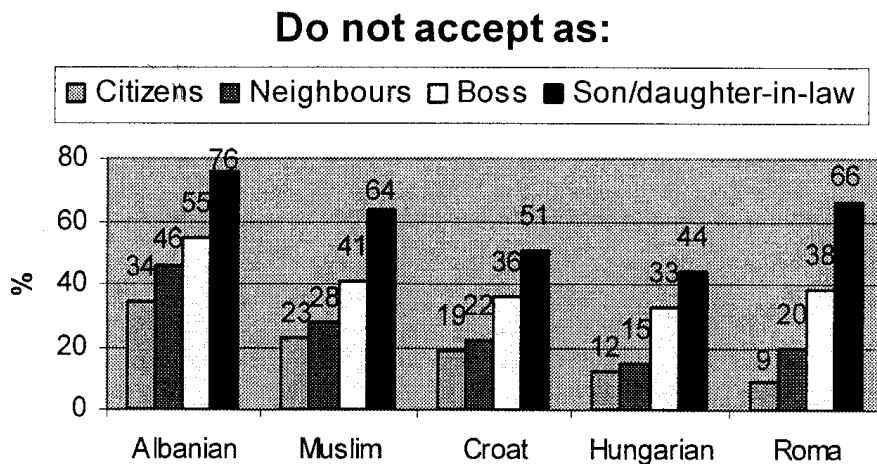
As seen from table 3, the average score on the Ethnic Distance Scale from 2001 is statistically significantly lower than the same score in 2000. Let's take a look at the distribution of total scores for 2000 and 2001 according to nationalities (Graph 2) and the distribution of scores according to the specific items for the nationalities where the highest distance is from 2001 (Graph 3)⁵.

Graph 2.: Scores on Ethnic Distance Scale according to nationalities



⁵ Reader will find the score distribution on the Ethnic Distance Scale for 2000 in the quoted paper (Biro at al, 2000).

Graph 3.: Ethnic distance in 2001 according to the items



Similar to the ethnic distance, the results for the individual questions concerning nationalistic attitudes also have a decreasing trend. We will show them in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Table 4.: “Serbs need to have more rights in their own state than other nations”

	YES	NO
2000	55.3%	44.7%
2001	47.4%	52.6%

Chi-square = 19.81; p = 0.000

Table 5.: “All our major state problems would be solved if Serbia would be cleansed from other nations”

	YES	NO
2000	27.7%	72.3%
2001	13.4%	86.6%

Chi-square = 106.3; p = 0.000

Table 6.: “One should always be careful with other nations, even when they are our friends”

	YES	NO
2000	71.6%	28.4%
2001	63.2%	36.8%

Chi-square = 9.58; p = 0.002

Table 7.: “Through recent bombardment of Serbia, Western nations showed that they hate us”

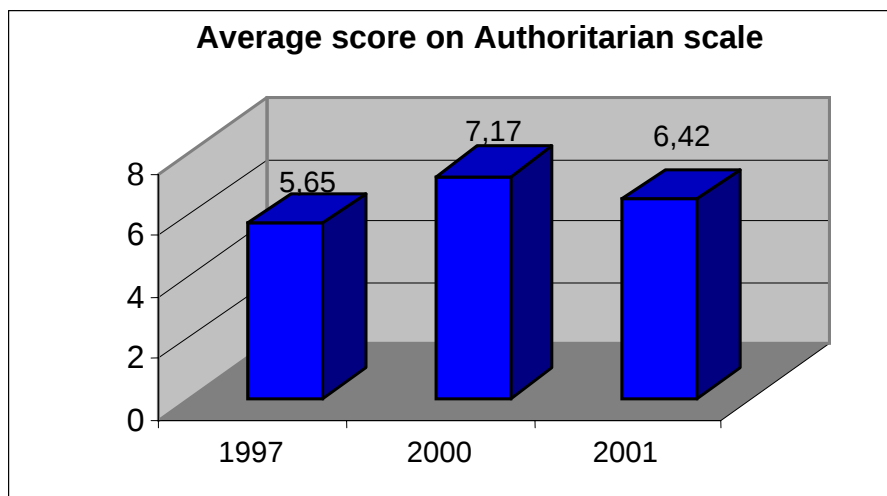
	YES	NO
2000	63.2%	36.8%
2001	47.8%	52.2%

Chi-square = 24.54; p = 0.000

DISCUSSION

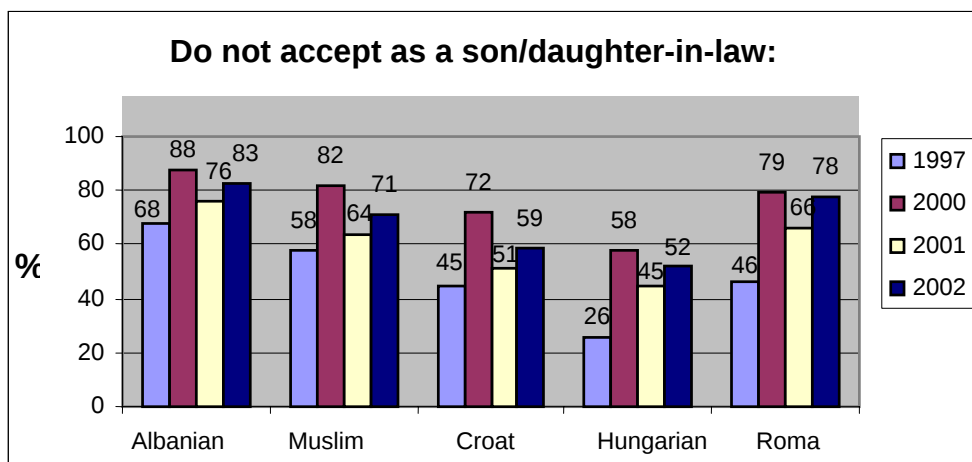
The enthusiasm that might have affected reader, must be, unfortunately, quickly disturbed through the presentation of the data from previous researches. Namely, the fact that the average scores of authoritarianism and ethnic distance in 2001 are significantly lower than the scores on these scales for 2000, does not say much, for both scores from 2000 are certainly the highest ones ever obtained! Was this the consequence of fresh memory to the bombardment of Serbia in 1999, or the culmination of the propaganda of hatred of fallen regime, remains to be discussed and it will not be the subject of our consideration. Only, it should be emphasized that the decrease of the authoritarianism and ethnic distance evidenced during the first year of the rule of democracy is still insufficient to bring this score closer to lower scores obtained in previous years!

Graph 4.: Average score on the Authoritarian Scale according to years



While the score from 1997 (Biro et al, 1997) on the Authoritarian Scale is approximate to the scores obtained in previous researches, and thus we may consider it relevant for comparison, the things are not so simple with the score on the Ethnic Distance Scale. Namely, our research (Biro, 1997) was done at relatively small (although representative) sample of 400 subjects, and more importantly, it is not in accordance with some other researches done in the same year (Sekelj, 2000), which obtained higher ethnic distance (but, which, unfortunately, used different methodology, thus the comparison is not possible). However, in case of the ethnic distance, we, thanks to the kindness of the Federal Ministry for National and Ethnic Communities, obtained the data from their research performed in February 2002 (the research was, according to the same methodology, performed by SMMRI), thus we also included this result in our comparison (Graph 5). As seen from the graph, in this last research, higher ethnic distance scores were once again obtained! They are, namely, still lower than in 2000, but higher than in 2001.

Graph 5.: Ethnic distance for blood relationship according to years



What has happened?

If we accept the basic thesis from this paper – that value orientations may be changed under the influence of media and the messages of political elite, then, we may conclude that both the authoritarianism and the ethnic distance were decreased immediately after the change of the regime in Serbia. But we may also conclude that these messages contributed to re-increase of nationalistic ideas and ethnic distance to other nationalities in 2002. Of course, for such a conclusion to be methodologically correct, it is necessary to analyze the contents of media and political messages of leading political persons, and measure their possible effects by using other instruments, too.

To what extent are obtained data reliable? Can our instruments be believed in? Besides good metric characteristics our instruments demonstrated in our researches⁶, the fact that the correlation and the ranking of items, as well as, the “ranking of desirability” of particular nationalities behaved almost identically in all researches speaks in favor of obtained data reliability.

However, the theoretical issue has remained unsolved – whether the registered changes are actually the changes of value orientation or is it only the change of perception of social desirability of particular value systems? Namely, the question whether the political atmosphere and media messages actually change the attitudes of people, or just send the message to the people: “now it is OK for you to think in this way”, thus citizens become freer to express their authentic attitudes and beliefs. In the research we studied the attitudes to (democratic) legal state (Biro et al, 1997; 1998), for example, authoritarian subjects zealously accepted democratic attitudes and solutions – if they were convinced that they were regulated by valid laws! So, if one in authoritarian manner suggests to authoritarian subject – now you should be democrat and you must tolerate minority nations – he will behave in authoritarian manner in accordance with the messages of accepted authorities.

However, if methodological limits disable us to connect the cause and effect, what we may certainly do is to analyze the effect. For such an analysis the results of the above mentioned research from 2002 may serve very well, for they clearly point out to the fact that public opinion in Serbia is not ready to face the contribution of its own nation in war and war crimes (Tables 8 and 9). And, until such awareness is lacking, there will be no chance for the decrease of ethnocentrism and xenophobia.

Table 8.: Is, according to your opinion, Radovan Karadžić criminal or hero?

	Frequency	Percent
1 – Criminal	118	7.7
2	110	7.1
3	516	33.6
4	293	19.1
5 – Hero	486	31.6
No respond	15	1.0
Total	1538	100

Table 9.: The cause of war in Yugoslavia is nationalism

	(NO) 1	2	3	4	(YES) 5
Serbian	19,6	16,8	24,0	15,2	23,5
Croatian	4,5	4,2	16,4	17,6	56,6
Bosniak/Muslim	5,2	4,7	19,1	17,9	52,5
Albanian	3,6	2,3	12,0	13,9	67,6

⁶ Crombach’s alpha coefficient for the Authoritarianism Scale would range between 0.85 and 0.89, and for the Ethnic Distance Scale between 0.91 and 0.94.

CONCLUSION

The answer to this question raised in the title was not fully provided by this research. The obtained results show that the change of regime in Serbia was followed by the change (decrease) in expression of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism, but also by the re-increase of ethnocentrism in 2002. However, whether the registered change is the effect of social-political circumstances, and whether it is the reflection of essential changes of value systems, or different perception of social desirability of particular attitudes – this research, due to methodological limits, could not provide unambiguous answer to this question.

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REZIME

DA LI SU DRUŠTVENO-POLITIČKE PROMENE U SRBIJI PROMENILE NIVO AUTORITARNOSTI I ETNOCENTRIZMA GRAĐANA?

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Predmet ovog istraživanja je poređenje rezultata ispitivanja javnog mnjenja pre i posle promene režima u Srbiji od 5. oktobra 2000. godine, odnosno poređenje rezultata na instrumentima koji su bili namenjeni registrovanju prisustva autoritarnosti i etnocentrizma.

Oba istraživanja (maj 2000. i jun 2001.) su bila terenska, na slučajnom uzorku građana Srbije, bez Kosova. Istraživanje iz 2000. je obuhvatilo 1100 ispitanika, a iz 2001. - 1513.

Rezultati pokazuju da su i skorovi na Skali autoritarnosti i na Skali etničke distance statistički značajno niži 2001. u odnosu na istraživanje iz 2000. Međutim, poređenja sa ranijim istraživanjima (iz 1997.), kao i sa kasnijim istraživanjima (iz 2002. godine) govore da je taj pomak ipak relativan, jer su postignuti skorovi još uvek veoma visoki, a, pored toga, poslednja istraživanja (iz 2002.) pokazuju ponovni rast etničke distance.