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Essays on Political Institutions Under Dominant Party Rule

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Essays on Political Institutions Under Dominant Party Rule

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An abstract of
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Essays on Political Institutions Under Dominant Party Rule
By Sinisa Miric

This dissertation investigates the institutional mechanisms underpinning dominant party regimes, with a focus on intraparty dynamics and their implications for democratic erosion. Drawing on the case of Serbia and its dominant party, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the three essays unpack how internal party struggles, central-local power relations, and leadership charisma shape regime stability and political outcomes.

The first essay examines how incumbent executives curb potential threats from local elites. It argues that foreign direct investment serves as a tool of political control, disproportionately targeted to party strongholds to weaken rival clientelist networks. A difference-in-differences design using original municipal-level data (2012–2019) demonstrates that central authorities use FDI allocation to consolidate control and manage intraparty hierarchies.

The second essay explores the ability of international election monitoring in detecting and deterring electoral fraud. Focusing on Serbia's 2022 elections, it contrasts the findings of international and domestic observers. It finds that reports produced by international mission of reduced ruling party vote share stem from non-random precinct assignment, while domestic mission's randomized approach detected no fraud. The study calls for improved methodological rigor in observer deployment to enhance the credibility of electoral assessments.

The third essay investigates whether voter loyalty in dominant party regimes is directed more toward the party or its leader. Through an original endorsement experiment embedded in a national survey, the study finds that charismatic leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, enabling central leaders to maintain elite support and marginalize internal rivals. This highlights how personalism and elite-leader bargains sustain dominant party rule.

Together, these essays contribute to our understanding of authoritarian institutions, the micro-foundations of party dominance, and the internal logic of regime durability in competitive authoritarian settings.

Essays on Political Institutions Under Dominant Party Rule

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This dissertation marks the culmination of seven transformative years at Emory University–years shaped by intellectual exploration, personal growth, and enduring curiosity about the political world. What began as a set of questions in my early days of graduate study evolved into a sustained scholarly pursuit, guided by a desire to understand complex institutions and the forces that shape them. Though much has changed since I first entered the program, the journey has remained rooted in a commitment to rigor, reflection, and the belief that ideas matter.

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Sinisa Miric

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation and research questions

In many countries (**Sim** around the world, one political party dominates political life. While some of these regimes—such as Japan—are classified as democracies, many others are not. In cases like China, Cuba, and Vietnam, opposition parties are banned outright. In other contexts–Hungary, Russia, Singapore, Tanzania, and Turkey–ruling parties operate in elections that are neither free nor fair. Scholars refer to the latter as dominant party regimes (Reuter 2017), where political competition exists in form, but real power flows through a single political organization. In such systems, political advancement typically depends on internal promotion rather than popular mandate, placing intraparty dynamics at the heart of governance. Recent literature on authoritarian/hybrid regimes has focused on understanding the role of nominally democratic institutions (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012). Importantly, these institutions often fail to serve as mechanisms of representation and accountability and are appropriated by political leaders, who by doing so expand their grasp on the most important political positions. Elections supply information about other political actors, both opponents and allies. Courts make arbitrary political decisions to

become part of the legal system. Parliaments provide a medium through which to co-opt other actors. However, political parties represent the most useful of all nominally democratic institutions for incumbents (Reuter 2017; Svolik 2012). In dominant party regimes, the party is crucial in ensuring the regime's survival and its ability to outlive other types of autocracies (Geddes 1999; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Svolik 2012). The regime party plays a key role in solving two main obstacles of authoritarian governance: the problem of authoritarian power-sharing (managing the ruling elites discontent to proof against a coup) and the problem of authoritarian control (managing popular discontent to preclude mass uprisings) (Svolik 2012). Dominant parties resolve these problems by brokering bargains among factions and by mobilizing mass support (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). They represent the key institution to mobilize people through party cells, ancillary organizations, and mass events (Berman 1997). In regimes with elections but little to no alternation in power, the party plays a role in mobilizing support for elections through vote-buying and coercive means (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2017). However, the party is also an important institution that generates genuine popular support (Frye et al. 2017). The party and its candidates have name recognition and a track record of governance among voters. In addition, voters may be unwilling to take a chance on the opposition if they believe it is unlikely to win anyway.

In many dominant regimes, party entrenchment coincides with the rise of a powerful leader–such as Putin in Russia, Erdoğan in Turkey, or Vučić in Serbia. A model developed by Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022) helps illuminate this phenomenon. Their framework features two key actors: party presidents and elites. Parties face a fundamental trade-off between the advantages of disciplined, programmatic campaigning and the electoral appeal of charismatic—yet potentially unfaithful—candidates. This tension is framed as a collective action problem, stemming from

candidates' inability to fully commit to building the party's collective brand.

Building on Cox and McCubbins (2007), the authors argue that this problem can be partially addressed by conditioning access to senior positions on the provision of public goods. However, resolving the collective action dilemma also requires solving a related challenge: a credible commitment problem. In particular, parties must credibly signal that they will promote loyalist candidates, those who may be less charismatic but who are committed to advancing the party's program.

Their model yields a noteworthy additional equilibrium, the 'uncommitted equilibrium,' which occurs when parties are unable to resist promoting highly charismatic individuals. In this scenario, every charismatic leader ascends to a senior position without contributing to collective brand-building, instead pursuing more particularistic, self-serving strategies. The outcome is a loose coalition of high-profile individuals who invest more in cultivating personal brands than in strengthening the party as a unified political vehicle.

Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022) identify key conditions under which this uncommitted equilibrium is more likely to emerge. Political and economic volatility, in particular, discourages programmatic campaigning and incentivizes short-term, charisma-driven appeals. Under such conditions, parties prioritize immediate electoral viability over long-term coherence.

A substantial body of scholarship has identified Eastern Europe as a region characterized by high electoral volatility (Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera 2017), making it especially prone to the uncommitted equilibrium described above. When combining the insights of Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022) and Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera (2017), we should expect parties in this region to lean more

heavily on charismatic candidates compared to their counterparts elsewhere. For this reason, my study focus on Serbia and its ruling party, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS).

I argue that this framework helps explain both the rise and continued dominance of Aleksandar Vučić within the SNS. Party elites chose to align themselves with a figure whose charisma and intuitive connection with the masses made him electorally formidable. Vučić, in turn, has leveraged his personal popularity as a key asset in navigating intraparty relations. By consistently demonstrating his electoral strength, he underscores the party's dependence on his leadership for continued success.

Notably, Vučić built his public image by closely tracking popular opinion—positioning himself as a relentless opponent of corruption and unemployment, and as a tireless advocate for ordinary citizens. Having secured an unchallenged position at the top of the SNS, the question now becomes: to what extent can Vučić shape public opinion in ways that further consolidate his influence within the party?

1.2   Case Study: Serbia

Serbia presents a compelling and analytically rich environment for studying the institutional foundations and dynamics of dominant party regimes. Over the last decade, it has undergone a marked transformation from a transitional democracy to a hybrid system in which democratic institutions remain formally intact but are functionally subordinated to a single ruling party. The emergence and consolidation of the Serbian Progressive Party since 2012 have offered a rare opportunity to observe how dominant parties come to monopolize political power not through overt repression, but by repurposing democratic institutions for authoritarian ends.

Several features make Serbia especially suited to the research questions laid out in this dissertation. First, Serbia's experience reflects broader trends in democratic backsliding and the reconfiguration of electoral competition in Central and Eastern Europe. The region has witnessed the rise of dominant parties with limited alternation in power (Fidesz in Hungary, United Russia in Russia, and the Justice and Development Party in Turkey), each exhibiting characteristics of competitive authoritarianism. However, compared to these regimes, Serbia stands out for its pronounced electoral volatility, underdeveloped partisan attachments, and fluid intraparty structures (Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera 2017). These conditions provide fertile ground for studying how dominant parties resolve internal coordination problems, mobilize mass support, and manage elite defection without the institutional depth found in more consolidated regimes.

Second, the SNS's strategic use of instruments such as foreign direct investment (FDI), media control, and charismatic leadership underscores the relevance of distributive politics and personalization in dominant party consolidation. Unlike cases where ideological coherence or historical legacy undergird party dominance, the SNS has relied heavily on centralized decision-making and vertical loyalty to maintain cohesion. The party's growth coincides with a broader decline in party institutionalization, evident in voter disillusionment, increasing personalization of political campaigns, and the marginalization of internal dissent (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015).

Third, the institutional architecture of Serbia's political system, such as featuring strong local governments, centralized executive control over distributive resources, and frequent reliance on international electoral monitors, enables detailed investigation of both intra-elite bargaining and mass-level political behavior. By focusing on the SNS, this dissertation is able to probe the institutional mechanisms that un-

derpin regime durability, including strategies of elite management, manipulation of democratic oversight, and the cultivation of public loyalty through personalization.

In sum, Serbia functions not just as a national case but as a theoretical archetype for understanding how dominant party regimes arise and persist in contexts marked by institutional fragility, charismatic leadership, and uneven electoral competition. The insights drawn from the Serbian case are not simply local; they speak to broader patterns of regime endurance, democratic erosion, and the recalibration of party politics under competitive authoritarianism.

1.3 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of three essays that approach this central question from different angles: elite coordination, electoral oversight, and mass loyalty. Taken together, the three essays open the black box of intraparty politics in dominant party regimes. They show how institutions designed to stabilize democracy are reshaped to consolidate authority and how the balance of power between leaders, elites, and voters determines the longevity of competitive authoritarianism.

The first essay in the dissertation is designed to answer the question: how do incumbent national executives constrain the power of potentially threatening local politicians? In regimes with dominant parties, incumbent executives often seek to consolidate their power and prevent potential defections which could threaten their rule. This paper argues that foreign direct investment (FDI)–a particular instrument of distributive politics–is one tool through which incumbents can thwart challengers. FDI projects bring private sector jobs which disrupt the public sector client bases of local politicians, while allowing central politicians to claim credit and boost their electoral success at the national level. However, incumbents only target these projects

in party strongholds in which they avoid the risk of undermining party control. To test the theory, this study employs a regression design using an original dataset on Serbian municipalities from 2012-2019. Evidence from Serbia suggests that more FDI projects are allocated to party strongholds than other areas, showing that the center can curb local elites and centralize party decision making.

The second essay in the dissertation is designed to answer the question: How effectively can international observer missions help us detect and understand electoral fraud? This study examines electoral fraud during Serbia's 2022 presidential and parliamentary elections, a compelling case due to Serbia's democratic backsliding and extensive electoral monitoring system. By comparing findings from international observers (OSCE) and domestic monitors (CRTA), the research identifies significant disparities. The OSCE found a notable decrease in the ruling party's vote share in observed precincts–2.8 percent for parliamentary and 3.4 percent for presidential elections–implying potential electoral fraud. In contrast, CRTA detected no such discrepancies. The analysis suggests the difference arises from observer assignment practices. OSCE monitors disproportionately visited urban areas, precincts with larger voter populations, and sites of previous low ruling party performance, leading to non-random sampling. Conversely, CRTA maintain their randomization process. The study concludes that while international missions remain vital for democratic development, their current practices require reform to ensure unbiased and reliable fraud detection.

The goal of the third essay in the dissertation is to answer the question: are voters more loyal to the ruling party or its leader? Dominant parties often form when elites with local bases of power rally around a figure who can command a nationwide following. These leaders lend their charisma, along with elites' political machines, to build a popular following for the dominant party. This deal turns out to be a winning

arrangement for both the leaders and elites. However, there is an underlying tension between leaders and elites within the dominant party. In this paper, I argue that in this struggle, influence over the masses is a source of power. By pointing to his charismatic connection with voters as the source of the party's electoral victories, a leader can maintain the support of most party elites, allowing them to marginalize less charismatic challengers within the party. To test this theory, a nationwide online survey experiment was conducted in Serbia using an endorsement experiment with a quasi-pretest-posttest design. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a control group with no endorsement, a presidential support treatment (linking a policy to President Vucic's support), and a disagreement treatment (where the president supports a policy, but the party opposes it). The design evaluates the president's ability to shape voter opinions, offering insights into the dynamics of loyalty between voters, the leader, and the party.

1.4 Personalism as Regime Backbone: Insights from the Serbian Case

Across the three chapters of this dissertation, a consistent thread emerges: dominant party rule in Serbia is sustained not primarily through programmatic coherence or institutional depth, but through a logic of personalization. The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), though formally structured as a political party, operates in practice as a personalized regime in which authority is centralized in the figure of Aleksandar Vučić. His leadership functions as the connective tissue linking elite coordination, distributive control, public opinion formation, and electoral legitimacy. This configuration reflects broader theoretical insights from the literature on hybrid regimes and authoritarian institutions, namely, that competitive authoritarian systems rely not just on electoral manipulation and institutional asymmetry, but on vertically integrated strategies

that elevate personal loyalty over organizational autonomy (Levitsky and Way 2010; Reuter 2017; Svolik 2012).

Beyond the formal structures of electoral competition, the findings point to a deeper logic of regime consolidation: power is sustained through strategic personalization rather than party institutionalization. This is evident in the timing and pattern of resource allocation. Preferential FDI targeting emerges only after the SNS achieves full national dominance, reflecting not a reward mechanism for loyal constituencies, but a tool of elite control (Reuter and Szakonyi 2019). By directing highly visible investment projects into stronghold municipalities, central leadership leverages its authority to undercut the clientelist bases of local allies, restructuring intraparty relations vertically and reducing the threat of defection. These actions suggest that even internal coalitions are governed not by stable organizational norms, but by the strategic deployment of state capacity to reinforce personal loyalty.

This distributive logic resonates with the patterns of public opinion uncovered in the behavioral analysis. In Serbia's context of high electoral volatility and low partisan attachment (Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera 2017), citizens respond more strongly to personalized cues than to party platforms. The persuasive power of Vučić's endorsements, even when they contradict the party's stated positions, reinforces findings from Barber and Pope (2019) and Lenz (2012). This dynamic should be particularly pronounced in systems with weak party institutionalization (Dalton and Weldon 2007). In such environments, political identity is increasingly shaped by charismatic leadership rather than programmatic alignment. Combining this, these dynamics reveal a regime that is neither fully ideological nor institutionally embedded, but one in which personalization supplants traditional markers of party coherence, reshaping elite behavior and voter attitudes through the gravitational pull of a singular figure.

Taken together, the three essays portray a regime in which formal party structure is subordinated to charismatic hierarchy. The SNS exhibits features of what Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022) term an 'uncommitted equilibrium,' where parties elevate charismatic figures who cultivate personal brands rather than party identity. In this equilibrium, elite loyalty is conditioned not on adherence to shared norms or policy platforms, but on the political capital of the leader. The durability of the regime thus relies not on institutional coherence, but on the central actor's ability to coordinate elites, manage dissent, and project legitimacy.

This configuration carries broader implications for our understanding of competitive authoritarian regimes. It highlights how personalism can function as an institutional logic in its own right–one that reorders the distribution of political power and redefines the basis of regime resilience. As Serbia's case shows, democratic erosion may unfold not only through manipulation of institutions, but through the gradual displacement of organizational authority by personal loyalty. In such contexts, elections, parties, and public policy become vehicles for reproducing centralized rule, even as democratic forms remain intact.

Chapter 2

Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts: FDI as a Tool of Intraparty Power Consolidation in Serbia

2.1   Introduction

Democratization and backsliding have had an important influence on people's lives (Geddes 1999; Linz 1976; Przeworski 2000; Samuel 1993). While there are multiple paths to democratic breakdown (Bermeo 2016), incumbent takeovers have become the most common (Svolik 2015). A key feature of incumbent takeover is that it happens through the gradual process of altering institutional rules such that incumbents can never lose elections (Luo and Przeworski 2019). Democratically elected incumbents gradually become dictators through legislation that disadvantages the opposition, cuts down the power of independent institutions (e.g., courts, media), and restricts rights that can be employed to challenge the government. In this process, the chief executive's co-partisans–'collaborators' (Applebaum 2020) or 'faithful allies' (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018)–are crucial. The ability of the chief executive's party to control

different branches and levels of government is of fundamental importance for making these institutional changes happen. Successful incumbent takeovers of this variety usually result in dominant party dictatorships (Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2017; Svolik 2012), such as that of Fidesz in Viktor Orban's Hungary or Vladimir Putin's United Russia. The focus of this paper is to understand how these takeovers take place and how do democratically elected central governments consolidate power in their hands.

The emergence of dominant political parties has been a frequently studied phenomenon (Brownlee 2007; Greene 2010; Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2017). Often, these parties start as unstable coalitions of popular national leaders and local representatives who have their own bases of power (Reuter 2017). The center and its local allies[1] can benefit from cooperation (Nunes 2013; Reuter 2017). Local elites can profit from (re)distribution from the center during elections. Cooperation with local elites, in turn, helps national leaders implement their agenda, claim credit for accomplishments, and improve their electoral success, as local elites are key mobilizers on behalf of candidates for the national elections. To reap these benefits, the central leadership desires to appoint loyal and competent local leaders (Hassan 2017).

However, the relationship between these actors is not always harmonious–the local elites can defect Reuter and Szakonyi 2019, and defection can lead to the breakdown of the regime, particularly in authoritarian or unconsolidated democratic settings (Svolik 2012). When local leaders defect, the regime loses the skills, followers, and resources those leaders control, thus subverting the capability of the regime to gather mass support. This crack in the regime also can induce a coordination problem – if the local elites participate in elections, they can split the vote and improve the opposition's chance of winning. Finally, defections may signal the vulnerability of

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1. I use the term central government, party leadership and center interchangeably, as well as local elites and mayors.

the regime, which may encourage even more defections (Magaloni 2006; Reuter and Gandhi 2011; Simpser 2013). Thus, a key problem for national-level incumbents who seek to consolidate a dominant party regime is to maintain control over their local allies. The research question this paper poses is how can central leaders manage powerful local partners with the ability to threaten to defect from the party?

When central leaders have very few options they can use to rein in powerful local allies, they may seek to replace them with loyalists. But these loyalists may be loyal exactly because they do not have a popular following, hence their dependency on central leaders (Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik 2022). Thus, unless national leaders can transform the reasons for which voters within a locality support the party, replacing popular local elites with loyalists runs the risk of alienating local voters. I argue that central leaders use targeted distribution exactly for the purpose of building a direct connection with the voters. They provide concessions to areas governed by their local allies, but only those for which they can take most of the credit among voters. While local power brokers may have been instrumental in allowing the party to attract support due to their own personal following and networks, the distributive transfer[2] is an attempt by national leaders to encourage supporters to cast their votes less out of allegiance to a local personality and more in support of the party and its national leaders. The key features of such distribution are that national-level incumbents have discretion over its allocation and can take more credit for it than their local allies, increasing their popularity with voters. However, this strategy does not come without risks–by undercutting their local agents, the incumbent runs the risk of allowing the opposition to challenge the regime. For this reason, national leaders target the safest localities–local strongholds.

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2. By distributive transfers, I refer primarily to particularistic monetary and non-monetary resources allocated by political authority to benefit select group interests. While this paper focuses on foreign direct investments, examples of distributive transfers in a different setting can include, but are not limited to pork barrel programs, industry-specific subsidies, and pro-poor income transfer programs.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is one such resource that the central government may possess. In countries whose institutional framework gives national leaders the power to determine the location and fiscal inducements for projects, FDI can be a useful tool for consolidation of power in the center. FDI enables central leaders to claim direct credit while preventing 'credit hijacking' by their local allies (Bueno 2018). By increasing opportunities for employment in the private sector, FDI also helps central leaders undercut local allies' patronage networks by reducing the allure of public employment. I argue that the central government strategically allocates FDI to the municipalities where they would benefit from undermining local leaders' ability to maintain their local patronage networks. For this reason, I predict that municipalities where the ruling party's allies enjoy a large margin of victory, to which I refer as ruling party strongholds, receive the bulk of FDI.

I examine these claims in the context of modern Serbia and its ruling party–the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS–Srpska Napredna Stranka). To test the theory, this study uses an original dataset on Serbian municipalities from 2012-2019. I find support for the argument by employing a two-way fixed effects regression design. The results show that, compared to competitive municipalities, the party strongholds are associated with a statistically significant increase in new jobs created by FDI, between 160 and 200 new jobs in a year. The effect amounts to a 23 to 29% within-municipality standard deviation increase. To show how significant this difference is: over a period of four years (2016-2019) local strongholds received four to five more new FDI projects. As a consequence, a significant number of citizens are not dependent on mayors to provide them with employment and thus the mayors' potential to build clientelistic relations shrinks. I conduct a series of robustness tests and also check if the assumptions behind the identification strategy hold; the results do not change.

However, the results presented in this study may be interpreted in a different way–supporting the core voter hypothesis. This would represent a much simpler explanation: national leaders reward citizens who vote for them. To distinguish the theory proposed by this study and show that FDI allocation is not a reward but a tool for undermining local allies, I conduct several tests. To start, I show that national strongholds (presidential and parliamentarian elections) do not follow the pattern of local strongholds (municipal elections); national strongholds are not rewarded by increase in FDI allocation. I then examine different types of central government transfers to municipalities. The results do not support the reward thesis; the central government sends fewer discretionary resources to local strongholds, contrary to what we would expect if their goal is to reward those areas. This result is particularly telling because this type of funding is preferred by central authorities (Bonvecchi and Lodola 2011) and can be used by mayors to employ public works firms and to help them build their patronage networks (Ravanilla, Sexton, and Haim 2022).

While this paper primarily focuses on the case of Serbia, its ruling party, and the role of FDI, the framework can be extended to different settings, as Serbia is not a unique case. The presence of several possible conditions would make these results more likely in other contexts. First, the existence of political parties that are either in the process of achieving dominance or have already achieved it (Repucci 2020). Second, the argument developed in this paper is more likely to apply in countries where political institutions, such as party identification and loyalty, are underdeveloped, which is the case in many new democracies (Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera 2017). Third, the story introduced in this study is more likely to apply in countries where the center possesses valuable distributive resources that they can control and for which they can claim credit.

This paper contributes to several debates in the political science literature. First, I add to the literature of dominant parties (Brownlee 2007; Greene 2010; Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2017), particularly on their rise to power. While most of the literature continues to focus on explaining why defections happen, this study examines this problem from the perspective of the central government and their attempt to curb defections. I present a novel strategy that party leaders may employ to consolidate their power and fend off potential defectors (or challengers) from local party ranks. When centralization of power occurs in established democracies, it appears to 'deepen' democracy (Cox 2005), while the same process may be cause for alarm in unconsolidated democracies (Brader and Joshua A. Tucker 2001). Ultimately, this strategy could increase a regime's longevity and weaken democratic institutions. In this light, this study addresses the literature on backsliding democracies and electoral authoritarian regimes that hitherto has focused on how national incumbents try to compete on an uneven playing field to disadvantage the opposition (Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2015). However, less attention has been paid to the problem of managing one's allies (for exceptions see Gandhi, Noble, and Svolik (2020) and Reuter (2017)).

Next, this study builds on the literature on distributive politics (Golden and Min 2013). The study shows that distribution can be influenced by ruling elites' perception of a threat. Such threats do not have to come from the outside (such as an opposition party or a different ethnic group), as a large portion of the literature on distributive politics depicts (Bohlken 2018; Bueno 2018; Migueis 2013; Owen 2019); it can also arrive from inside the ranks. This perception of a threat potentially explains the pattern of FDI distribution that diverges from existing theories.

Finally, this paper adds to the rich patronage network and clientelism literature (Hidalgo and Nichter 2016; Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015; Larreguy, Marshall, and

Querubin 2016; Nichter 2008; Novaes 2018). This literature shows that the central government often assists their local allies in the effort to build their own personal patronage networks. This study shows that this may not be the case, especially if the center perceived their copartisans as the main treat to the regime itself. While party leadership may help their allies to cultivate a personal network in order to win elections, they may also actively contain that effort in some districts in order to limit the influence of local agents and to preserve their own positions of power.

2.2 Challenges of Center-Local Coalitions for Dominant Parties

Dominant party regimes are the most common form of autocracy and exhibit a high level of stability (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018; Magaloni 2006). A dominant party is defined as 'a political institution that has a leading role in determining access to many important political offices, shares powers over policy making and patronage distribution, and uses privileged access to state resources to maintain its position in power' (Reuter 2017, p. 4). In order to understand the internal relations of these parties, let us first consider how they form.

Incumbent parties that attempt to engage in democratic backsliding usually first emerge as loose coalitions of elected central government officials and local elites with their own bases of power. National leaders need to recruit and maintain the allegiance of local power brokers who can mobilize voters to support the party. The usual way to do this is to have local elites agree to run under the party's label. Putin, for example, recruited local elites into United Russia with the express purpose of using their political machines to expand the party's presence throughout the country (Hale 2003; Reuter 2017). National leaders of the SNS in Serbia have done the same.

Employing their personal networks and the powers of the state, local officials are able to keep voters in the party's fold. In Serbia, municipal leaders wield significant authority in managing land, development projects, and public service companies–all of which provide an ample opportunity for building and maintaining local patronage networks (Jovanovic 2015; Serences 2012). Access to the state, in turn, provides local elites with opportunities to rent-seek and influence policy at various levels of government.

Managing a coalition of strong local elites is not without challenges, however (Reuter and Szakonyi 2019). For national party leaders in the executive, there are multiple ways local elites could become a threat. First, they can decide to join the opposition or to run as independents, both of which can pull votes away from the party. Second, local elites can become internal challengers for party or national leadership positions. Local elites' capacity to threaten either of these options becomes more credible as the strength and independence of their local political machines increase. In Russia, local politicians with more autonomous political resources are more likely to defect from United Russia, with much of their influence stemming from control over public sector employment (Frye et al. 2017; Reuter and Szakonyi 2019). In Serbia, defection from the ruling party has been a constant headache for central officials (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Given the weakness of the opposition, why would national leaders worry about threats of defection or actual defections by local officials within the party? For national leaders of incumbent parties that are trying to consolidate power, as in the case of Serbia, the ability of local elites to defect threatens their political project. Single defections from the party can 'snowball' into an avalanche that may threaten the party's stronghold on political offices throughout the state (Animashaun 2015; Garrido de Sierra 2012; Magaloni 2006). Defections by local power brokers contributed

to the fall of the Milosevic regime in Serbia (Levitsky and Way 2010). Even if such an avalanche does not materialize, the ability of individual elites to constantly extract concessions from the party–in the form of increased rents and policy influence – by threatening to leave (or actually leaving in order to be enticed back) creates a persistent headache for national party leaders (Serences 2012). For national leaders, this 'blackmail potential' not only results in the loss of spoils and political power to local elites, but also creates substantial transaction costs through persistent bilateral bargaining with their local partners (Reuter 2017).

To address the problem of unruly local elites, one solution would be to replace them with more compliant allies. Yet because those newly installed by national leaders are less likely to have their own local following, central leaders would be unwise to move too hastily in this direction. Removal of popular local allies while the party still relies on their personal following and networks to attract votes would reduce the party's vote share. So, before it can remove or 'discipline' their unruly allies, national leaders must also consider how to do so without undermining the party's electoral support at the local level. In other words, they need to manage their coalition in ways that do not undermine their electoral dominance and potentially give the opposition a path towards challenging them.

I argue that central leaders use distributive tools that help them address these challenges; they provide concessions to their local allies, but only those for which they can take most of the credit among voters. This targeted distribution is designed to transform the reasons for which voters within a locality support the party. While local power brokers may have been instrumental in allowing the party to attract support due to their own personal following and networks, the distributive transfer is an attempt by national leaders to encourage supporters to cast their votes less out of allegiance to a local personality and more in support of the party and its national

leaders. The key features of such distribution are that national-level incumbents have discretion over its allocation and can take more credit for it than their local allies, increasing their popularity with voters.

The strategy is risky, because by undercutting their local agents, national leaders run the risk of enabling the opposition to make inroads. This could happen if local leaders decide to defect to the opposition, or if internecine conflict among local and national party elites enables the opposition to step in and gain support. Thus, the safest place where national leaders can try this strategy is in local strongholds. Higher levels of party vote share in these strongholds provide a buffer, so that in the event the party suffers some loss of support in the next election, it is unlikely that the opposition will be strong enough in that locality (e.g., municipality) to win the election and take office.

In addition to this, there is one more very important reason to target local party strongholds. These local leaders possess the most developed patronage networks, and their recruitment allows the ruling party to gain a foothold in a locality. However, these local elites, the ones who have large personal followings and whose 'blackmail potential' is the largest, are the ones who the central leadership would most like to rein in. Thus, local strongholds present an ideal setting for FDI allocation in that they can minimize the negative consequences of investment and allow central leaders to target the elites that are most likely to defect in the future.

2.3   The Serbian Context

To examine my claims, I focus on the case of Serbia, which is a de jure parliamentary republic. The National Assembly is a unicameral body of 250 members, chosen by popular vote every four years through a PR closed list system in which the country

is a single electoral unit. Parties must pass a five percent threshold in order to win seats.[3] Along with a prime minister, the executive is composed of a president, whose election by popular vote affords them a lot of power (Orlović 2015). For this reason, the presidency is a coveted position for which party leaders traditionally run (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015).

There are two administrative levels in Serbia: the central government and the municipalities and cities.[4] The country is divided into 117 municipalities and 28 cities,[5] forming the basic level of local government. The head of the municipality is the president of the municipality, while the executive power is held by the municipal council, and legislative power by the municipal assembly. The municipal assembly is popularly elected using a proportional closed- party list system, while the president and the council are elected by the assembly. Local elections are held every four years. Only the cities officially have mayors, although the municipal presidents are often informally referred to as such and will be addressed as mayors for the purpose of this paper.

Since the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s, Serbia has moved toward a multi-party system. Notwithstanding the multi-party system, free and fair elections were not held until after the transition from the Milošević regime in 2000. In the first decade of the 21st century, the number of political parties grew rapidly, reaching 123 parties in 2020. Most of these parties represent factions of well-known national brands (Lončar and Stojanović 2016); only seven party lists won seats during the 2016 parliamentary elections. Furthermore, party identification among citizens is not very well developed; parties like the Democratic Party (DS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), that led the political transition

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3. This has been change after the elections in this paper to 3% of total valid cast votes.
4. There is only a small difference in authority between municipalities and cities.
5. Not including Kosovo and Metohija, which is not a part of the study.

in the '90s are now on the fringe of the political scene. Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera (2017) identify Serbia as a country with high electoral volatility, including vote shifting among established parties (within-system volatility), and even more pronounced vote shifting to new parties (extra-system volatility).

Another important characteristic of the Serbian political arena is the economic legacy from the latter half of the twentieth century. Following communism and the Milosevic regime, as well as the devastating events of the 1990s, the country's economy was one of the least developed among European countries. The infrastructure was shattered by wars, unemployment rates were high, and the public sector employed a large number of people, sometimes even up to one in three employees. This situation allowed elites controlling public sector jobs to cultivate an army of loyal voters. Due to institutional rules granting significant power to local governments, mayors became highly influential political actors. By establishing direct relationships with local voters, mayors were able to switch parties and bring a significant number of votes to the party they chose to support in national elections. This ability to influence voting patterns gave mayors important leverage when dealing with national-level leaders. Figure 1 illustrates the fact that a majority of mayors have switched their party allegiance at least once during their political careers, thereby creating a credible threat of defection from the central government.

In the last decade, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) has become the dominant political force in Serbia. The SNS was formed in 2008 after a split within the leadership of the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Starting as a group of 21 parliament members who left the SRS, they embarked on the process of organizing a new party. First, they established a national branch and then gradually sought allies at the local level.

Figure 2.1: Party switching (mayors in 2016)
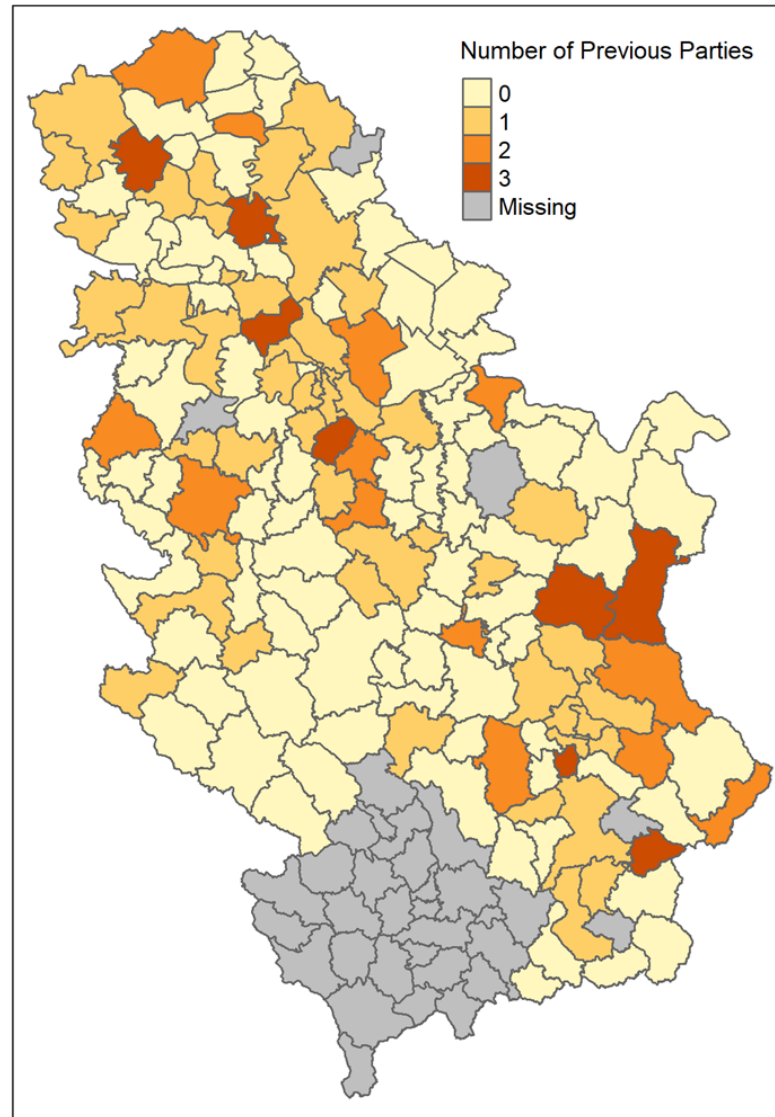
The figure shows the number of political parties that mayors were members of prior to their current party in 2016. Data collected by the author.

After the 2012 elections, the SNS won the presidency and emerged as the largest party in the National Assembly. However, despite this success, it did not have full control of the executive branch and local governments. Nevertheless, the 2016 general elections marked a turning point. Prior to 2016, the ruling party sought to attract local elites to gain influence at the local level. Over time, the party managed to

gain complete control of all levels of government. As a result of the 2016 elections, the incumbent party was now able to shift its strategy and consolidate power at the center.

Consolidation of power at all levels, combined with local elites whose trustworthiness is questionable due to their history of party switching, has led the party leaders to change their stance towards their local allies. Anecdotal evidence supports the claim that after 2016, the party leadership altered its strategy towards local elites, transitioning from enticing them to join the party ranks to purging local officials that could pause a threat from the party.

In 2019, President Vucic promised significant changes within the party at the local level, intending to replace up to 40 percent of mayors after the 2020 elections (B92 2019). The minister of health in the Serbian government, Zlatibor Loncar, publicly called for the purging of 'unfaithful' party members in 2021.

In addition to these anecdotal claims, I conducted a series of interviews with local officials. One of them described their struggle, stating: 'It is not the SNS against the opposition, it is the SNS against the SNS.' Another local official highlighted how the newly elected mayor (chosen after the 2020 local elections) lived in fear of making mistakes and facing reprimands from the central party. A third local official, when asked about the change in city leadership, bluntly stated that the new mayor is significantly less intelligent and will obediently follow any directives from the center.

2.4 FDI as a Device for Consolidation of Power in Serbia

In Serbia, foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a pivotal role as a tool for national leaders to manage their coalition effectively. The country's FDI amounts to over 8 percent of its GDP, with the number of investment projects, primarily from the European Union, surpassing expectations by 12 times considering the size of the Serbian economy (Bankar.rs 2020)

The Development Agency of Serbia (Razvojna Agencija Srbije, RAS), an entity under the central government's jurisdiction, serves as the primary point of contact for foreign firms interested in investing in the country. Through its discretionary authority, RAS wields significant influence over the existence and location of these investment projects, providing an opportunity for national leaders to target their local allies.[6] To achieve this, the RAS employs two main approaches. Firstly, RAS offers each firm a choice of no more than three municipalities where they can establish their operations. This approach effectively limits the negotiation process to only those locations pre- selected by the central government. Secondly, although the criteria for subsidies and tax relief are defined on general grounds, RAS holds direct control over whether a foreign firm receives these privileges.[7] To gain access to these benefits, firms must apply to RAS, which retains discretion in determining which companies receive such concessions.

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6. The exact procedure is as follows, once the RAS receives a company's declaration of interest, it determines the locations for the project based on multiple criteria (e.g., local infrastructure, quality of local bureaucracy, available workforce, etc.). Next, the agency offers the project three different municipalities based on their assessment. After meeting with local officials, the company selects a potential location and sends an official letter of intent to the agency. Following this, company representatives negotiate with representatives of both the central (Ministry of Economy and its agency, RAS) and local governments over the conditions for investment. Finally, a company management decides whether to invest

7. For details of a case and lack of transparency, see the FIAT story (N1 Info)

Ultimately, RAS acts as a faithful agent of national SNS leaders, as its agency officials are SNS appointees.[8] Consequently, SNS leaders have the power to allocate FDI in alignment with their political motives. Overall, FDI serves as a critical instrument for national leaders in managing their coalition in Serbia. The significant influence wielded by the RAS, along with its alignment with the SNS, empowers leaders to strategically direct foreign investment to support their political goals.

Can the central allocation of FDI enhance voter support for national party leaders over that of their local allies? There are several reasons to believe this is the case. First, it revolves around the disparity in the quantity and quality of concessions that the central government can provide compared to local governments. While municipal leaders can offer benefits like low real estate prices and favorable local tax rates, it is the more substantial subsidies and tax relief offered by the central government that attract foreign firms.[9] In addition, national leaders engage in substantial credit-claiming for these projects (Mayhew 1974) to avoid 'credit hijacking' by local officials (Bueno 2018). In August 2019, when The Financial Times proclaimed Serbia the 'world champion' in attracting FDI, state-controlled media was saturated with stories crediting President Vučić and interviews with Prime Minister Brnabić claiming credit for the central government (B92 2019).[10] Anecdotal evidence suggests that a high-ranking member of the central government, usually the president or prime minister, is present for groundbreaking and ribbon cutting ceremonies for these projects (B92 2010; Blic / Tanjug 2018; Novosti.rs / Tanjug 2025). Finally, FDI projects undercut the ability of local leaders to foster their own clientelistic relations through public

8. https://www.transparentnost.org.rs/sr/aktivnosti-2/pod-lupom/9140-ko-je-na-celu-razvojne-agencije-srbije

9. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30107650.html

10. Serbia's government exerts extensive control over the media. Freedom House (2019) assigns Serbia a grade of 2 (on a scale of 0-4) for freedom of expression, explaining 'The state and ruling party exercise influence over private media in part through advertising contracts and other indirect subsidies. Many private outlets are owned by SNS supporters.' Additionally, Serences (2012) points out that many municipalities do not have their own media outlets, which biases the coverage in favor of the central government.

sector employment. As more people within a municipality are employed in the private sector–e.g., foreign firms – they are less reliant on local patronage networks and have fewer reasons to cast their vote for the SNS on the basis of local personalities.[11]

To rein in local elites from their own party, central officials will need to direct FDI to localities that are under their co-partisans' control. They can choose to direct FDI to either electoral strongholds or more competitive districts. If central officials send FDI to competitive districts–where their local co-partisans have a slimmer electoral majority – they run the risk of undermining their local co-partisans too much. By stealing credit for FDI from their local co-partisan incumbents, central officials may induce voters to support challengers for local office. If enough voters end up supporting opposition candidates, then this move may result in an opposition victory at the local level – an outcome that central leaders from the dominant party want to avoid.

In localities that are strongholds for the dominant party – where local co-partisans command large electoral majorities – central leaders of the party see a more appealing target. First, these local elites are precisely the ones who have large personal followings whose 'blackmail potential' is the largest. Consequently, these local co-partisans are the ones who the central leadership would most like to cut down. Second, because their local co-partisans won with such large electoral majorities, central leaders have more room for error. By directing FDI and claiming credit for it, central leaders are trying to induce their voters to support the party on the basis of its national leadership and efforts rather than local personalities. If, in the process, they push some voters into supporting the opposition, the party still has a comfortable margin that would make an electoral loss to the opposition very unlikely. Consequently, central leaders of the dominant party have incentives to direct FDI projects to localities

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11. Often, unemployed people join the ruling party in hope of getting local public sector jobs (Blečić 2018). Once there are new FDI projects, these people can get a job in newly opened foreign firms that are not connected to their mayors. Thus, FDI effectively shrinks mayors' personal networks.

that are strongholds of their local co-partisans. This leads to the following empirical observation:

Hypothesis Party strongholds get more new jobs created through FDI projects.

2.5 Identification Strategy and Data

Since I investigate the strategic allocation of FDI over time, I employ time series cross-sectional (TSCS) data. The period under study is 2012–2019, during which the SNS held dominant power at the national level. The unit of analysis is the municipality–year. Because my argument concerns intraparty dynamics, I focus on the subset of municipalities led by mayors affiliated with the ruling party after the 2016 local elections. Thus, my sample includes approximately 81% of all Serbian municipalities. In total, the dataset covers 122 municipalities across eight years, yielding 976 observations.

Treatment Previously I demonstrated that 2016 represents a watershed moment for the SNS–it was at this point the party established control over all branches and levels of government. Until this moment, they needed influential allies to gain a foothold in localities. Figure 2.2 shows the change in the number of localities with SNS mayors after the 2012 and 2016 elections. Once they achieved this control, national leaders were able to shift their focus to consolidating power. Let $\mathbf{D}_{it}$ (treatment) be the interaction of the party stronghold status and a dummy variable for the post-2016 elections period ($\mathbf{D}_{it} = SNSstronghold_i * 1$ (Year $\geq$ 2016)). I define local strongholds based on a municipality's margin of victory by the ruling party in the municipal elections. My main results present two thresholds for local strongholds. First, a margin of victory of 17%, which is the average margin of victory by the SNS at municipal elections including all municipalities. Second, the margin of victory

of 24%, which is the average margin of victory by the SNS at municipal elections including just those won by SNS. On the other hand, my control group represents the competitive municipalities. I estimate:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha \mathbf{D}_{it} + \mathbf{X}_{it}\beta_1 + \mathbf{W}_i\beta_2 + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \qquad (2.1)$$

where i indexes municipalities, t years. Note that the direct effect of electoral competitiveness or the post-2016 elections period is absorbed by the municipality and year fixed effects (γ_i and δ_t, respectively). In equation (1), α is the coefficient of interest and it represents the post-2016 election change in outcomes associated with the change in national strategy, to target local strongholds, after differencing out the change in project allocation observed in other municipalities in Serbia. This approach exploits sub-national variation in project allocation trends; any explanation that causes a nationwide shift in project allocation or generates time-invariant differences in project allocation cannot explain the results. I cluster the standard errors at the municipality level for all models.

Y_{it} represents my outcome of interest. The primary dependent variable is the accumulated total number of jobs created by greenfield FDI projects in a municipality-year (*jobs_created*). The data are coded at the firm level; thus, I aggregate up to the municipality-year level. The data comes from fDi Markets, a service from *The Financial Times*, which is the most comprehensive online database of cross-border greenfield investments available, covering all countries and sectors worldwide. This is suitable for the analysis here since these projects request an explicit location decision.

$\mathbf{X}_{it}$ represents the set of time-variant characteristics of the municipality that are not affected by the treatment, while Wi corresponds to time-invariant characteristics that could affect allocation of FDI. I hold these time-invariant set of controls at their

2011 values, their values before the SNS established its dominance. In particular, I accounted for the attractiveness of municipalities to foreign firms by controlling for various factors such as human capital, infrastructure, and historical, geographical, and political idiosyncratic characteristics of Serbia.[12]By controlling for these variables, I aimed to isolate the effects of the treatment from the other potential influences on the outcome being studied.

Figure 2.2: SNS Mayors
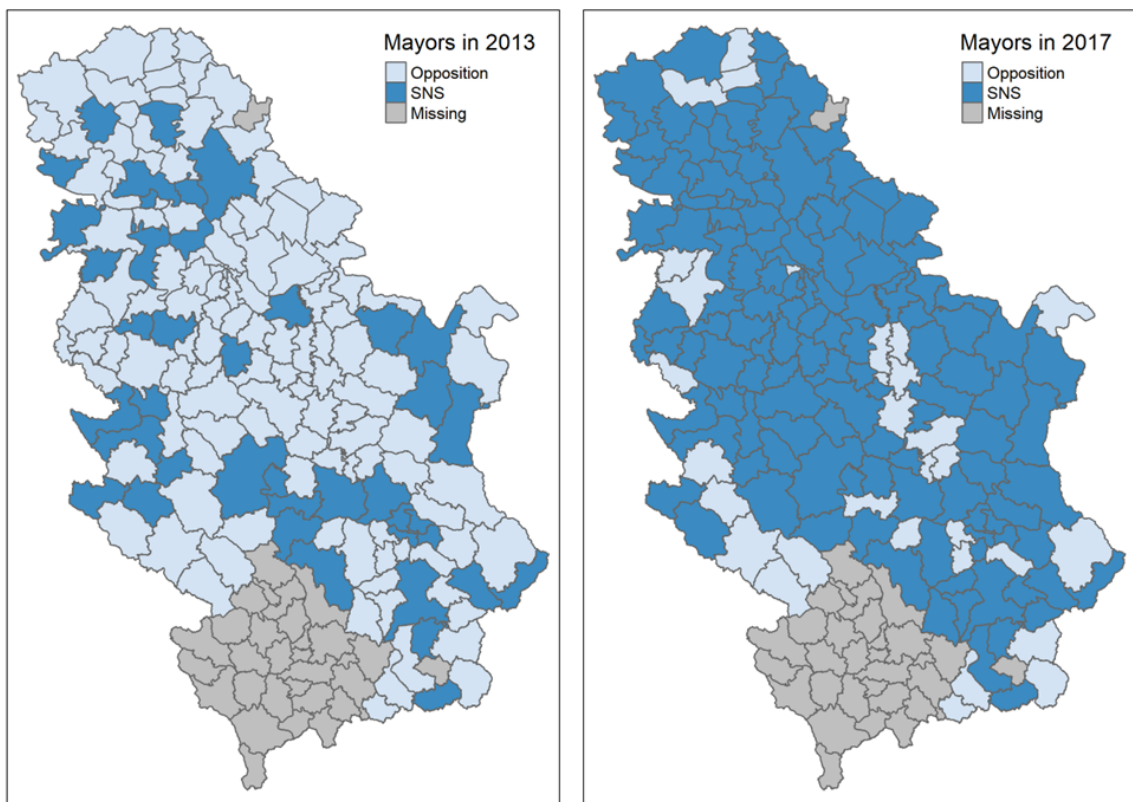
Distribution of SNS-run municipalities after 2012 (left) and 2016 (right) municipal elections

Human capital represents one of the most important factors sought by companies when deciding to invest in a municipality (Milosevic and Miljkovic 2017). Additionally, it is worth noting that SNS voters tend to be older and less likely to possess

12. **Appendix A4** describes the measurement of the variables discussed here.

a university degree (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015). As a result, these characteristics can significantly impact the desirability of certain municipalities for companies, as human capital directly influences wages, thereby affecting investment and employment decisions made by firms (the outcome). Moreover, it can also influence the vote share of the ruling party, as it relates to the number of individuals dependent on social programs and highly educated citizens (the treatment). To capture the measure of human capital across municipalities, I include the following variables: employment rate, municipality's population, average age, proportion of high school-educated inhabitants, and a binary indicator denoting whether the municipality has a university within its borders. Furthermore, I create a binary indicator for municipalities in which national minorities outnumber the local Serbian population. This is essential to account for potential SNS electoral results since minorities are often represented by ethnic minority-focused parties.

Infrastructure development is a crucial consideration for foreign companies when investing in a foreign country. To measure infrastructure development, I take into account various factors. Firstly, I control for the level of development based on municipalities' GDP. This gives me an indication of the economic prosperity and overall development of each municipality. Additionally, I use binary variables to denote whether or not the Danube flows through a municipality. The presence of the international river can have significant implications for transportation and trade, making it an essential aspect of infrastructure. Furthermore, I consider the presence of a highway within each municipality's borders. Highways are vital transportation arteries that facilitate the movement of goods and people, and their existence can be a critical factor for foreign investors. Moreover, I specifically focus on the City of Belgrade and the larger Belgrade District and Vojvodina region. These areas have traditionally been more developed compared to other regions in the country. By

accounting for these regions separately, I can assess the impact of existing development levels on foreign investment decisions.

Finally, I control for the number of SNS-affiliated national deputies residing in each municipality. These individuals may exert political influence to secure projects for their locality and use their personal prestige to boost local party performance.

2.6 Findings

Do stronghold areas receive a larger number of greenfield projects–as measured by newly created jobs–as predicted by the theory? Before turning to regression models, the empirical patterns presented in Figure 2.3 offer preliminary support for the theoretical expectations. The figure displays the average number of newly created jobs between 2016 and 2019 in municipalities classified as SNS local strongholds versus their more competitive counterparts. The data reveal a substantial divergence: beginning in 2016, stronghold municipalities experienced a markedly higher number of newly created jobs than competitive municipalities. Specifically, in the post-2016 period, strongholds received an average of 268 new jobs, compared to 57 in non-stronghold areas.

Given the theoretical logic underpinning the argument, a panel data analysis would initially appear to be the most appropriate empirical strategy. Yet, as detailed in the preceding section, foreign direct investment allocation in Serbia is politically determined and far from random. Municipal strongholds may differ systematically from more competitive areas in terms of their baseline ability to attract foreign firms, owing to variations in infrastructure, human capital, or political connections. Such confounding factors risk contaminating the identification strategy and jeopardizing any causal inference derived from a naïve panel data comparison.

Figure 2.3: New FDI jobs distribution
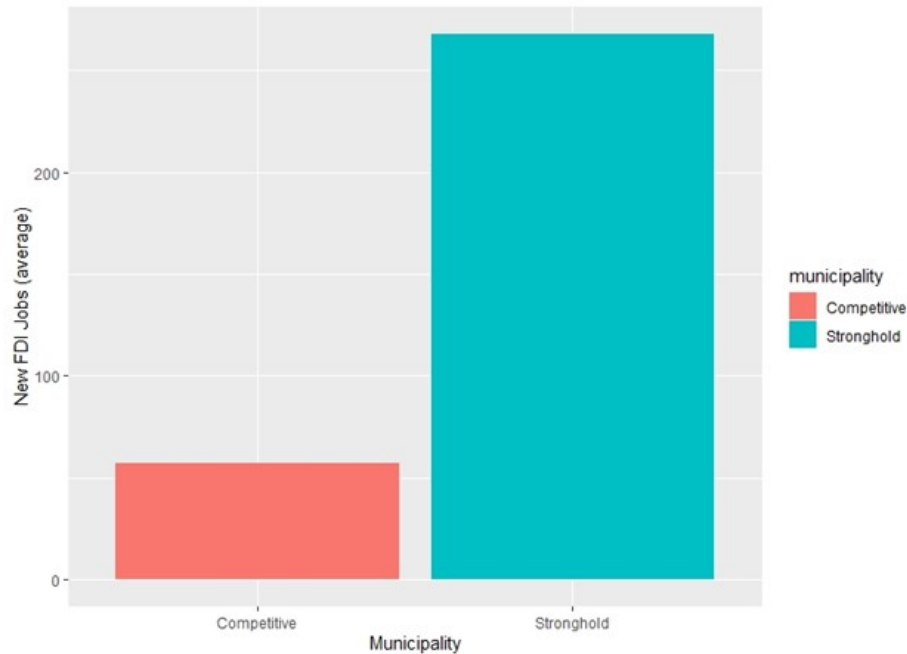
The figure displays the distribution of newly created FDI jobs between SNS strongholds and competitive municipalities in the 2016-2019 period

To address these concerns, the study employs a two-way fixed effects regression design that controls for both municipal-level heterogeneity and time-specific shocks. This approach is well-suited for analyzing politically motivated FDI allocation, as it accounts for unobserved time-invariant characteristics and common temporal dynamics across units. By assuming a simultaneous treatment intervention, the framework enables a straightforward interpretation of the estimates as the average treatment effect on the treated.

Table 2.1 presents the baseline results based on equation 2.1. Models 1 and 2 display results using two alternative thresholds for defining party strongholds - 17.7% and 24%, respectively. Both models include the full set of controls, along with year and municipality fixed effects. Across specifications, the results indicate that party strongholds experience a statistically significant increase in new jobs created through FDI projects compared to competitive municipalities. Specifically, the average an-

nual increase ranges between 158 and 203 jobs. Given that the average FDI project generates approximately 150 jobs (based on fDi Markets data), this effect translates to roughly one additional project per year in treated municipalities.

Table 2.1: Main Results

	Dependent Variable:	
	Jobs created	
	(1)	(2)
SNS Stronghold 17*post2016	158.257*	
	(87.162)	
SNS Stronghold 24*post2016		203.231**
		(85.226)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y
Observations	976	976
Avg. DV Value	149	149
Adjusted R^2	0.493	0.496

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

OLS models using the specification from equation 2.1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of new jobs created by greenfield FDI projects.

To contextualize the magnitude: the change represents a 23% to 29% increase in the within-municipality standard deviation. Over the full post-treatment period (2016-2019), local strongholds received approximately four to five more new projects. Considering that the median SNS-run municipality has just over 20,000 residents, the employment impact is non-trivial. In practical terms, this corresponds to an increase of 630 to 810 jobs, enough to reshape local labor markets and reduce citizen reliance on public-sector patronage distributed by mayors. This shift has political implications. As voters become less dependent on local elites, the central leadership weakens mayors' patronage-based leverage while simultaneously reinforcing the party's national brand. Through ribbon-cuttings, public ceremonies, and national

media exposure, central government officials claim credit for the FDI projects, redirecting voter loyalty toward the party's top leadership.

2.7   Robustness Checks

These results hinge on assumption that both treated and non-treated municipalities would have followed the same trend in project allocation in the absence of the shift in the SNS's status as a dominant party. However, this assumption poses a fundamental challenge to causal inference (Holland 1986) and remains untestable. Despite this limitation, I have taken several steps to enhance the credibility of the analysis.

Firstly, I conducted a placebo test to examine the pre-trends, as presented in Models 1 and 2 of Table 2.2. In these models, I estimated equation (1) with two modifications. Firstly, I used data only from the pre-2016 elections period (from 2012 to 2016), effectively halving the number of observations. Secondly, I coded Dit prior to the actual implementation of the strategy (stronghold*post 2014). The purpose of the placebo test was to observe whether treated and non-treated districts followed divergent trends before 2016. If treated areas were experiencing an increase in FDI allotment before the political dominance, the placebo estimates would show positive and significant results. However, the findings presented in Table 2 align with what we would expect from a successful placebo test. The difference between party strongholds and competitive municipalities is approaching zero and lacks statistical significance at the traditional level.

Next, I re-weight my non-treated areas to ensure balance across pre-treatment measures. To be more specific, the study employs entropy balancing using a set of pre-treatment variables (Hainmueller 2012). Models 3 and 4 (Table 2.2) show the results after employing this strategy. After re-weighting the competitive areas, the

main results do not change; party strongholds get between 122 and 206 more jobs through FDI projects than their more competitive counterparts.

Additional robustness checks are presented in Appendix A. First, I re-estimate the model in equation 2.1 using robust standard errors clustered at the district level rather than the municipality level. I also re-run the analysis excluding Belgrade, the country's largest city and principal economic hub. In both cases, the results remain statistically significant and directionally consistent with the main findings, though the coefficients are somewhat smaller when Belgrade is excluded (see Table A.1, Appendix A).

Next, Table A.2 (Appendix A) assesses whether the results are sensitive to alternative specifications of the dependent variable. I re-code the outcome as (1) the natural logarithm of newly created jobs, (2) the total number of projects, (3) the number of large-scale projects, and (4) the total capital investment value. I also include a broader count of all FDI projects in Serbia—incorporating brownfield investments and privatizations—to ensure the findings are not confined to greenfield projects alone.

This broader project count is sourced from an alternate database that records only the number of projects, without additional information on employment or capital inflow. Because the theoretical argument should apply to all types of private-sector firms, I use this more limited measure to evaluate consistency. The results in Table A.2 point in the expected direction, though some fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Finally, I conduct a series of sensitivity analyses using the approach developed by Cinelli and Hazlett (2020) (Appendix A). These analyses reveal that, in order to fully account for the estimated treatment effect, an omitted confounder would need

to be at least three times as strongly correlated with the outcome as the share of the population with a university degree, and at least four times as influential as any other control variable in the model.

Table 2.2: Pre-Trends and Entropy Balancing

	Dependent Variable:			
	Jobs created			
	Placebo Pre-Trends		Entropy Balancing	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SNS Stronghold 17*post2016			121.797**	
			(60.283)	
SNS Stronghold 24*post2016				206.202***
				(84.033)
SNS Stronghold 17*post2014	8.046			
	(27.703)			
SNS Stronghold 24*post2014		−8.031		
		(27.452)		
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	488	488	976	976
Adjusted R^2	0.507	0.507	0.481	0.482

$^{***}p < 0.001; ^{**}p < 0.01; ^{*}p < 0.05$

OLS models using the specification from equation 2.1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of new jobs created by greenfield FDI projects.

2.8 Alternative Explanations–Successful Undermining or Reward?

One plausible alternative explanation for the observed patterns draws from the extensive literature on distributive politics.[13] According to the 'core partisan strategy,' incumbents tend to allocate resources to constituencies where their party enjoys stead-

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13. See Golden and Min (2013) for a detail review.

fast support (Cox and McCubbins 1986). From this perspective, the empirical results could be interpreted as evidence of rewarding loyal voters, consistent with the core supporters argument.

However, while the core supporter logic suggests that resource allocation aims to maintain existing political coalitions and secure reelection, this paper advances a distinct rationale. I argue that central leaders may use FDI not as a reward, but as a strategic tool to disrupt local power bases without jeopardizing electoral support. In this context, FDI allocation is designed to weaken local allies, not assist them.

To assess the validity of the core voter hypothesis, I conduct two empirical tests. First, I analyze whether FDI projects are targeted based on national-level SNS electoral performance (i.e., parliamentary and presidential elections). The results reveal no systematic relationship, offering no support for the core voter explanation. Second, I examine the distribution of central government transfers to SNS-controlled municipalities. If national leaders were attempting to reward loyal areas, we would expect to see greater intergovernmental transfers to local strongholds. Yet the data contradict this expectation, the SNS leaders are not channeling resources to assist co-partisans in the strongholds using fiscal transfers.

National Strongholds and FDI Distribution   If the main findings aligned with the core voter theory—suggesting that FDI is allocated as a reward—it would be logical to expect central leaders to target loyal voters based on their performance in national elections, thereby bolstering their own electoral prospects rather than aiding local elites. To test this hypothesis, I conducted a series of supplementary analyses, with results presented in Table 2.3. These models re-estimate Equation (1), substituting local strongholds with national strongholds. Models (2) and (5) mirror the original specifications but identify strongholds using parliamentary and

presidential electoral margins, respectively. Coding practices follow the main models: the parliamentary stronghold is defined by the mean margin of victory in the 2016 parliamentary elections (held concurrently with local elections), while the presidential stronghold uses the 2017 presidential election margin. As shown in Table 2.3, there is no evidence that the central government disproportionately allocates FDI to these areas.

To test whether loyalty is rewarded using alternative measures, Models (1) and (4) use the party's margin of victory in parliamentary and presidential elections, respectively. Furthermore, since the 2012 elections (presidential and parliamentary) marked the SNS's rise to power, party leaders may choose to reward those foundational constituencies. Models (3) and (6) test this possibility using binary indicators for whether the SNS won the highest vote share in each municipality during those elections. Across the board, the results provide no support for the core voter hypothesis.

Tables A.5 and A.6 (Appendix A) provide additional tests using alternative proxies for national strongholds. These results similarly reject the reward thesis. Table A.5 includes two further tests: Column (3) finds no evidence supporting the swing voter hypothesis, and the final column examines whether SNS parliamentarians are able to direct projects toward their own hometowns as 'pork.' The result is not only statistically insignificant but also negative, further weakening that explanation.

In sum, the classical arguments from the distributive politics literature–core voters, swing voters, and legislative pork–do not account for the observed distribution of FDI in Serbia. While many of the coefficients do not reach statistical significance, the consistent lack of effect across models suggests it is unlikely that FDI projects are being allocated as rewards for mayors or parliamentary deputies.

Table 2.3: National Strongholds

	Dependent Variable: Jobs Created					
	Parliamentary Elections			Presidential Elections		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parliament MoV*Post	−0.577					
	(1.736)					
Parliament Stronghold*Post		21.245				
		(71.591)				
Parliament Victory in 2012*Post			24.174			
			(67.547)			
President MoV *Post				8.066		
				(5.275)		
President Stronghold*Post					−124.545	
					(88.761)	
President Victory in 2012*Post						24.154
						(61.490)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	976	976	976	976	976	976
Adjusted R^2	0.490	0.490	0.490	0.497	0.492	0.490

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

OLS models using the specification from equation 2.1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of new jobs created by greenfield FDI projects.

Intergovernmental Transfers as a Reward　For the second test, I shift the focus to fiscal transfers from the central government. If FDI projects are being allocated to party strongholds as a reward for electoral support, we would also expect to observe an increase in fiscal transfers to those same areas. However, not all transfers are functionally equivalent or hold the same strategic value for national incumbents. As Bonvecchi and Lodola (2011) note, executives often favor discretionary funds over formula-based transfers because they offer greater control over both the recipients and the uses of funds. Ravanilla, Sexton, and Haim (2022) further argue that discretionary transfers are particularly beneficial for local leaders, as they provide opportunities for rent-seeking and clientelistic exchange.

Given this logic, if FDI allocation operates as a reward mechanism, we should see a parallel pattern in the distribution of discretionary transfers, particularly subsidies, while formula-based transfers would likely follow a different trajectory.

Table 2.4 presents the results using the *SNS_Stronghold_17* variable, while Table A.4 (Appendix A) confirms that findings are consistent when using the *SNS_Stronghold_24* threshold. The most salient result appears in Column 2: SNS strongholds receive, on average, approximately one million euros less in subsidies compared to competitive municipalities. This result runs directly counter to the expectations of the reward hypothesis. If central leaders intended to bolster their local co-partisans, we would expect these areas to receive more discretionary transfers—not less—as a means of reinforcing local patronage networks.

Additionally, Column 1 shows no significant difference between strongholds and competitive municipalities in the distribution of formula-based transfers. This suggests that fixed, rule-driven allocation processes are unaffected by partisan dynamics, as expected.

To further bolster the interpretation, I conduct a placebo test using foreign donations to municipalities, resources over which the central government has no allocative control. As shown in Column 3, there is no systematic difference between SNS strongholds and competitive areas, as predicted. This result further affirms the central claim: the observed FDI patterns are not consistent with a simple reward-based explanation.

Table 2.4: Intergovernmental Transfers (*SNS_Stronghold_17*)

	Dependent Variable:		
	Formula Transfers(log) (1)	Discretionary Transfers(log) (2)	Donations (log) (3)
SNS Stronghold 17*post2016	0.123 (0.109)	0.441* (0.226)	−0.033 (0.358)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y
Observations	944	944	944
Adjusted R^2	0.498	0.727	0.418

$^{***}p < 0.001;\ ^{**}p < 0.01;\ ^{*}p < 0.05$

OLS models using the specification from equation 2.1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the natural log of the formula based transfers (1), the natural log of discretionary transfers (2), and foreign donations (3).

2.9 Discussion and Conclusion

The relationship between the central party leadership and its local allies is strategically important for political actors, as both sides stand to benefit. However, this relationship is not always harmonious, particularly in dominant party regimes, where internal allies may pose a greater threat than opposition parties, especially during the regime's formative years. Incumbents can address this problem through several mechanisms, one of which is the strategic provision of government services and public goods to control local elites. This study investigates how incumbents can leverage state resources to achieve that goal.

Specifically, I argue that the central government in Serbia has strategically allocated foreign direct investment (FDI) based on the political competitiveness of municipalities. FDI projects are particularly valuable because they enable central leaders to claim credit and simultaneously limit the capacity of local leaders to build and main-

tain patronage networks. This, in turn, allows the central leadership to pursue its goal of power consolidation, maximizing national vote shares while curbing internal threats.

The paper tests this argument using a novel dataset on local governments in Serbia using a two-way fixed effects regression design. The findings support the theory: SNS strongholds receive 160 to 200 more jobs per year through greenfield FDI projects than do competitive municipalities. These results are robust to multiple specification checks and persist after controlling for alternative explanations.

While the evidence presented in this study casts meaningful doubt on the core voter reward hypothesis, particularly given the absence of consistent patterns in national strongholds and discretionary fiscal transfers, I cannot definitively rule it out. It remains plausible that the central government may selectively use FDI as a reward mechanism, especially in localities where aligned mayors have cultivated strong partisan loyalty. Future research could sharpen causal inference by leveraging natural experiments, spatial discontinuities in agency decision-making, or original survey data that trace credit attribution among voters. Additionally, designs that incorporate qualitative fieldwork with municipal actors, or use party switching histories to proxy elite leverage, could better disentangle the regime's strategic goals from the mechanics of coalition maintenance. Such work would offer critical insight into whether FDI functions primarily as a disciplinary tool or a patronage lever within dominant party networks.

Although Serbia anchors the analysis in the chapter, the theoretical framework lends itself to broader application across diverse political contexts. Three conditions are particularly conducive to similar patterns elsewhere. First, the presence of dominant parties, those in the process of consolidating or having already consoli-

dated control, is a common feature in numerous countries, such as Fidesz (Hungary), Justice and Development Party (Turkey), United Russia, the People's Action Party (Singapore), and the Botswana Democratic. Many of these regimes have experienced democratic erosion as captured by metrics like the Freedom House Global Freedom Score and V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (Lührmann et al. 2020; Repucci 2020). In contexts where the opposition is weak or marginalized, internal regime actors pose the most credible threats to leadership stability (Svolik 2012).

Second, the framework is likely to apply in countries where political institutions such as party identification and loyalty are underdeveloped, a hallmark of many new democracies. As Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera (2017) show, compared to consolidated Western democracies, these systems are marked by much higher electoral volatility, both within-system and extra-system. Party switching by local elites is common in settings as diverse as Brazil (Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo 2019), Russia (Reuter 2017), the Philippines (Ravanilla, Sexton, and Haim 2022), and across the Balkans(Passarelli 2018). This weak partisanship contributes to incumbency disadvantage in Brazil (Klašnja and Titiunik 2013) and may help explain similar patterns in India (Uppal 2009), and post-communist Europe (Roberts 2008).

Third, the argument is most applicable in countries where the central government controls valuable distributive resources that can be credited to national leaders. While this study focuses on FDI, similar dynamics have been observed with direct fiscal transfers in Spain (Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr 2006) and Portugal (Migueis 2013). In Brazil, Bueno (2018) documents how central actors channel funds to nonstate organizations in opposition districts to bypass local opposition officials and prevent credit hijacking.

Importantly, not all political allies benefit from their alignment with national leaders. Han, Li, and Oi (2022) show that politically connected firms in China face higher taxation—a cost of proximity to power. Similarly, Kasara (2007) finds that coethnic alignment can be costly for constituents, as aligned regions sometimes face steeper tax burdens. Nellis (2016)demonstrates how high-ranking party elites in India may sabotage their own co-partisans to protect their positions. And Albertus (2015) shows how institutional reforms designed by regime elites can systematically weaken lower-tier allies while boosting national leaders' visibility and control.

Although this study does not engage directly with normative debates, it offers important insights into the mechanisms of democratic backsliding. Some may view party consolidation in a favorable light–as a path to stable, nationally rooted political organizations and less volatile party systems (Cox 2005). However, the evidence presented here suggests otherwise. The consolidation process appears to serve a narrower goal: centralizing power and undermining future prospects for free and fair competition.

In 2012, Serbia attained EU candidate status, signaling its intention to adopt the democratic values of the European community. The country has since made progress on key macroeconomic indicators, fiscal stability, public debt reduction, and GDP growth. Yet political developments have diverged. Freedom House downgraded Serbia's status from 'free' to 'partly free' in 2019. That same year, the V-Dem Democracy Report identified Serbia among the top global backsliders. The 2020 elections, held amid a pandemic and boycotted by the opposition, yielded a parliament with only seven non-government-affiliated deputies. These trends, along with mounting concerns about diminishing intraparty democracy (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015), point to a broader erosion of accountability and internal dissent—central themes in this study.

Chapter 3

Evaluating International and Domestic Electoral Observers: Evidence from Serbian Election

3.1   Introduction

Elections are prevalent in today's world (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009), aiming to ensure political legitimacy and stability. While democratic systems require more than periodic elections, the integrity of electoral processes remains critical for sustaining democratic institutions. Concerns over electoral fraud have prompted increased international and domestic efforts to monitor elections. Since the end of the Cold War, election observation has emerged as a key instrument for promoting electoral integrity. Between 1992 and 2006, two-thirds of nearly 900 elections were monitored by reputable international observers (Hyde and Marinov 2014), reflecting the growing institutionalization of election monitoring.

Electoral fraud encompasses a wide range of practices aimed at distorting the integrity of democratic competition. It can take subtle and systemic forms—such as

manipulating media narratives, leveraging public sector employment to coerce voter behavior, or misusing state resources to favor incumbents (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Levitsky and Way 2010). These tactics often unfold well before election day and shape the broader informational and institutional environment in which voters make decisions. However, in this chapter, I focus specifically on election-day fraud occurring within and around polling stations. This includes direct and observable violations such as ballot-box stuffing, intentional invalidation of votes, voter intimidation inside precincts, and manipulation of voter-registration lists (Hyde 2007; Schedler 2002). By narrowing the scope to election-day misconduct, I aim to assess the effectiveness of third-party observers in deterring fraud at the point of vote casting and tabulation—where their presence is most immediate and their impact most measurable.

Despite widespread adoption, the impact of election monitors[1] on electoral outcomes remains an open empirical question that this study aims to answer. Observers are theorized to deter fraud by increasing its detection risk, thereby raising the costs of manipulation for political elites (Hyde 2007; Ichino and Schündeln 2012; Leeffers and Vicente 2019). Additionally, they may provide technical assistance, improving the accuracy of vote tabulation and adherence to election procedures (Simpser and Donno 2012a). However, existing research suggests that fraud may shift rather than disappear in response to monitoring efforts (Asunka et al. 2019; Ichino and Schündeln 2012). Despite its broad acceptance, assessing the true impact of election monitors on electoral outcomes requires careful attention to how they are deployed. Randomized assignment–in which monitors are placed independently of local political conditions–is crucial for isolating their causal influence from confounding contextual factors.

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1. I use interchangeably monitors and observers in this paper. Similarly, I use interchangeably terms poll station and precinct.

This study examines the impact of election observers on vote shares by analyzing the 2022 Serbian presidential and parliamentary elections. Serbia presents a compelling case due to its complex electoral history and concerns over democratic erosion (Angiolillo et al. 2024). Multiple international organizations–including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament—routinely monitor Serbian elections, alongside domestic civil society groups such as the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA) and the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID). By comparing international and domestic observers, this paper investigates whether observer presence affects electoral outcomes.

To address this question, I leverage a natural experiment in observer deployment, comparing precincts monitored by OSCE and CRTA. Both organizations assert that their assignment process mimics randomization, ensuring that monitored precincts do not systematically differ from unobserved ones. I rigorously test these claims and examine whether observed differences in vote shares stem from observer presence or selection bias.

My findings reveal significant discrepancies between international and domestic monitoring results. OSCE reports indicate a statistically significant decline in the ruling party's vote share in observed poll stations compared to their unobserved counterparts–2.8% in parliamentary elections and 3.4% in presidential elections–potentially translating to a loss of 7–8 parliamentary seats. By contrast, CRTA findings suggest no significant differences between observed and unobserved precincts, challenging assumptions about electoral fraud. Further analysis reveals systematic biases in observer deployment: international monitors disproportionately visit urban precincts, high-population polling stations, and areas with weaker incumbent performance. Domestic observers, however, demonstrate greater adherence to randomized

placement.

These findings underscore a critical limitation in the use of international monitoring missions as evidence of electoral fraud. While this study focuses on the Serbian case, its implications extend to other elections monitored by organizations such as the OSCE, which adhere to standardized procedures outlined in their operational handbooks. Moreover, discussions with observers from the Carter Center reveal that similar methodological challenges exist across different electoral contexts, raising broader concerns about observer deployment practices. However, this does not suggest that international monitoring should be abandoned altogether. Election observers serve a crucial role in fostering democratic development, providing transparency, and reinforcing institutional accountability. Rather than discarding international observation efforts, reforms should focus on improving assignment methods to enhance their efficacy in detecting and deterring electoral fraud.

Furthermore, while fraud can occur in various stages of the electoral process, including pre-election manipulations such as vote buying or media restrictions, the integrity of election day itself remains paramount. For incumbents to secure victory, they must still amass the requisite number of votes, making election-day fraud a decisive factor. Exposure of electoral manipulation can have significant political consequences. First, credible reports of fraud from neutral observers can embolden opposition movements, potentially sparking domestic unrest (Hyde 2011). Second, documented instances of fraud may erode voter confidence in the ruling party, contributing to electoral volatility (Reuter and Gandhi 2011). Evidence from survey experiments following the 2016 Russian elections demonstrates that fraud revelations can be particularly destabilizing for regime loyalists, who are more likely to initially believe in the fairness of elections. When confronted with credible evidence of fraud, these supporters exhibit a marked decline in willingness to back the regime, illustrating the broader

costs of electoral manipulation beyond immediate electoral results. Thus, autocrats have strong incentives not only to conceal fraud but also to minimize its scope to preserve legitimacy.

This study contributes to the literature on electoral fraud by evaluating the impact of election observers on vote outcomes and their effectiveness in deterring manipulation. First, like Leeffers and Vicente (2019), it directly compares two observer groups employing distinct monitoring strategies, enabling a more nuanced assessment of observational bias. Second, unlike their study, this analysis covers the entire country rather than a limited subset of precincts, offering a broader and more representative evaluation of observer influence.

Third, the findings challenge prevailing assumptions about the capacity of international monitoring missions to reliably detect fraud. Although Leeffers and Vicente (2019) show that randomization improves detection, this study reveals that randomization alone may be insufficient, as fraud still occurred in precincts visited by international observers. A likely explanation is that brief visits, often lasting only minutes, fail to meaningfully deter misconduct. This suggests that the deterrent effect of monitoring is not merely a function of presence or random assignment, but also of intensity, duration, and perceived credibility. In practice, international observers may lack the local embeddedness or sustained visibility required to alter the cost-benefit calculus of potential perpetrators. Moreover, their standardized protocols and diplomatic constraints may limit their responsiveness to context-specific manipulation tactics. By revealing the methodological limitations of observer deployment, this study contributes to the debate on electoral integrity and monitoring design, emphasizing the need for more robust, context-aware strategies that move beyond symbolic presence and instead prioritize sustained engagement, targeted deployment, and coordination with domestic accountability institutions.

3.2 Electoral Fraud and the Role of Election Observers

The integrity of elections is central to democratic governance, ensuring legitimacy and representation (Fearon 2011). While electoral processes are widely adopted—even in authoritarian regimes (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009)–irregularities persist, often undermining electoral credibility (Lehoucq 2003). Scholarly research has extensively documented various forms of electoral manipulation, ranging from pre-election coercion and vote buying to election-day fraud (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Ziblatt 2009).

One strand of the literature examines pre-election manipulation, where incumbents use economic and institutional tools to shape electoral outcomes. Hyde and O'Mahony (2010) highlight how governments engage in fiscal manipulation before elections, particularly when direct fraud is constrained by international monitoring. Similarly, Simpser (2013) argue that high-quality monitoring missions can inadvertently reduce broader democratic accountability by forcing autocrats to shift tactics toward non-electoral forms of control, such as media suppression and bureaucratic interference.

Another strand focuses on election day irregularities, where fraudulent practices directly impact vote counts. Electoral forensic techniques identify abnormal vote distributions suggestive of manipulation Beber and Scacco 2012; Rundlett and Svolik 2016. Leemann and Bochsler (2014) caution against over-reliance on forensic methods, advocating for robust empirical tests. Beyond forensic analysis, survey experiments reveal the prevalence of vote buying and coercion; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2012) find that nearly 25% of respondents in Nicaragua reported receiving electoral incentives, while Garbiras-Díaz and Montenegro (2022) show that citizen reporting campaigns

in Colombia increased fraud detection.

Against this backdrop, election observers play a potential countervailing role in curbing fraud. Observers may influence election outcomes through several mechanisms. First, their presence increases the cost of manipulation, deterring fraudulent behavior by raising the likelihood of exposure (Hyde 2007; Ichino and Schündeln 2012; Leeffers and Vicente 2019). Second, monitors contribute to procedural integrity, assisting with polling station operations, ballot counting, and voter registration efforts Simpser and Donno 2012b. Third, monitoring alters public perceptions, shaping voter behavior by enhancing confidence in electoral credibility or signaling irregularities to domestic audiences Callen et al. 2016; Reuter and Szakonyi 2021.

Empirical assessments of election observers' effectiveness yield mixed findings. While field experiments indicate that both international and domestic observers can reduce fraud, the magnitude and mechanisms of their impact vary. Hyde (2010) finds that internationally assigned observers in Indonesia influenced voter behavior, despite the election being widely regarded as democratic. In contrast, studies of domestic observation missions–such as Asunka et al. (2019) in Ghana and O'brien and Rickne (2016) in Russia–demonstrate that third-party monitors significantly reduced the vote share of ruling parties, similar to the effects documented by international observers in Armenia (Hyde 2007). However, results are less consistent in Mozambique (Leeffers and Vicente 2019), where domestic observers effectively deterred fraud in competitive districts, but international observers had no measurable effect in either competitive areas or strongholds of the ruling party. Some studies also suggest that observers do not eliminate fraud but rather redistribute it–Ichino and Schündeln (2012) report that in Ghana, fraud was displaced rather than fully prevented, highlighting how political actors adjust their tactics in response to monitoring. A crucial methodological concern is observer assignment bias. Election monitors purport to use randomized

deployment, ensuring that observed precincts do not systematically differ from unobserved ones. However, Ichino and Schündeln (2012) and Enikolopov et al. (2013) suggest that observer placement may be skewed toward politically contested regions or urban areas, potentially distorting measured effects. If observers are disproportionately allocated to precincts where fraud is already lower–or where incumbents anticipate scrutiny–then reported impacts may not accurately reflect their deterrent effects.

3.3   Argument and Empirical Implications

Election monitoring plays a crucial role in shaping electoral integrity, yet its precise impact on fraud remains contested. Leaders who invite international observers and permit independent domestic monitors must weigh both political and strategic considerations. Hyde and Marinov (2014) argue that observers mitigate informational asymmetries surrounding election quality by providing credible, nonpartisan assessments. When elections are deemed fair, this transparency reduces the likelihood of post-election protests. Conversely, when observers document fraud, they can facilitate coordinated citizen responses. As a result, regimes anticipating strong opposition mobilization are more likely to hold clean elections, reinforcing democratic development.

While observers are expected to deter electoral fraud, their effectiveness may be constrained by the complexity of manipulation strategies. Fraud manifests in various forms (Hyde 2007; Lehoucq 2003), many of which evade direct detection by monitors. Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi (2019) illustrate the prevalence of workplace-based electoral intimidation, an area largely beyond observer oversight. Simpser and Donno (2012a) further highlight how incumbents, anticipating monitoring, manipulate media access and bureaucratic control rather than engaging in overt election-day fraud.

Moreover, international observers may adopt a risk-averse approach, selectively condemning manipulated elections to maintain diplomatic neutrality (Hyde and Marinov 2014).

Despite these limitations, election monitors have historically played a role in deterring specific fraudulent practices. Observers have publicly exposed electoral manipulation, pressuring governments to uphold procedural transparency (Hyde and Marinov 2014). Schedler (2002) and Hyde (2007) identify key fraud mechanisms that monitors can detect, including ballot-box stuffing, intentional vote inflation, voter coercion inside polling stations, and manipulation of voter-registration lists. Following this scholarly tradition (Asunka et al. 2019; Enikolopov et al. 2013; Hyde 2007; Leeffers and Vicente 2019), this paper focuses on electoral fraud occurring in and around polling stations on election day. If election officials and political actors anticipate scrutiny, they may adjust their behavior, reducing visible fraud in monitored precincts. Additionally, observers have demonstrated an evolving approach, shifting their focus toward pre-election conditions to counter incumbents' strategic adaptations (Yukawa and Sakamoto 2024).

Incumbents possess distinct advantages that shape their ability to manipulate elections. Ziblatt (2009) illustrates how resource asymmetries–such as landholding concentration—can entrench electoral misconduct. Expanding this perspective, Simpser and Donno (2012b) provide evidence that incumbents strategically shape institutional conditions, including the rule of law, bureaucratic efficiency, and media freedom, to reinforce political dominance. McGhee (2020) documents historical patterns of partisan gerrymandering in the United States, highlighting the extent to which incumbents manipulate electoral boundaries to consolidate power. Similarly, Callen and Long (2015) show that fraud in Afghanistan's 2010 election was primarily concentrated among politically connected candidates, reinforcing the tendency for manipulation to

favor entrenched elites. Hyde (2007) further underscores the role of incumbents in orchestrating electoral fraud, with Armenia's incumbent president using various tactics to skew vote counts. Consequently, the primary focus of this paper is the extent to which the ruling party may alter vote shares to its advantage.

Like several influential studies in the field (Asunka et al. 2019; Enikolopov et al. 2013; Hyde 2007; Leeffers and Vicente 2019), this paper uses incumbent vote share as a proxy for electoral fraud. Focusing on the vote share of the incumbent offers several analytical advantages. First, it provides a direct and quantifiable measure of electoral performance, allowing researchers to assess whether observer presence correlates with changes in support for the ruling party (Enikolopov et al. 2013; Hyde 2007). Because incumbents are typically the primary beneficiaries of electoral manipulation, shifts in their vote share serve as a useful proxy for the presence or absence of fraud (Enikolopov et al. 2013; Hyde 2007; Rundlett and Svolik 2016). This approach also aligns with theoretical expectations that incumbents possess both the motive and the institutional capacity to distort electoral outcomes (Schedler 2002; Simpser and Donno 2012b). Moreover, vote share data are often available at the precinct level, enabling fine-grained analysis and facilitating the use of quasi-experimental designs such as randomized observer deployment or difference-in-differences estimation (Ichino and Schündeln 2012; Leeffers and Vicente 2019).

However, relying solely on incumbent vote share as the outcome variable presents important limitations. First, changes in vote share may reflect factors unrelated to fraud, such as genuine shifts in public opinion, campaign dynamics, or demographic variation across precincts (Ferree et al. 2020; Mauk and Grömping 2024). Without careful attention to observer assignment and contextual controls, these confounding influences can obscure causal inference (Dunning 2012). Second, vote share does not capture other forms of manipulation that may not directly affect the incumbent's

tally, such as voter suppression, ballot spoilage, or intimidation of opposition supporters (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2019; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012). Third, this approach assumes that fraud primarily benefits the incumbent, which may not hold in contexts where coalition partners or local elites also engage in vote distortion (Kasara 2007). Finally, focusing on vote share may miss more subtle or procedural violations, such as biased media coverage or misuse of administrative resources, that undermine electoral integrity without altering aggregate outcomes (Hyde and O'Mahony 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010).

In Serbia, incumbent vote share serves as a valid proxy for electoral manipulation due to the centralized control the ruling party exerts over key electoral institutions. The Republic Electoral Commission, the body responsible for overseeing elections, is formally composed of representatives from multiple parties. However, its leadership is appointed by the National Assembly, which is dominated by the SNS, allowing the ruling coalition to exert disproportionate influence over the commission's operations. This institutional arrangement undermines the Commission's nominal impartiality and enables the SNS to shape critical aspects of the electoral process, including precinct-level oversight, ballot certification, and dispute resolution. In such a context, vote share becomes a meaningful indicator of manipulation, particularly when shifts in support correlate with observer presence.

Moreover, the SNS's control over local governments and public sector employment further amplifies its ability to shape electoral outcomes. Municipal officials, often SNS loyalists, play a direct role in managing polling stations, coordinating voter mobilization, and overseeing vote tabulation, as discussed in Chapter 2. This vertical integration between national and local party structures enables the central leadership to orchestrate electoral strategies that reinforce its dominance. As Reuter (2017) and Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi (2019) show, such coordination allows incumbents to

leverage patronage networks and workplace-based coercion to secure votes. In this environment, changes in vote share are not merely reflections of voter sentiment but may also signal the effectiveness or disruption of manipulation tactics.

Additionally, incumbents benefit from an informational edge in manipulating voter turnout. A specific manifestation of this advantage arises when electoral authorities exploit knowledge of citizens residing abroad who have not registered for external voting. By casting ballots on behalf of absent voters, state officials can artificially inflate participation rates and bolster the ruling party's vote share. This form of election-day manipulation is particularly difficult to detect without third-party oversight, as it relies on internal voter roll data and administrative discretion. However, when observers are present, the perceived cost of detection increases, potentially deterring such practices (Hyde 2007; Ichino and Schündeln 2012). In this context, both inflated vote shares and unusually high turnout rates can serve as a red flag for fraud.

Building on this, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1 Monitored precincts should exhibit a measurable decline in the incumbent party's vote share compared to unmonitored precincts.

Hypothesis 2 Precincts monitored by election observers should exhibit a lower average turnout rate compared to unmonitored precincts.

3.4   Serbian Electoral Context

Political Environment   In the late 1990s, Serbia, formerly part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, underwent a transition from a one-party state to a multiparty system. However, this transition did not lead to significant democratic

progress. The Serbian Socialist Party (SPS) and its leader, Slobodan Milosevic, utilized the infrastructure inherited from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to maintain their incumbent status and prolong their rule. The Milosevic regime was characterized by electoral manipulation, harassment of the opposition, and citizen protests (Levitsky and Way 2010).

The first major involvement of third-party electoral observers occurred after the 1996 local elections, which were marred by controversy. While the opposition claimed victory in several major jurisdictions, the SPS refused to accept defeat, and local election commissions, often controlled by Milošević's allies, declined to certify opposition wins. These events sparked protests across Serbia, with student and opposition groups organizing non-violent street rallies against the Milošević regime. Amidst these protests, an OSCE delegation confirmed opposition victories in several disputed elections, including in Belgrade. In response, the Serbian government partially conceded by signing the 'lex specialis,' which acknowledged opposition wins and established local government in several cities, albeit without admitting any wrongdoing.

The next pivotal event where observers played a significant role occurred during the 2000 presidential elections, ultimately resulting in the downfall of the Milosevic regime. Following the elections, the government-controlled Federal Electoral Committee asserted that although the opposition candidate garnered more votes, no candidate secured over 50% of the vote, necessitating a second round. While international observers were barred from monitoring the elections, domestic observers independently announced their findings, indicating that the opposition candidate not only won the popular vote but also surpassed the 50% threshold required for victory. Subsequently, widespread protests erupted across the country, culminating in citizens storming the National Assembly. In response to mounting pressure, Milosevic conceded to the opposition's victory, thereby bringing an end to his rule over the nation.

Figure 3.1: V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index for Serbia (compared to the USA) during the 1990-2022 period
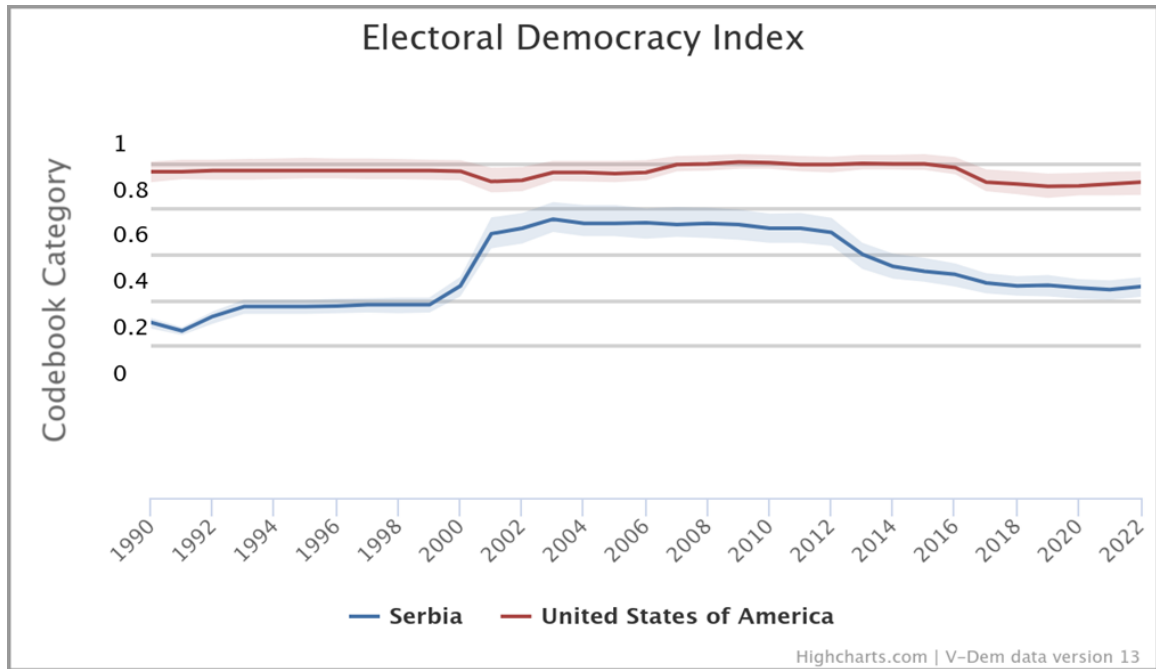
Between 2001 and 2012, there was a notable strengthening of democratic institutions and sustained involvement of electoral monitors, both international and domestic. Figure 1 illustrates the democratic advancements achieved during this period, characterized by minimal claims of electoral fraud by participants and the formation of multiple diverse political parties in government. Third-party observers documented improvements in the electoral process alongside areas requiring further development. However, in the post-2012 period, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) emerged as the dominant political entity in the country. From 2012 to 2016, the party consolidated control over the executive, legislative branches, and the majority of local governments, marking a period of centralized power within the party center (Chapter II). Moreover, international assessments of democracy noted a significant decline in the quality of the country's democratic performance (Angiolillo et al. 2024). Figure 3.1 illustrates that this decline extended to the electoral arena. The culmination of these trends occurred when the opposition boycotted the 2020 parliamentary elections, cit-

ing Covid-19 pandemic restrictions that they argued prevented fair competition.

2022 Elections In this prevailing political climate, general elections were held on April 3, 2022, to elect both the president of Serbia and members of the National Assembly. The campaign period was marked by polarization, with opposition parties criticizing the ruling party's dominance in the media, despite attempts by news outlets to organize debates and political programming. Candidates focused on key issues such as combating corruption, strengthening the rule of law, and addressing concerns related to the economy, the environment, and infrastructure. Voter turnout reached 58.5%.

The National Assembly comprises 250 members elected through closed-list proportional representation in a single, nationwide constituency. Seats are allocated using the d'Hondt method, with a 3% electoral threshold applied to valid votes. This threshold is waived for ethnic minority parties. Since 2020, electoral lists are required to include at least 40% women. In this election, 19 party lists competed, and 12 surpassed the threshold to enter the National Assembly. Although the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) lost its outright majority, it remained the dominant force, winning 44.27% of the vote and securing 120 seats. The largest opposition party received 14.1% of the vote and won 38 seats.

The president of Serbia is elected via a two-round system for a five-year term, limited to two terms. Official candidates must be Serbian citizens, at least 18 years old, and supported by a minimum of 10,000 signatures. Birth in Serbia is not a requirement. Eight presidential candidates were confirmed by the Republic Electoral Commission. Incumbent Aleksandar Vučić won re-election outright in the first round with 60% of the vote. His closest challenger, Zdravko Ponoš, received 18.9%. As a result, a runoff was not required. Both the presidential and parliamentary elections

were held concurrently.

Electoral Institutions   The Republic Electoral Commission serves as the primary government agency overseeing the electoral process in the country. Its chairperson and the 16 members are appointed by the National Assembly for four-year terms, upon the proposal of the National Assembly parliamentary groups. Despite the expectation of political neutrality in these positions, the involvement of the National Assembly in appointing commission members allows for potential influence from the ruling coalition.

During elections, the commission operates in an extended composition, including one representative from each electoral list submitter or presidential candidate proposer. This extended composition remains in effect from the announcement of elections until the declaration of results, allowing the opposition to participate in the electoral process.

The Single Electoral Roll serves as a public document containing records of eligible voters in the Republic of Serbia, maintained as an electronic database updated regularly. Registration on the Electoral Roll is a prerequisite for voting rights, with each voter registered only once. Citizens have the right to verify their information by consulting the Electoral Roll, and are assigned a designated polling station notified via mail or the government website. To vote, citizens must present a state-issued document and sign the voter register list at their assigned polling station.

Additionally, each electoral precinct has a dedicated electoral committee comprised of a chair appointed by the Republic Electoral Commission (in extended composition) and up to two representatives from each electoral list submitter or presidential candidate proposer. This ensures opposition oversight of election fairness, even without

third-party observers, as the precinct committee can document any observed manipulation in its official report, signed by all committee members and submitted to the Republic Electoral Commission.

3.5 Natural Experiment and Data Description

Experimental methods offer significant advantages in political science, particularly the ability to randomly assign treatment conditions and establish causal inference. Yet researchers often encounter practical or ethical constraints that limit their ability to fully control experimental implementation. In such cases, natural experiments, where treatment assignment occurs independently of researcher intervention, provide a valuable alternative. Crucially, however, the credibility of such designs depends on demonstrating the plausibility of random assignment (Dunning 2012).

To examine the hypotheses outlined in this study, I employ a natural experiment derived from the allocation of international and domestic election observers during Serbia's 2022 general elections. Two independent organizations dispatched observer missions: the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA).

OSCE is an intergovernmental organization composed of 57 member states, with a long history of conducting electoral observation missions. Since its first intervention in Serbia during the 1996 local elections, it has executed 17 missions in the country. OSCE employs both long-term and short-term observation strategies. On election day, 250 short-term observers are deployed in multinational teams of two to monitor procedures such as opening of polling stations, ballot casting, vote counting, and results tabulation. Observers typically spend 15 to 30 minutes at each polling station. The long-term mission spans from February 21 to April 15 and includes 15 experts and

27 observers who assess legal compliance, institutional integrity, campaign financing, media coverage, and the broader democratic environment, in accordance with OSCE standards and national legislation.

CRTA, a Serbian civil society organization, has monitored elections since 2016 and conducts a comprehensive evaluation of the entire electoral process. This includes monitoring the campaign atmosphere, administrative conduct, misuse of public resources, media narratives, and post-election developments. On election day, CRTA deployed approximately 3,000 trained domestic observers to 950 polling stations (450 in Belgrade and 500 elsewhere), where they remained for the full duration of voting and vote counting. Their findings are grounded in rigorous documentation and a strict code of impartiality, accuracy, and independence. Establishing the random nature of observer deployment is essential to the analytical credibility of this study (Dunning 2012). Both OSCE and CRTA claim to approximate random assignment. According to the OSCE handbook, each observation team receives a list of polling stations selected arbitrarily from the national registry, designed to minimize systematic differences between observed and unobserved precincts, avoid overlap, and ensure proportional geographic distribution, including urban-rural balance.

CRTA's assignment process also claims to meet randomization standards. Based on an interview with CRTA's head of analytics, the allocation is executed centrally by two individuals using randomization software. Observer assignments are disseminated to regional coordinators one day before the election for logistical planning. Their strategy is based on two stratified random samples–450 polling stations in Belgrade and 500 across the rest of Serbia–designed to reflect variation in size, geography, and political competitiveness. While polling stations in Kosovo and Metohija are excluded, the sampling approach aims to ensure representativeness for both Belgrade and the rest of the country.

Data The unit of analysis is the electoral precinct. To collect the data, I code every precinct's official electoral report. The Republic Electoral Commission publicly reports disaggregated election returns at this level, enabling a population-wide study comprising nearly 8,000 precincts across 166 municipalities.

The primary outcome variable for H1 is the vote share of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), measured as the proportion of total ballots cast for SNS (or for Aleksandar Vučić in the presidential race). This measure captures the potential for electoral manipulation by incumbents, who–despite institutional constraints–retain substantial leverage over electoral administration.

For H2, the outcome of interest is voter turnout, defined as the percentage of registered voters who cast ballots in each precinct. This allows for testing discrepancies in participation rates between observed and unobserved precincts, potentially indicative of inflated or coerced turnout.

The main explanatory variables are two dummy indicators for observer presence. One variable captures whether OSCE observers visited a precinct (1 = observed, 0 = unobserved), and the other identifies precincts visited by CRTA observers using the same binary coding. Presence is defined as any observation lasting at least one minute.

I collect a wide array of precinct-level, political, and contextual characteristics that may influence the relationship between observer presence and outcomes. These include:

- Precinct-level attributes: number of registered voters, invalid vote counts, if elections were repeated because of irregularities, instances of corrected reports, electoral committee size, and prior turnout levels.

- Political context: local elections held concurrently with national ones, SNS campaign activity in the municipality, and prior vote share for SNS (or Vučić).

- Geography and demographics: urban or rural classification, status as a municipal administrative center, whether the precinct is housed with others in the same building, and location in Belgrade or Vojvodina region.

- Human capital: share of local population with high school and university degrees.

Table 3.1: Summary statistics by region and observer coverage

Variable	Value
SNS Vote Share (Belgrade)	0.3463
SNS Vote Share (non-Belgrade)	0.4922
Registered Voters (Belgrade)	1,368
Registered Voters (non-Belgrade)	687
CRTA Coverage (Belgrade)	0.3220
OSCE Coverage (Belgrade)	0.1503
Avg. Turnout Rate (CRTA)	0.6019
Avg. Turnout Rate (OSCE)	0.6099
Avg. CRTA Precinct Size	990.54
Avg. OSCE Precinct Size	946.15
Precincts < 250 Voters (CRTA)	0.1193
Precincts < 250 Voters (OSCE)	0.0853
Campaign Presence (CRTA)	0.3065
Campaign Presence (OSCE)	0.4093
Remarks Logged (CRTA)	0.0894
Remarks Logged (OSCE)	0.0558
Reports Corrected (CRTA)	0.0923
Reports Corrected (OSCE)	0.0716
Repeat Elections (CRTA)	0.0056
Repeat Elections (OSCE)	0.0063

Table 3.1 presents descriptive statistics. It is evident that CRTA and OSCE adopted divergent allocation strategies. CRTA disproportionately emphasized precincts in Belgrade and rural areas, whereas OSCE observers were more likely to visit large cities–excluding Belgrade–and precincts targeted by the SNS campaign.

Table 3.2: Belgrade District vs Serbia

Variable	Belgrade District	Serbia (no BGD)
CRTA Visit	47.16%	8.21%
OSCE Visit	16.33%	11.73%
SNS Vote Share	34.6%	49.22%
Precinct Size (average)	1386 registered voters	688 registered voters

Although both organizations assert that observer deployment is random, Table 3.1 reveals clear discrepancies in their allocation strategies. CRTA employs two distinct sampling frames, one for Belgrade (450 precincts) and another for the rest of Serbia (500 precincts), suggesting a stratified design. In principle, this allows for adjustment using techniques such as inverse probability weighting. However, because OSCE does not appear to block on Belgrade or apply similar stratification, I do not use inverse probability weighting in the analysis. As shown in Table 3.2 , the Belgrade District diverges substantially from the rest of the country: precincts there are more likely to receive observers and exhibit notably lower support for SNS. To account for these differences, I include a control variable for Belgrade District in the OLS regression models presented below.

3.6   Randomization Checks

Where do these two missions deploy their representatives? To begin addressing this question, I examine a specific case: Subotica, one of Serbia's largest cities (Figure B.1 Appendix). This example casts doubt on OSCE's assertion that observed precincts do not systematically differ from unobserved ones. Even within a single municipality, observer allocation appears skewed toward urban areas. This matters because existing research indicates that rural regions disproportionately support the ruling party (Lončar and Stojanović 2016), raising concerns that selection bias in observer placement could distort electoral integrity assessments.

While Subotica offers a compelling illustration, it may not reflect broader national trends. To evaluate allocation patterns more rigorously, I estimate a series of OLS regressions in which the dependent variable equals one if OSCE (or CRTA) observers were present in a precinct, and zero otherwise. Table 3.3 empirically tests the organizations' claims that their observers were deployed to precincts that do not differ systematically from those unvisited.

To do so, I assemble a set of precinct-level covariates. Given prior findings on rural support for incumbents (Lončar and Stojanović 2016), I proxy rurality using three indicators: whether a precinct lies within a municipal administrative center, and whether it contains fewer than 250 or 500 registered voters. Additionally, I incorporate indicators such as the presence of concurrent local elections, campaign visits by President Vučić, and his vote share in the 2017 presidential election, as these factors are explicitly cited by both missions on their websites as relevant criteria in observer allocation decisions.

Table 3.3 reports results separately for Belgrade and the remainder of the country. In Belgrade, observer placement appears relatively balanced across both missions. CRTA and OSCE observers were deployed to precincts that do not exhibit major systematic differences from those unobserved. That said, OSCE placements still show mild bias, favoring municipal centers and precincts with slightly lower Vučić vote share in 2017 (2.8 percentage points lower).

Outside Belgrade, more pronounced differences emerge. CRTA observer presence correlates with only one precinct characteristic: those visited by Vučić during the campaign were slightly less likely to be observed. In contrast, OSCE deployment shows significant ($p < 0.01$) associations with multiple traits: precincts were less rural (by 16.7-18.6 percentage points), more likely to be located in administrative

centers (+17.5), more frequently visited by Vučić (+5.9), more often held concurrent local elections (+2.9), and showed lower Vučić support in 2017 (-4.5).

Appendix B (Tables B.1 and B.2) presents a comprehensive balance check across 31 covariates. While CRTA allocation appears sensitive only to the Belgrade District, OSCE observer placement correlates with 13 distinct precinct characteristics. These patterns substantially undermine OSCE's claim of non-selective deployment and suggest that observer placement may be shaped by contextual factors with potential implications for bias in election assessments.

Table 3.3: Observers' Allocation

(a) Belgrade District

	< 500 (1)	< 250 (2)	Administrative Center (3)	Local Elections (4)	Campaign (president) (5)	Vucic (share in 2017) (6)
			Dependent variable:			
CRTA	0.002	0.005	-0.020	-0.000	0.062	0.008
	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.029)	(0.000)	(0.033)	(0.008)
OSCE	-0.018	-0.003	0.083*	0.000	-0.043	-0.028**
	(0.017)	(0.008)	(0.038)	(0.000)	(0.044)	(0.011)
Observations	1,031	1,031	1,031	1,031	1,031	1,021

$^{***}p < 0.001; ^{**}p < 0.01; ^{*}p < 0.05$

(b) Serbia without Belgrade District

	< 500 (1)	< 250 (2)	Administrative Center (3)	Local Elections (4)	Campaign (president) (5)	Vucic (share in 2017) (6)
			Dependent variable:			
CRTA	0.002	-0.036	0.030	-0.007	-0.059*	-0.007
	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.014)	(0.026)	(0.007)
OSCE	-0.186**	-0.167**	0.175**	0.029**	0.053**	-0.045**
	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.005)
Observations	6,917	6,917	6,917	6,917	6,917	6,667

$^{***}p < 0.001; ^{**}p < 0.01; ^{*}p < 0.05$

Note: OLS models

However, my previous analysis assumes a simple uniform randomization implemented by both observation missions. It is possible, however, that the OSCE placed greater emphasis on certain locations or weighted specific types of precincts more heavily. To assess this, I consulted the Election Observation Handbook published

by the OSCE. I found no explicit information regarding stratified randomization or protocols to prioritize particular polling stations.

Nonetheless, logistical constraints may have limited OSCE's ability to access all locations, leading to a sampling strategy biased toward more accessible precincts. To account for this possibility, I restrict the analysis to precincts that are easier to reach. I construct two subsamples: the first includes only urban precincts (defined as those with over 250 registered voters), while the second includes only precincts located in municipal administrative centers.

Table B.9 presents the results of this analysis. Model 1 focuses on urban precincts, and Model 2 examines administrative centers. Even under these favorable conditions, the OSCE sample exhibits high levels of statistical imbalance, suggesting that their deployment was not random even within more accessible areas. In contrast, Models 3 and 4 replicate the same analysis for the CRTA mission and reveal a substantially more balanced sample, reinforcing the notion that CRTA's deployment strategy adhered more closely to randomized principles.

3.7   Analysis

In this section, I put the earlier hypothesis to the test. Table 3.4 presents simple difference-in-means estimates assessing the relationship between the presence of CRTA and OSCE observers and SNS vote share. At face value, the results may suggest irregularities, offering a tempting entry point for allegations of electoral fraud. However, interpreting these findings causally requires randomized assignment of treatment, a condition clearly violated, as shown in the previous section. Without randomization, the observed differences may reflect underlying precinct characteristics rather than the effect of observation itself.

Table 3.4: SNS Vote Share in Observed vs Unobserved Precincts

Mission	Elections	SNS Vote Share in Observed Precincts	SNS Vote Share in Unobserved Precincts	Difference in Means	t-statistics
CRTA	Parliament	42.44%	47.8%	-5.36%	-9.36
OSCE	Parliament	44.4%	47.73%	-3.33%	-13.36
CRTA	President	56.86%	65.51%	-9.65%	-6.88
OSCE	President	60.99%	65.26%	-4.27%	-8.37

To address the Belgrade District as an important outlier, Figure 3.2 presents the main results testing the first hypothesis, with Table B3 (Appendix) offering an alternative presentation. The inclusion of this district materially affects the results. The presence of OSCE observers remains associated with a decrease in vote share for the ruling SNS party, dropping by 2.8% in the parliamentary and 3.4% in the presidential elections—consistent with the findings reported by Hyde (2007). In contrast, the CRTA results show no significant difference between observed and unobserved precincts, suggesting no detectable effect and, by extension, no evidence of fraud.

Although Figure 3.2 adjusts for the Belgrade District as a confounder, the distinct deployment strategies used by the two missions—CRTA implementing separate randomization for Belgrade, while OSCE does not—indicate a differentiated treatment of the district. To more precisely evaluate the first hypothesis, I split the sample into two, instead of just controlling for it (like Figure 3.2): one covering Belgrade and the other the rest of Serbia. Table 3.5 reports these findings, with the first four columns focusing on Belgrade and the remaining columns on the broader national sample.

The results are consistent with earlier observations. In Belgrade and the rest of the country, the presence of OSCE observers is significantly associated with lower SNS and Vučić vote shares, reinforcing concerns of potential electoral fraud. Conversely, CRTA-monitored precincts do not differ meaningfully from unobserved ones, apart from a modest reduction in Vučić's vote share outside the capital.

Figure 3.2: SNS Vote Share (Controlling for Belgrade District)
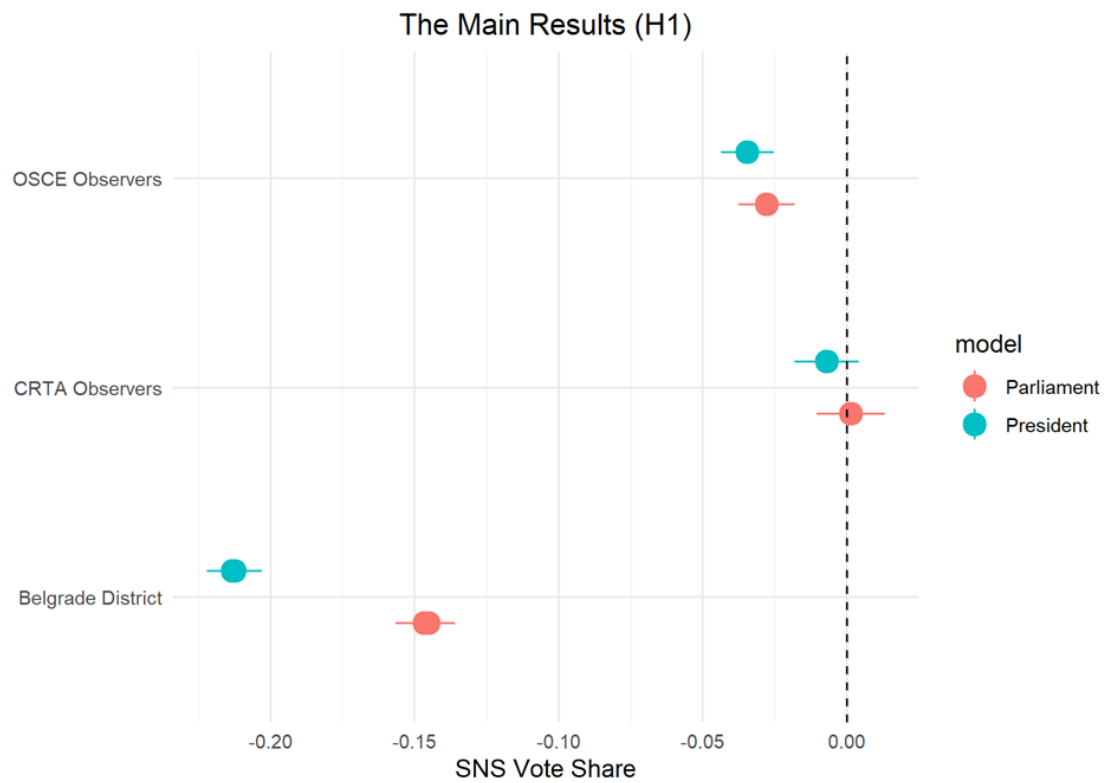
Table 3.5: Results for H1

	Belgrade District				Serbia (without Belgrade)			
	SNS% (1)	Vucic% (2)	SNS% (3)	Vucic% (4)	SNS% (5)	Vucic% (6)	SNS% (7)	Vucic% (8)
CRTA observers	0.007 (0.008)	0.006 (0.009)			-0.002 (0.008)	-0.015* (0.007)		
OSCE observers			-0.029** (0.010)	-0.029* (0.012)			-0.028** (0.006)	-0.035** (0.005)
Constant	0.344** (0.004)	0.459** (0.005)	0.350** (0.004)	0.465** (0.004)	0.492** (0.002)	0.676** (0.002)	0.495** (0.002)	0.679** (0.002)
Observations	1,031	1,031	1,031	1,031	6,916	6,916	6,916	6,916
Adjusted R^2	-0.0001	-0.001	0.007	0.005	-0.0001	0.0005	0.003	0.007

Note: $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

Table 3.6 presents the core results for the second hypothesis. If election officials linked to incumbents are engaging in fraudulent behavior—such as inflating turnout by voting on behalf of citizens abroad—then we would expect observer presence to suppress such actions, resulting in lower reported turnout at observed precincts. This effect hinges on the assumption that physical observation effectively deters manipulation.

Table 3.6: Results for H2

	Serbia		*Belgrade District*		*Serbia (without Belgrade)*	
	Turnout Rate (National Assembly)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
CRTA observers	−0.014**		−0.001		−0.005	
	(0.004)		(0.004)		(0.006)	
OSCE observers		−0.005		0.009		0.006
		(0.004)		(0.006)		(0.004)
Constant	0.616**	0.615**	0.590**	0.588**	0.618**	0.619**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Observations	7,947	7,947	1,031	1,031	6,916	6,916
R^2	0.001	0.0002	0.0001	0.003	0.0001	0.0003

Note: $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

However, the results offer little support for this deterrence mechanism. While the initial CRTA coefficient indicates a negative association with turnout across the full national sample, this effect disappears once the data are split between Belgrade and the rest of the country. Meanwhile, the OSCE coefficient is consistently insignificant across all specifications.

An alternative explanation is that officials may not be deterred by third-party observers. If this were the case, we would anticipate that any misconduct–especially behavior as overt as ballot stuffing–would be noted in official precinct-level reports. However, I reviewed every available observer report, and none document or even

suggest this type of activity. This absence further challenges the idea that turnout discrepancies stem from observable fraud deterred by observer presence.

Finally, the analysis confirms that precincts visited by international observers differ systematically from those left unobserved (Tables 3.3, 3.4, B.1, and B.2). To address these allocation biases, I re-estimate the main results, this time controlling for the variables previously identified as confounders. Table 3.7 reports these findings.

Table 3.7: Main Results (Accounting for Systematic Differences)

	Dependent variable:			
	SNS % (1)	Vucic % (2)	SNS % (3)	Vucic % (4)
CRTA observers	0.004 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.004)		
OSCE observers			0.004 (0.004)	0.003 (0.003)
< 250 registered voters	0.003 (0.004)	0.021* (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)	0.021* (0.003)
< 500 registered voters	0.018** (0.004)	0.023** (0.003)	0.018** (0.004)	0.023** (0.003)
Administrative Center	-0.041** (0.004)	-0.052** (0.003)	-0.041** (0.004)	-0.052** (0.003)
Campaign (president)	0.007** (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.007** (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)
Local elections	0.051** (0.005)	-0.004 (0.004)	0.051** (0.005)	-0.003 (0.004)
Vucic VS% in 2017	0.493** (0.012)	0.522** (0.009)	0.493** (0.012)	0.522** (0.009)
Belgrade District	-0.074** (0.007)	-0.073** (0.005)	-0.073** (0.007)	-0.074** (0.005)
Constant	0.178** (0.008)	0.348** (0.006)	0.178** (0.008)	0.347** (0.006)
Observations	7,687	7,687	7,687	7,687
Adjusted R^2	0.413	0.631	0.413	0.631
F Statistic (df = 8; 7678)	675.614**	1,646.160**	675.614**	1,646.160**

Note: $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

Once these systematic differences are accounted for, the disparities in SNS vote share between observed and unobserved precincts disappear. This holds across both parliamentary and presidential races, as well as for both observation missions. Importantly, the pattern remains robust even when the analysis is restricted to precincts outside the Belgrade District (Table B.8, Appendix B). These findings point to an absence of observable electoral fraud. This may help explain why neither CRTA nor the OSCE explicitly accuse the government of fraud in their post-election reports—despite noting procedural irregularities.

3.8   Additional Analysis

Beyond direct effects, I also explore potential spillover effects of observer presence. While Enikolopov et al. (2013) suggest that observers can deter electoral fraud not only in monitored precincts but also in nearby ones, other studies–including Asunka et al. (2019), Ichino and Schündeln (2012), and Leeffers and Vicente (2019)–find that fraud may simply be displaced to adjacent locations.

To test this, I collected data on the physical locations of precincts, focusing on those situated within the same building (typically schools). This allows for a within-location comparison of SNS vote shares between observed and unobserved precincts. If observer presence deters fraud at the observed station but not its neighbors, we would expect lower SNS support in observed precincts relative to unobserved ones in the same location. Table 3.8 presents the results: across shared locations, there are no statistically significant differences in ruling party vote share between precincts observed by CRTA or OSCE and those that were not, in either the presidential or parliamentary races. A robustness check excluding the Belgrade District (Table B5, Appendix B) confirms this pattern—no evidence of spillover or displacement effects is detected. These findings contrast with prior work and suggest that, in the Serbian

context, observer presence does not lead to fraud being shifted to nearby polling stations.

Table 3.8: Spillover Effects

	Dependent variable:			
	SNS % (1)	Vucic % (2)	SNS % (3)	Vucic % (4)
CRTA observers	0.001 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.008)		
OSCE observers			-0.010 (0.007)	-0.012 (0.007)
Belgrade District	-0.129** (0.006)	-0.190** (0.006)	-0.129** (0.005)	-0.191** (0.005)
Constant	0.447** (0.003)	0.621** (0.003)	0.449** (0.003)	0.623** (0.003)
Observations	2,913	2,913	2,913	2,913
Adjusted R^2	0.164	0.300	0.165	0.301
F Statistic (df = 2; 2910)	286.680**	624.348**	288.183**	626.799**

Note: $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

In Appendix B, I conduct a series of additional analyses to further test the robustness of the findings. First, I examine opposition vote share, reasoning that since opposition parties held minimal representation in the National Assembly and controlled only a few municipalities, they likely lacked the capacity to commit fraud. Therefore, we would not expect a decrease in their vote share in precincts with observers. I apply the same logic to the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)–a longstanding coalition partner of SNS, but one with considerably fewer resources.

Tables B.6 and B.7 present the results. Consistent with earlier findings, no significant differences are observed in CRTA-monitored precincts. However, OSCE-observed precincts show a notable increase in opposition vote share (2-4%) and a significant decrease in SPS vote share (13-15%) in both the parliamentary and presidential elec-

tions. This pattern suggests that SNS's electoral support efforts may extend to coalition partners, casting further doubt on the integrity of vote share distributions in OSCE-observed precincts.

To further validate the OSCE findings, I construct an expanded variable–OSCE Network–which includes observers affiliated with the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the U.S. Embassy. Results from this specification (Tables B.6 and B.7) remain consistent, reinforcing concerns of electoral fraud.

To conclude quantitative analysis, I explore three additional outcomes. First, I assess the number of revisions to official precinct reports post–election day. Second, I evaluate the percentage of invalid votes, and third, I investigate whether observer presence correlates with repeated elections. Table B.8 shows no significant differences across these outcomes, with one exception: precincts with observers experienced fewer amendments to official records—a result that may indicate improved transparency or administrative deterrence in monitored locations.

This raises an important question: can CRTA's findings be trusted? One potential explanation for their limited effects could be organizational shortcomings or external influences, such as interference by state officials. However, multiple factors make this unlikely.

First, the 2022 general elections were not CRTA's first foray into election monitoring. Over several cycles, the organization has demonstrated professional rigor, supported by both interviews and prior reporting. CRTA is affiliated with the Open Government Partnership and the General Assembly of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations. Its credibility is further reinforced by international recognition, including the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award and the

OSCE's 'Democracy Defender' Award. These credentials make it improbable that incompetence or inexperience underpins the findings in question. Second, concerns about political alignment or cooptation are similarly unconvincing. CRTA is a non-governmental organization that does not receive state funding and has consistently produced critical assessments of the government. Its willingness to confront the ruling party is evident in its 2023 Belgrade election report, which stated:

> CRTA Election Observation Mission assesses that drastic abuses of voters' rights, laws and institutions escalated on Election Day. We bring attention to serious concerns regarding the quality of Parliamentary elections, and their further departure from standards for free and fair elections. Considering the scope and diversity of electoral abuses in Belgrade we conclude that the results of the Belgrade elections do not reflect the freely expressed will of voters living in Belgrade.

These findings were publicly presented before the European Parliament, after which CRTA faced public attacks from then–Prime Minister Brnabić–further underscoring the organization's independence and willingness to criticize the government.

Taken together, these considerations cast doubt on the notion that CRTA's results are politically compromised. Instead, the lack of detected fraud in their analysis may reflect genuine variation in the effectiveness or visibility of fraudulent practices, rather than institutional bias

3.9   Conclusion and Discussion

This study investigates the influence of third-party observers on electoral fraud, an increasingly salient issue in modern democracies. Focusing on Serbia's 2022 national elections, I leverage a unique natural experiment in which two election monitoring

organizations–the international OSCE and the domestic CRTA–claim to have randomly assigned their observers. By comparing their strategies and findings, this research contributes new insight into the literature on election monitoring and fraud detection.

The analysis reveals divergent conclusions from the two missions: while CRTA observers detect no evidence of election day fraud, OSCE observers identify statistically significant anomalies. To account for this discrepancy, I examine observer allocation patterns and find that OSCE-monitored precincts differ systematically from unobserved ones, unlike CRTA's more balanced sample. Once we account for these differences, the findings converge–we find no evidence of election day fraud. This highlights the importance of caution in interpreting findings from observational field studies masquerading as randomized interventions.

This study is most applicable to electoral contexts characterized by dominant-party rule, where the incumbent possesses disproportionate resources and institutional control, and where election-day fraud is a plausible strategy for securing political advantage. Specifically, the scope is limited to cases in which manipulation is predominantly committed by incumbents, rather than being a widespread tactic employed by multiple parties, and where institutional safeguards allow external observers to meaningfully monitor electoral processes. Serbia represents a fitting case within these parameters. Since 2012, the ruling Serbian Progressive Party has consolidated control over executive, legislative, and many local institutions, cultivating an environment conducive to electoral manipulation. While formal democratic institutions persist, the asymmetric power distribution between incumbents and opposition actors, coupled with historical patterns of election interference, renders election-day fraud both feasible and strategically valuable. Additionally, Serbia's institutional openness to both international and domestic election monitors creates an empirical opportunity

to evaluate fraud mitigation mechanisms in a controlled yet substantively rich setting.

The broader aim of this research is to understand how the presence of election monitors affects electoral outcomes. My findings suggest that there is no universal answer. In this regard, the study echoes the work of Leeffers and Vicente (2019) on Mozambique, who were able to control randomization for both domestic and international monitors. Their results showed limited observer effectiveness, domestic monitors reduced fraud at the cost of spatial displacement, while international missions had minimal effect. Taken together, the two studies point to a shared limitation: international observers often visit systematically different precincts and for short durations, creating space for electoral manipulation before and after their presence.

Yet this does not imply that international observers are ineffective. Their value lies not only in deterrence but in capacity building and normative pressure. In the Serbian case, the OSCE played a pivotal role in fostering civil society expertise by funding and training organizations like CRTA, which now deploy robust observational methods rooted in international best practices.

In addition, international monitors can exert reputational leverage. Research by Hyde and O'Mahony (2010) and Simpser (2013) shows that governments respond strategically to the threat of external scrutiny. Even if no electoral fraud occurred in 2022, the presence of the OSCE may have influenced government behavior in advance. This is especially salient in Serbia, where observer reports are presented in the European Parliament—a venue with real consequences for the country's EU accession ambitions. In such a context, a negative report carries more than symbolic weight; it can delay or derail integration.

These findings suggest that the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) may not primarily depend on election-day fraud to secure electoral victories. Instead, the evidence points toward a broader reliance on pre-electoral manipulative mechanisms that fall outside the immediate scope of observer detection. Importantly, this study does not imply the absence of manipulation. Fraud may take forms not easily captured by the empirical strategies employed here. CRTA's 2023 pre-election research documents persistent pressure on voters, especially public sector employees and vulnerable populations, paralleling findings from Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi (2019) in Russia. Subsequent investigations by CRTA exposed clientelist networks embedded in Serbia's social work centers, suggesting deeper institutional entanglement.

Media control further compounds these democratic deficits. My content analysis of B92's election coverage illustrates a striking imbalance: of 165 articles published during the 2022 campaign window, 141 focused on the ruling party, only 18 on the opposition. Once a pillar of independent journalism, B92 has shifted markedly following ownership changes. Reflecting this broader trend, Serbia's RSF press freedom ranking has plunged from 63rd in 2012 to 98th in 2024. Taken together, these findings suggest that the SNS's electoral strategy is less reliant on ballot-box tampering and more dependent on structural advantages, including media dominance, institutional pressure, and clientelist mobilization which pose equally serious threats to democratic integrity but elude most observer missions focused narrowly on election day.

This study also offers important policy insights into the design and implementation of election monitoring strategies. Observer deployment, despite claims of randomization, may systematically favor precincts that are urban, politically salient, or less susceptible to electoral manipulation. Such patterns risk undermining the validity of fraud assessments and point to the need for more rigorously randomized assignment procedures. For international organizations such as OSCE, this necessitates a critical

reexamination of deployment algorithms. Stratified random sampling that accounts for urban–rural variation, precinct size, and historical voting behavior could substantially improve representativeness and enhance the analytical credibility of observer findings.

That said, it is important to acknowledge the mission-driven logic of organizations like the OSCE. Their strategic focus is not on producing academically rigorous inferences, but rather on safeguarding electoral integrity, particularly in high-density urban precincts where voter concentration and stakes are highest. Within this framework, prioritizing urban areas represents a rational allocation of scarce resources. Nevertheless, randomized deployment within urban precincts would offer a feasible compromise between operational priorities and evaluative rigor, enabling more robust post-hoc assessments of mission effectiveness.

Additionally, randomized assignment alone is not sufficient. Leeffers and Vicente (2019) show that short-term observer presence may only delay manipulation, whereas full-day monitoring exerts stronger deterrent effects. This insight underscores the importance not just of where observers go, but also how long they stay, highlighting the need for revised operational guidelines that optimize coverage, duration, and deterrent capacity.

Domestic organizations like CRTA may be better positioned to align with randomized protocols, thanks to localized knowledge and operational flexibility. Still, they too would benefit from greater transparency in allocation logic, third-party validation of sampling procedures, and broader integration of pre- and post-election monitoring strategies.

Ultimately, observer missions should expand their theory of impact: not solely as fraud detection entities, but as institutional actors who shape electoral incentives through deterrence, reputational signaling, and information provision. Rethinking training programs, reporting protocols, and civil society partnerships in line with this expanded role can help maximize the long-term democratic benefits of election observation. In sum, while third-party observers alone cannot safeguard democracy, their strategic deployment and thoughtful reform remain critical components of its defense.

Chapter 4

Master of Puppets: An Endorsement Experiment on Party Presidents' Ability to Shape Citizens' Policy Preference

4.1 Introduction

Loyalty to political parties is observed to be low globally. Research by Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera (2017) analyzing 67 countries indicates significant electoral volatility, including votes shifting to new parties and transfers between established parties. This suggests considerable electoral instability in most countries studied. Incumbents in many developing democracies face substantial reelection challenges, contrasting with the incumbency advantage seen in mature democracies (Klašnja 2015). Studies of Brazilian mayoral elections by Klašnja and Titiunik (2013) show that weak party attachments among politicians can negatively affect their parties. However, in contrast, ruling parties in Turkey, Hungary, and Serbia have main-

tained power for over a decade despite being relatively new. This raises the question of how these parties gained and sustained popularity. This study aims to explore whether a party president's support for a policy influences party voters' opinions more strongly than the party's stance itself. Specifically, it examines if leaders like Erdogan, Orban, and Vucic sway voter opinions more effectively than their respective parties: Justice and Development, Fidesz, and the Serbian Progressive Party.

To address this question, I adjust Barber and Pope (2019) simplified model that consists of two groups of the party's voters: presidential and partisan loyalists. The central piece of their theory is the importance of politicians' cues and the way the cues are interpreted. In this dichotomy, genuine presidential loyalists are unwaveringly loyal to the leader, but do not have strong opinions on the underlying issues espoused by the president. Thus, they would follow the president's lead; presidential loyalists mimic the president's stance, even when it changes. On the other hand, party loyalists' behavior differs strikingly from this pattern. These voters should be highly loyal to their core political principles and policies that emerge from these core principles; thus, they should vote for any politician from the party that embraces those core principles. The central part of my argument is that the president's endorsement of a policy influences voters' opinions, causing them to be aligned with the president's opinion. To demonstrate the president's capacity to shape public opinion, it is essential to show that his endorsement influences voter support irrespective of the party's position. If the president endorses a policy, citizens' support should increase whether the party supports or opposes that policy. If the president endorses a view that is traditionally espoused by the party, this could just reinforce co-partisans' attitudes, which is not the case if the president supports a view that the party opposes.

To test the argument, I conduct a nationwide survey experiment in Serbia. To understand the true ability of the Serbian president, Aleksandar Vucic, to shape

ruling party voters' opinions, I apply an endorsement experiment to untangle the problem of the correlation between support for political parties and their leaders.

Serbia presents a suitable case for multiple reasons. After the 2012 national elections, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) became the dominant party in Serbian politics, after which the current president, Aleksandar Vučić, started his meteoric rise in popularity among voters, allowing us to compare importance of the two actors. Furthermore, the influence of political parties is decreasing in Serbia. Spasojević and Zoran (2018) argue that the increase of party presidents' control over their party has led to the 'presidentialization' of parties in general; this phenomenon is especially prominent in the case of the SNS. Finally, the quality of Serbia's democracy has deteriorated significantly since the SNS rose to power; from 2012 to 2022 the Global Freedom Score dropped from 'free' to 'partly free'[1] and the Liberal Democracy Index dropped from 0.47 to 0.24.[2]

This study examines whether parties, as institutions, or their leaders, as individuals, are more powerful in shaping public opinion. When a leader has stronger connections to voters than his party does, he can use this popularity to consolidate his power within the party. If the party, in turn, plays a more powerful role in opinion formation, it can establish a more even balance of power with the leader (Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik 2022). This push and pull between a leader and his party is related to the institutionalization of parties which often implies a move away from more personalized politics. When centralization of power occurs in democracies, it appears to 'deepen' democracy (Cox 2005) while greater personalization appears to be cause for alarm (Brader and Joshua A. Tucker 2001; Kirchheimer 1966; Mainwaring 1999). In countries where a dominant party has gained control, such as Serbia, the

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1. https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia
2. https://v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/

relationship between the leader and the elites within the governing party is a similar bellwether of regimes. Since Serbia is governed by a dominant party, opposition parties are marginalized. If voters choose to follow President Vucic over his party, he can leverage his popularity to consolidate his control over the SNS so that no challengers from within the party can emerge. In this case, a reason to worry for the future of democracy in Serbia, and in other places with dominant parties, arises.

This paper contributes to the literature on dominant parties (Brownlee 2007; Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2017). Previous studies show that leaders of dominant party regimes enjoy a high level of support by their citizens (Frye et al. 2017). This paper helps us understand the source of the regime's popularity–that its popularity is mainly driven by party leaders. Further, it gives us insight on why some politicians, especially those who value office, do not defect from the regime. In the case of a clash between the party and its leaders, voters are going to follow the latter.

In addition, this study builds on the Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022) findings. The authors advance the model that shows that parties, to solve the collective action problem, need to untangle a different strategic problem–a credible commitment issue. Parties can do this by committing, to a degree, to strategically promote candidates that are less charismatic, but who are ready to promote the party program. In their 'uncommitted equilibrium' every charismatic leader is promoted to a senior position without exercising effort to promote a collective brand, while focusing on more particularistic behavior. I contend that the Serbian case fits the 'uncommitted equilibrium' case, and thus allows us to examine consequence of personalism on shaping voters' opinions, at the expense of party building. To attain electoral success in the short-term, the party may promote its most charismatic leaders. However, in the long run, this leads to an outcome in which said party becomes a hostage of that leader.

4.2 Dominant Parties: Contested Rule between Parties and Leaders

Dominant parties are governing parties that control a vast majority of elected offices at the national and local levels. Such parties often form when elites with local bases of power rally around a figure who can command a nationwide following Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022). Such a leader lends his charisma and elites use their political machines to build a popular following for the dominant party. This deal turns out to be a winning arrangement for both the leader and elites. Voters support the party's candidates for electoral offices (i.e., national and local, executive and legislative). Those candidates who win electoral office go on to appoint their colleagues, completing the party's takeover of the state.

However, there is an underlying tension between leaders and elites within the dominant party. For elites, the party is an institution that helps stabilize power-sharing between them and the leader (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018; Reuter 2017; Svolik 2012). This requires some constraints on the leader's rule so that he cannot unilaterally alter the terms of any bargain (Meng 2020; Reuter 2017). A leader, in turn, wants the help of party elites to win and maintain office, but not the constraints they may seek to impose on him.

In this struggle between the leader and elites within the dominant party, influence over the masses is a source of power. By pointing to his charismatic connection with voters as the source of the party's electoral victories, a leader can maintain the support of most party elites Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik (2022), allowing him to marginalize less charismatic challengers within the party. To the extent the party can form a deep connection with voters, independent of that of the leader, elites within the institution are better off. They have a tool to constrain the leader, and their

collective fortunes are less tied to that of one person, especially important should the leader fall into disgrace or die.

To examine the connection between voters and the dominant party or its leader, observational studies of election results get us only so far. Concurrent elections make it difficult to determine how much voters support the party versus the leader. Presidential elections that are staggered with legislative or local elections sometimes show divergence in support between the leader and the party. Yet, the vote is a crude instrument for measuring support for either the party or the leader. Moreover, electoral support is just one way in which voters are connected to their parties and leaders. Another connection manifests in how parties and leaders are able to shape popular opinion. Do voters take their policy cues from the dominant party or from its leader? To address this question, I review some of the literature on opinion formation, arriving at several hypotheses that I test in the Serbian context with a survey experiment.

4.3 The Effects of Parties and Party Leaders on Opinion Formation

Various scholars have demonstrated the importance of partisanship as a crucial factor of democratic politics (Dalton, McAllister, Wattenberg, et al. 2000; Weisberg and Greene 2003). Partisan attachment indicates loyalty to a key institution that incorporates citizens into the system of democratic principles and values. Due to this importance, partisanship should be more important in new, unconsolidated democracies, compared to older democracies.

Research treats the development of partisan attachment as a symbol of acceptance of the new democratic system, indicating the change in mass loyalties from charismatic leaders to lasting party organizations (Brader and Joshua A. Tucker 2001;

Kirchheimer 1966; Mainwaring 1999). Dalton and Weldon (2007) state that the insti-tutionalization of the French Fifth Republic was associated in part with the transfer of loyalty from Charles de Gaulle as a person to Gaullism as a political idea.

Given the importance of political parties, party identification has been a focus of study for many scholars of political behavior, with most of our knowledge coming from the American context. One group of scholars contends that party attachment represents a type of social identity, developed as lasting psychological attachment with a party (Campbell 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). On the other hand, a different branch of the literature offers the explanation that partisanship represents a more rationalistic concept, a product of voters maximizing their utilities (Achen 1992; Fiorina 1976). Whatever reasons underlie citizens' attachment to parties, the idea is that parties will be an important source of influence on citizen's policy views.

Party identification in the United States and other developed democracies, however, is a product of stable party competition or low electoral volatility Mainwaring, Gerva-soni, and España-Najera 2017. Countries with more recent transitions to democracy may not follow this trend. Rather, these countries have high electoral volatility, where old parties disappear, and new ones arise. Consequently, partisanship among citizens in new democracies often arises more slowly, and usually develops under cer-tain institutional conditions. Dalton and Weldon (2007) show this with time-series cross-sectional survey data across 36 nations while Brader and Joshua A Tucker (2008) find evidence of partisan attachment in Russia as early as its second electoral cycle after the transition to democracy.

Studies in several countries also find that party cues play an important role in shaping citizens' policy preferences. Samuels and Zucco Jr (2014), for example, ar-

gue that Brazil represents one of the least likely cases in which to find evidence of developed partisanship due to a long history of dictatorship, political parties without a long tradition, a high degree of party fragmentation, shallowness of sociocultural cleavages, and an institutional framework not conducive to stable party identification. Despite all of this, the authors find that party cues can influence partisans' support for a policy, but not that of non-partisans. Results from other democracies such as Argentina (Lupu 2013), Hungary and Poland (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2013) also highlight the importance of party cues.

While party cues may impact citizens' policy preferences, they are not the same as partisan attachment. Consequently, it is possible that the effect of party cues in the context of new democracies is really a case of attachment to specific party leaders rather than deep loyalty to parties as institutions. As central political figures in many democracies, party leaders mold their organization's votes, offices, and policy goals (O'brien and Rickne 2016). Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo (2019) posit that partisanship at the municipality level in Brazil is weak and that dynastic politics serve as a functional equivalent for it. They point out, for example, that over time, vote correlation is much stronger among candidates belonging to the same family than those belonging to the same party (p. 396). Similarly, in Serbia, every defeated candidate for the position of party president of the Democratic Party (DS–Demokratska Stranka) left the party to found a new one, with the help of voters who also defected (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015).

Another important aspect of party cues is that they represent a special case of the more general concept–source cues. Source cues are defined as the name recognition of the actor emitting a message. Source cues may be especially important for opinion formation among voters because they provide an informational shortcut that can make political decision-making easier. A change in one's evaluation of a message is

the result of the change in context that comes with the attachment of the actor's name to the message. In other words, the meaning of the message is interpreted differently depending on who the author of the message is (Asch 1952). Consequently, source cues are considered the most impactful information shortcuts in politics (Arceneaux 2008; Druckman 2001; Kam 2005; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Lupia and McCubbins 1998), particularly on changing opinions about difficult and unfamiliar issues.

Yet, the impact of source cues is not the same for everyone within a population. According to social identity theory (Brewer 2007), individuals often place themselves and others as 'in-group' and 'out-group' members. Those who are deemed similar to us belong to the former group and are subjected to positive attitudes, while those perceived as different are in the latter group and subjected to negative biases. The intensity with which cues can shape attitudes depends on the salience of membership in a specific group. The predominance of in- or out-group cues also may depend on levels of intragroup competition (Mackie and Cooper 1984; Mackie 1986; Mackie, Worth, and Allison 1990). In uncompetitive environments, in-group biases tend to dominate, making in-group endorsement more important. Out-group cues, in turn, should be predominant in high-stakes contexts. Those who follow a party should be more likely to be persuaded when told that an argument was made by members of their own party.

For this reason, some scholars of political behavior examine party leaders' ability to shape voters' opinion (Barber and Pope 2019; Lenz 2012; Nicholson 2012). Barber and Pope (2019) find that President Trump's cue was incredibly powerful, moving a subset of Republicans and Independents to express policy preferences that were at times more conservative, but at other times more liberal. Additionally, Lenz (2012) shows that parties' candidates for the presidency were able to influence partisanship regarding specific economic policy issues, but not overall economic performance. Nicholson

(2012) finds both party and leader cues were not successful in persuading in-partisans, but instead polarized the opinion of out-partisans. In addition, he compares the effect of party labels to party leaders, finding that party leaders influence out-partisans more than the labels themselves.

While these studies improve our understanding of how parties and their leaders can change support for a policy, to the best of my knowledge, none of the works directly compare the effects of party labels and party leaders when the leaders and their parties are at odds. Although leaders usually reinforce their party's views, it is possible to observe the opposite. Barber and Pope (2019) show that President Trump supported liberal policies at times, and that the president's cue was powerful enough to increase support for these liberal policies, particularly among self-defined strong conservatives and Republicans. What remains to be seen is whether the effect of the president's cue would be the same if respondents were also told that the party opposes these policies because they run counter to the party's traditional stances. By investigating voters' policy preferences when faced with messages in opposite directions, we can determine who has more influence on those preferences: the party itself or its leader?

To address this research question, I adjust Barber and Pope (2019) simplified model that consists of two groups of the party's voters: presidential and partisan loyalists. In this binary model, partisan loyalists represent voters that identify themselves with the party and should be highly loyal to its core political principles and policies that emerge from these core principles. On the other hand, some voters may perceive the party as a loose coalition of elites fighting for political influence, and thus identify themselves with the party to a lesser degree. The latter case could be more prevalent in unconsolidated democracies where party identification lags compared to developed democracies (Dalton and Weldon 2007). In this case, citizens may decide to cast their votes based on their connection to the most charismatic member–the

party leader (Hollyer, Klašnja, and Titiunik 2022)This group of voters represents presidential loyalists.

The central piece of the theory proposed here is the importance of politicians' cues and the way the cues are interpreted. We should observe very different pattern of behavior between these two groups. Genuine presidential loyalists are unwaveringly loyal to the leader and may not even have strong opinions on the underlying issues espoused by the president. Thus, they would follow the president's lead; presidential loyalists mimic the president's stance, even when it changes. On the other hand, party loyalists' behavior differs strikingly from this pattern. Since these voters are loyal to the party's core political principles, partisan loyalists should vote for any politician from the party that embraces those core principles.

The crucial part of this study is that presidential endorsement serves as a powerful cue capable of shaping public opinion independently of party alignment. Voters tend to adopt the president's position on a given policy, even when that stance diverges from their party's traditional platform. To establish this, it is essential to demonstrate that the president's support for a policy increases voter support regardless of whether the party itself endorses or opposes the policy. If the president endorses a view consistent with the party's traditional positions, the resulting support may reflect reinforcement of existing partisan attitudes. However, if the president supports a view contrary to the party's stance, and voter support still rises, it more clearly indicates the president's independent capacity to influence opinion.

4.4   The Case of Serbia

I investigate this argument in the context of Serbia, a country with a more abbreviated history of electoral competition. In order to clearly state empirical expectations in

terms that are specific to the context, I first highlight important features of Serbia's political environment.

The party system and voters in Serbia Since the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s, Serbia has moved toward a multi-party system. Notwithstanding the multi-party system, free and fair elections were not held until after the transition from the Milošević regime in 2000. In the first decade of the 21st century, the number of political parties grew rapidly, reaching 123 parties in 2020. Most of these parties represent factions of well-known national brands (Lončar, Stojanović, and Zoran Stojiljković 2015); only seven party lists won seats during the 2016 parliamentary elections. Furthermore, party identification among citizens is not very well developed; parties who were behind the political transition in the '90s and formed multiple governments after the transition, like the Democratic Party (DS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), are now on the fringe of the political scene, meaning it is hard for people to know which party they have traditionally identified with. The degree of change in voting behavior between elections is defined as electoral volatility. Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera (2017) show that Serbia has some of the highest electoral volatility in Eastern Europe, which itself is the region with some of the highest electoral volatility in the world.

Consequently, Serbian citizens display a certain degree of disengagement from the political system and dissonance in their political views. A survey conducted by a research team from Belgrade University shows that, overall, citizens are not interested in politics, with 42% stating that they are not interested at all (Lončar, Stojanović, and Zoran Stojiljković 2015). Only 31% of them indicate that they follow political events in the country to a greater extent. The survey also shows very discouraging levels of political knowledge. Nicholson (2012) states that source cues are particularly powerful when citizens are less knowledgeable on policy, indicating that these cues

should be effective in the Serbian context. Despite the discouraging results on citizens' interest in and knowledge of politics, over 60% of respondents, agree that democracy represents the best political system for the country. However, 62% of citizens reports they are not satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Serbia.

In addition to providing us with the information on voters' perception of politics, the survey (Lončar, Stojanović, and Zoran Stojiljković 2015) provides us with contradictory information on how voters evaluate parties and their leaders. On one hand, 83% of respondents agree with the statement that only political parties with strong leaders can form a stable government, indicating that their attachment to parties is strongly shaped by party leaders. On the other hand, when directly asked about how they decide to cast a vote for their parties, 34% of respondents state that they vote for a party because the party holds a position on certain issues, while 28% vote for a party because of their leaders. As such, previous research provides inconclusive evidence for whether citizens cast their votes because of their attachment to a party itself or because of their attachment to a party leader.

The Rise of the SNS   From this tumultuous party system, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) has arisen as the dominant party in Serbia. The SNS was founded in 2008 as a split from the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS), the culmination of a decade-long conflict within the SRS between the party's moderate and hardline wings. The SNS retained the former party's conservative outlook while adopting distinct pro-European and neoliberal policies. Ideologically, the party is a big tent–a political party that encourages a broad spectrum of views among its members (Meyer and Odom 2016)–and populist political party. They advocate for accession of Serbia into the European Union while maintaining balance with the Eastern and Western powers.

Figure 4.1: Citizens' intent to vote for the SNS

SNS Rating
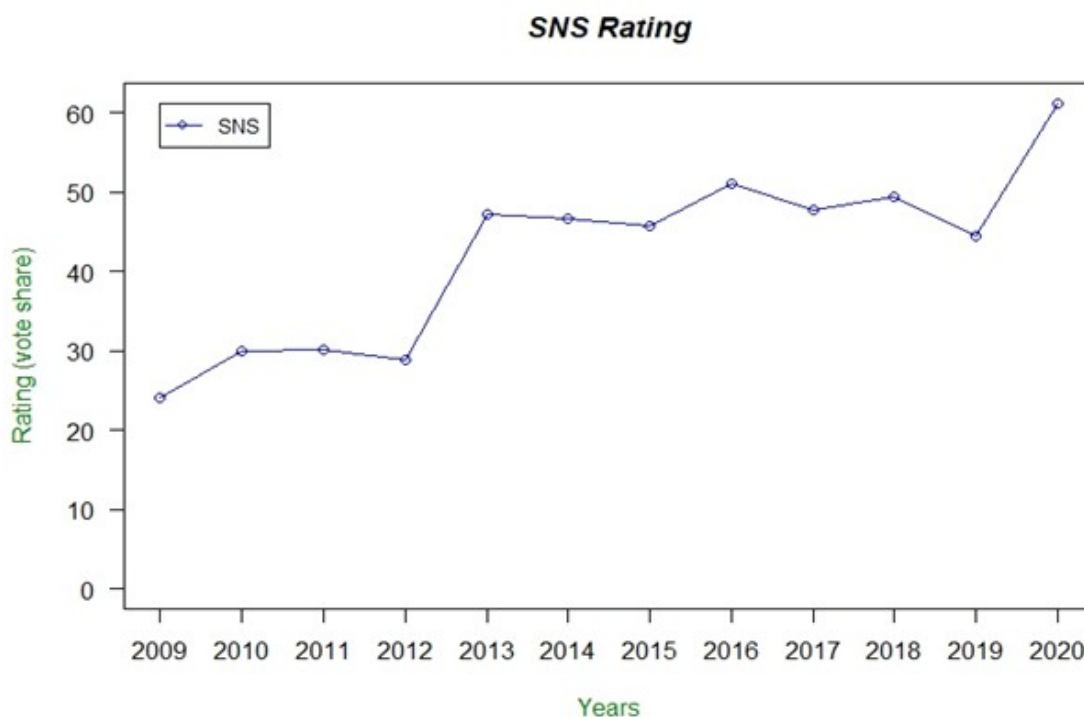
Source: Publicly available public opinion survey results conducted by IPSOS strategy and Factor Plus

Unlike the majority of political parties in Serbia, the SNS actively focused on establishing local party branches and securing the loyalty of local elites to the central party leadership (Chapter II). Following the 2016 elections, the party took control over all levels of government—local, legislative, and executive. With at least 750,000 members as of 2020, the SNS is one of the largest parties in Europe by membership (N1 Info 2020). Figure 4.1 illustrates the SNS's rise by depicting citizens' responses when asked if they would vote for the SNS in a hypothetical election held that day.

The Rise of Vucic Aleksandar Vučić was elected as the new president of the party in 2012. Vucic succeeded Tomislav Nikolić, who was president of the SNS from the party formation until being elected as president of Serbia, and who publicly endorsed Vucic as his successor. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the SNS won

around 25% of votes and became a part of the government for the first time. Vučić became the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. At this point, the SNS shifted its campaign strategy to focus on him (Lončar and Stojanović 2016). Vučić became the political individual most likely to appear on the front pages of newspapers and magazines – significantly more than President Nikolić or Prime Minister Ivica Dacic (Lončar and Stojanović 2016). Vučić was presented as a vigorous fighter of corruption and unemployment and as a hard worker who meets citizens at any hour to hear their problems, corresponding well with what Serbian citizens consider the most important characteristic for a politician: industriousness (Spasojević 2021). These highly personalized campaigns resulted in three SNS landslide victories for parliamentary elections in 2014, 2016 and 2020, with around 50% of the vote share. After the 2014 elections, Vučić became prime minister. The next step in his rise to power was his run for the presidency in 2017, challenging President Nikolić, the incumbent and the SNS's founder.

As shown in Figure 4.2, public opinion ratings, based on a five-point scale, reveal Vučić's marked advantage over Nikolić, providing insight into the party's rationale for nominating him in 2017. Before he became the party president, Vucic's rating was lower compared to Nikolić, but once he obtained the party leadership position, his rating soared. Vučić was clearly more popular than Nikolić,[3] and he went on to win the presidential election with 55% of the vote. Interestingly, the data shows that Vučić has always remained a popular figure, no matter what government position he holds: vice prime minister (2012-2014), prime minister (2014-2017), and president (2017-present). Because he is such a charismatic figure who has established a strong connection with voters, SNS elites are unwilling to desert or challenge him.

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3. The sharp decline in Nikolić's public approval ratings, illustrated by the presence of zeroes in Figure 4.2, reflects not a dramatic drop in support, but rather the cessation of public opinion surveys including questions about him after Vučić assumed the presidency. As Vučić became the central figure in Serbian politics, polling organizations reoriented their instruments to focus on him exclusively, rendering Nikolić statistically invisible in subsequent datasets.

The rise of Vucic clearly coincides with a deinstitutionalization of the SNS and parties more generally in Serbia. Until 2012, the SNS represented a political option that was in between historically pro-Western parties and ex-Milosevic regime parties. After Vucic became its president, the party shifted its campaign focus to him (Lončar, Stojanović, and Zoran Stojiljković 2015) in order to use his popularity to boost short-term electoral success. The result is that Vucic became more influential than the party itself. His influence is evident by the fact that he can scold co-partisan mayors in public (Klix.ba 2016) and decide who will represent the party in the National Assembly and local government (Beta and FoNet 2020). While Vucic rose to power, the party's institutions erode and lost its influence. Furthermore, the government follows this trend since the party controls all its branches Figure 4.3 illustrates party institutionalization scores (Bizzarro, Hicken, and Self 2017) for Serbia, as well as Hungary and Poland which follow similar trends, compared to consolidated democracies of the European Union, after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

4.5 Empirical Implications

In this section, I state observable implications based on the argument developed in the study applied to the Serbian context. The goal is to examine the influence of presidents compared to the influence of parties in their ability to shape voters' opinions about policy. However, it is not easy to empirically observe the reasons why citizens support parties. Voters may support the leader's party because that party espouses the same political principles as they do, or because they associate that party with the leader. It is especially hard to distinguish these two issues in contemporary Serbia, as party lists are usually named after their president (i.e., Aleksandar Vucic–Serbian Progressive Party) (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015). The key issue is to understand who voters would support in the case of conflicting signals by

Figure 4.2: Politicians' Ratings
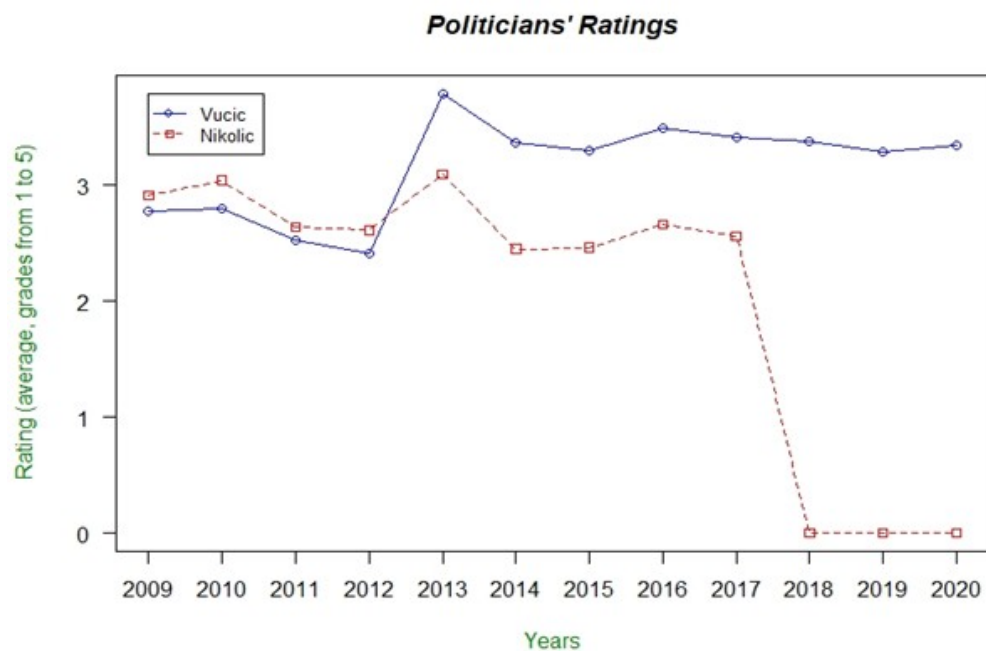
Source: Publicly available survey results conducted by IPSOS strategy and Factor Plus

Figure 4.3: Party Institutionalization Index across countries
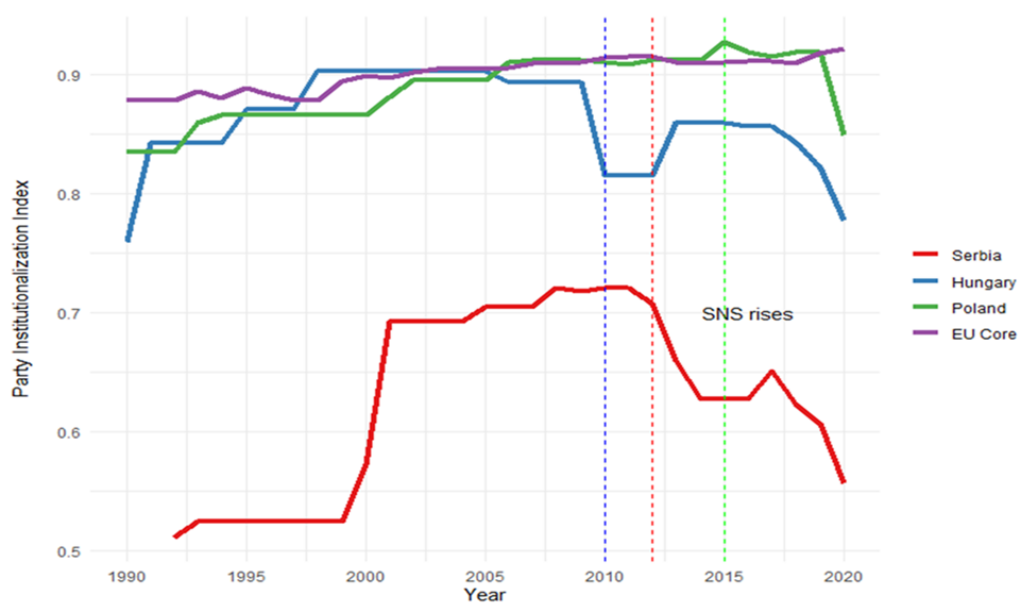
Notes: Vertical axes represent year when current ruling parties took control of governments.

cue givers, which in this case includes the party president and the party itself.

Following the example of Barber and Pope (2019), who use President Trump and his tendency to take multiple positions on multiple issues that may vary ideologically, I use SNS officials' similar tendency on some particularly important issues for Serbian society.[4] Various scholars on American politics have shown that partisanship is considered the strongest political cue; in the Serbian context, however, the endorsement of party leaders may be its equivalent (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015). Thus, there is evidence that either of these cues would potentially be successful in influencing citizens' political views. The central part of my argument is that if President Vucic's endorsement of a policy truly shapes citizens' opinions, it will move them closer to Vucic's own opinion. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1 (the president support treatment (PST)): The support for a policy by President Vucic will increase voters' support for this policy compared to individuals who do not receive any endorsement.

I expect the president's support for a policy to operate as a cue for SNS supporters. However, since subjects may assume that president Vucic's position is the same as the SNS's, we do not know if respondents' change in support for a policy is a consequence of the president's popularity or due to implicit party support. To investigate whether the president's support carries more weight with voters than the party's support, I test one more additional hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (the disagreement treatment (DT): The presence of support for a policy by President Vucic and opposition to a policy by the SNS will increase support

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4. The Kosovo issue and joining the European Union (EU). For example, Prime Minister Brnabic stated that the EU represents the only path forward for Serbia. Minister of Interior Vulin, on the other hand, voiced his opinion that Serbia should not join the EU if it requires Serbia to change the relationship with its friends (Russia and China, in particular).

for the policy compared to individuals who do not receive any endorsement.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) evaluates the impact of elite-level disagreement on voter support for a policy by isolating cases where the president and his party adopt opposing positions. If respondents implicitly assume policy alignment between the president and the party, exposure to disagreement may reduce support relative to the agreement treatment (H1). Conversely, if the president's endorsement is the primary driver of opinion formation, then voter support in the disagreement condition should remain indistinguishable from the president-only endorsement condition and exceed levels in the control group. This comparison between presidential support alone and explicit elite conflict allows us to rule out the possibility that respondents are simply responding to the appearance of elite consensus.

At the same time, the credibility of the disagreement treatment may warrant scrutiny, given the president's dominant political stature. One could reasonably ask whether respondents would even perceive such disagreement as plausible. While instances of dissent within the SNS are rare, they are not entirely absent. For example, Aleksandar Vulin, then Minister of the Interior, publicly questioned Serbia's EU accession, citing concerns over the EU's alignment with Albanian positions on Kosovo.[5] Similarly, Vladimir Djukanović, a party founder and current deputy in the National Assembly, expressed strong opposition to a government-backed law expanding same-sex marriage rights.[6] President Vučić himself has periodically threatened to marginalize party members deemed insufficiently loyal, illustrating that intraparty tensions, though uncommon, do occur.[7] These episodes provide the empirical grounding nec-

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5. https://informer.rs/politika/vesti/414684/vulin-ne-treba-nam-takva-eu-koja-nas-stavlja-u-isti-kos-sa-albancima-i-cuti-na-stvaranje-velike-albanije

6. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/godina-za-zakon-o-istopolnom-partnerstvu-u-srbiji/31025074.html

7. https://n1info.rs/vesti/vucic-preti-da-ce-da-se-pozdravi-sa-svojim-milionerima-ko-se-nalazi-na-listi-nove-srpske-elite/

essary to justify the realism of the disagreement treatment.

4.6   Research Design

Survey and Sample   To evaluate the core hypothesis, I conducted a nationwide, preregistered[8] online survey experiment in Serbia, utilizing an endorsement experiment design to assess the extent to which the Serbian president can influence voter attitudes toward specific policy outcomes. The survey was implemented through the Qualtrics platform, with participant recruitment carried out via Facebook advertisements. Given that the theoretical expectations pertain specifically to supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party, the target population for the experiment consists of Serbian citizens who either intend to vote for the SNS or express a leaning toward it.

As demonstrated by Zhang et al. (2020), Facebook offers a practical method for survey researchers aiming to approximate population-level public opinion. Furthermore, Facebook provides a significant advantage in recruiting a specific target population, which was crucial for this study focusing on SNS voters. Respondents did not receive compensation from Facebook or the survey itself. The online campaign ran from early April to early May 2025. During this period, approximately 250,000 individuals viewed the survey advertisement. Facebook analytics indicated that about 51% of the targeted users were female, and roughly two-thirds of the total respondents were located in central Serbia, closely mirroring Serbia's actual population distribution. This aligns with the findings of Zhang et al. (2020). Out of all targeted users, 10,600 clicked the ad, slightly over 2,900 opened the survey, and 1,907 completed it.

Although the targeted population appeared to approximate the general Serbian population, the subset of Facebook users who responded to the survey deviated no-

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8. https://osf.io/7az3y/

tably from a representative sample. For instance, 58% of respondents were male, 78% were over the age of 45, 38% held a university degree, 56% reported earnings above the median Serbian wage, and 33% were retired. These figures suggest the presence of selection bias, indicating that the sample is not broadly representative of the Serbian population.

Self-reported data on political engagement further underscore the sample's distinctiveness. A substantial majority–84%–stated that they had participated in the most recent national elections; 82% indicated they were either somewhat or very interested in political affairs; and 81% reported following the news at least once daily. Moreover, the respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of political knowledge: out of six questions designed to assess political awareness, the average number of correct answers was four, with a median of five.

Figure 4.4 outlines the structure of the survey. The process began with obtaining informed consent from participants. Upon agreeing to participate, respondents were presented with a screening question. Following this, the survey commenced with ten initial questions, five of which served as pre-treatment measures of key outcomes.

Subsequently, participants answered three thematic blocks of questions: demographic information, political attitudes, and political interest, participation, and knowledge. After completing these sections, respondents were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups and proceeded to answer five outcome-related questions. Finally, all participants responded to two concluding direct questions, marking the end of the survey.

After reading the survey consent form, respondents were asked the following question: *'If the election were held this weekend, how would you vote?'*

Figure 4.4: Survey Flow
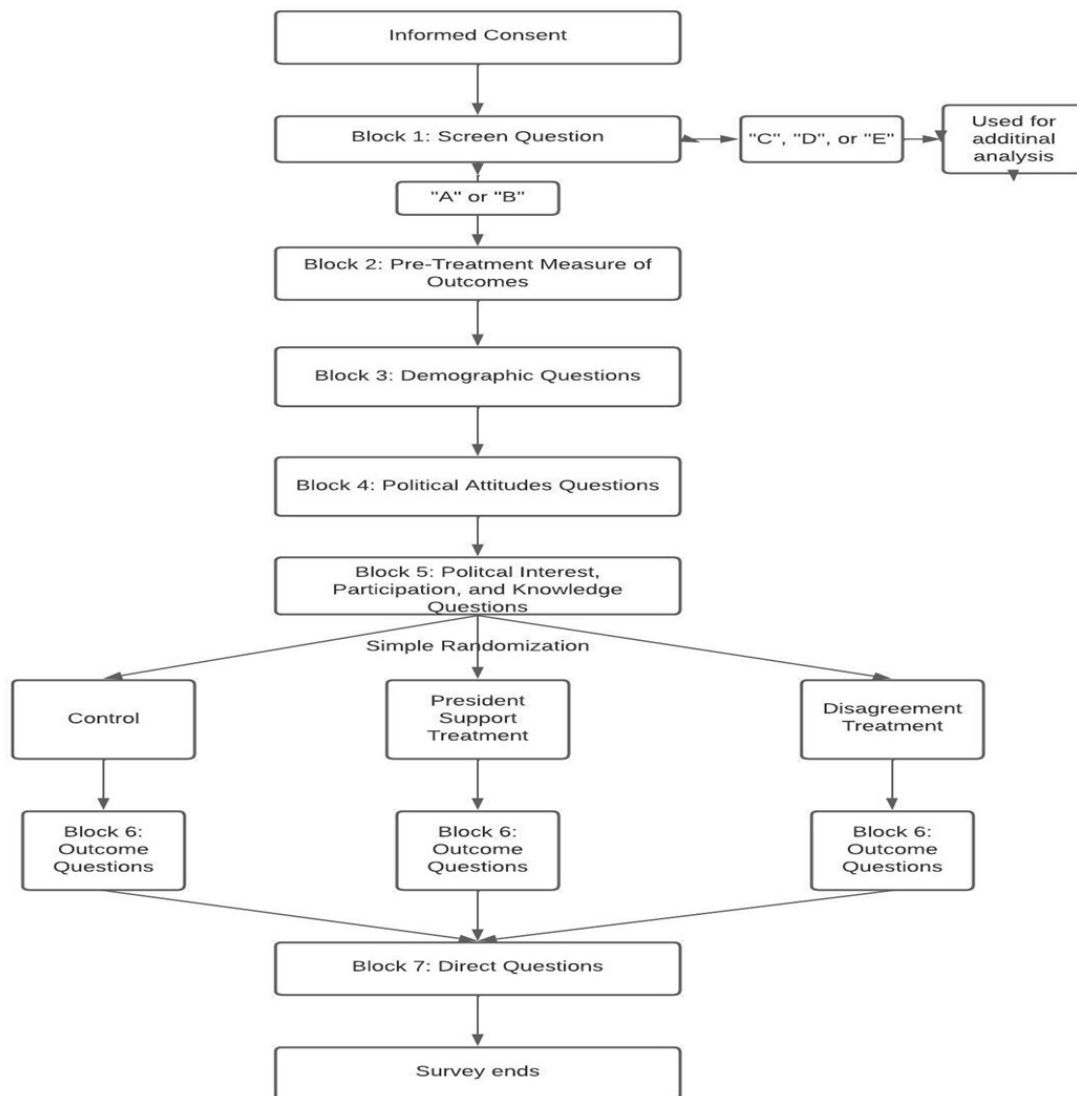
A. Vote for the coalition built around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)

B. Undecided, but leaning toward voting for the coalition built around SNS

C. Undecided, but leaning toward voting for the coalition built around the opposition parties

D. Vote for the coalition built around the opposition parties

E. Abstain from voting

Figure 4.5 presents the distribution of responses to this question among the 1,907 participants who completed the post-treatment portion of the survey. The results indicate that a majority of respondents either support or lean toward supporting the opposition. I will address this finding further in the discussion section. For the purposes of the primary analysis, only those respondents who expressed support for the SNS–specifically those who selected options 'A' or 'B'–are retained. This subgroup comprises 483 individuals. The remaining respondents are included only in supplementary analyses and the discussion section.

Treatment Respondents were randomly assigned, with equal probability, to one of two treatment conditions or a control group through simple randomization. Each participant was placed into one of the three experimental arms and presented with a series of five prompts in succession. They then answered the same set of five outcome questions. The order of these questions was randomized using the Qualtrics platform. However, the treatment content differed across groups, varying by the nature of the policy endorsements, as detailed below.

The experiment employed an endorsement design, in which respondents were asked their opinion on a series of policy proposals. In the control condition, policies were presented without any attribution to political figures. In the treatment conditions, iden-

Figure 4.5: Screen Question Results
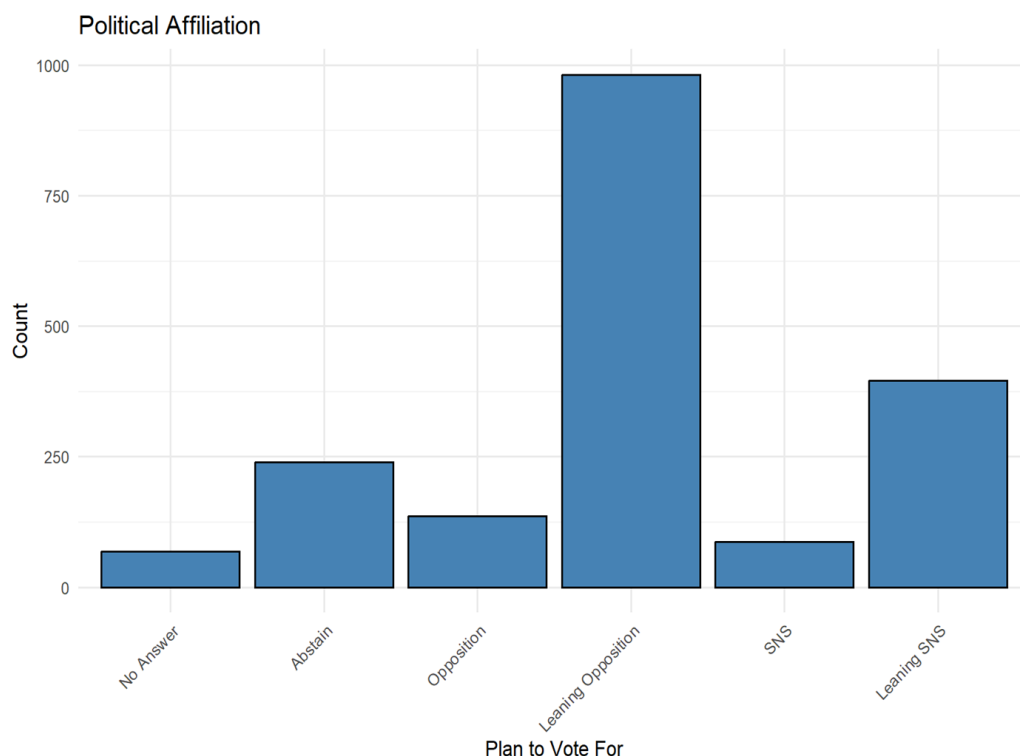
tical policy questions were preceded by endorsements from political actors who may influence public opinion. Specifically, in the Presidential Support Treatment (PST), respondents were shown the statement: *'President Vučić supports [insert policy]'* prior to answering. In the Disagreement Treatment (DT), the endorsement was presented as: *'President Vučić supports [insert policy]. The SNS party program states its opposition to [repeat policy].'* Respondents in the control group received no endorsements whatsoever, they were just asked about their support for a policy.

It is important to acknowledge that the current experimental design may permit respondents to assume that presidential support for a policy implicitly signals party endorsement as well. Ideally, this assumption would be measured directly within the survey instrument; however, due to constraints on statistical power, only indirect evidence is available. There is compelling reason to believe that many voters conflate the party with its leader. Most of the SNS's media campaigns have prominently

featured President Vučić, often at the expense of institutional branding (Lončar and Stojanović 2016). Furthermore, officials from both the government and the ruling party have publicly called for the removal of members deemed 'unfaithful to the president', reinforcing the centrality of presidential loyalty over party allegiance. This personalization is further evident in the naming of official party lists in the 2020 and 2022 parliamentary elections–*Aleksandar Vučić–For Our Children and Aleksandar Vučić–Together We Can Do Everything*, despite Vučić's ineligibility to run, as he was already serving as head of state.

Random assignment was implemented using simple randomization via the Qualtrics platform. Table 4.1 presents results from three pairwise comparisons: control vs. presidential support treatment (Model 1), control vs. disagreement treatment (Model 2), and presidential support vs. disagreement treatment (Model 3). The randomization procedure was largely successful, with no significant imbalances detected across key covariates. To further assess robustness, Appendix C provides supplementary analyses: Table C.1 compares covariate distributions between the control group and the combined treatment arms, while Table C.2 reports results from a multivariate balance check. Overall, the randomization process proved effective; only one covariate, attendance at SNS rallies, exhibited imbalance, and only within the disagreement treatment condition.

Outcomes   Respondents were asked to evaluate a series of policy proposals in order to assess their levels of support for various contemporary issues. Specifically, each participant responded to five outcome questions designed to capture public opinion on both foreign and domestic policy matters.

Two of the five outcome questions focused on Serbia's foreign policy orientation. Participants were asked to indicate their support for (1) Serbia's accession to the

Table 4.1: Balance Tests Across Subsamples

	Dependent variable:		
	Treatment		
	C vs PST	C vs DT	PST vs DT
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Gender	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.13 (0.11)	0.02 (0.05)
Age	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.004 (0.05)
Income	0.04 (0.03)	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.06** (0.03)
Education	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.002 (0.03)
Material Status	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.004 (0.03)
Investment	0.001 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.03)
Local economy	0.02 (0.02)	0.003 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.02)
Immigration	0.03 (0.03)	0.09* (0.05)	0.01 (0.02)
Democracy (support)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.001(0.05)	0.02 (0.02)
Democracy (Serbia)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.06)	0.02 (0.03)
Ideology	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.03)
Party Membership	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.04)
Attending Protests	-0.15 (0.15)	0.08 (0.27)	0.17 (0.14)
Attending SNS Rally	0.07 (0.07)	-0.36** (0.15)	-0.21*** (0.07)
Interest (politics)	0.03 (0.03)	0.002 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.03)
Follow (politics)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.04)
Constant	1.55*** (0.36)	2.94*** (0.76)	2.99*** (0.35)
Observations	269	274	291
R^2	0.05	0.06	0.09

Note: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

European Union (EU) and (2) increased cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These questions were adapted from the biannual public opinion polls conducted by the Ministry of European Integration (2020).

The remaining three outcome questions addressed domestic policy issues. Respondents were asked to evaluate their support for: (3) the reinstitution of mandatory military service, (4) a legislative bill aimed at expanding LGBTQ+ rights, and (5) a proposal to permit lithium extraction by foreign companies. These three items were original questions developed specifically for this survey.

For each outcome question, responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale: *strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.* The order of questions was randomized. The complete survey instrument in English and Serbian, including the textual treatments presented to respondents across the three experimental conditions, is provided in Appendix C.

To address concerns related to multiple comparisons and to streamline the analysis, I constructed a composite outcome index incorporating all five policy items. Following Kling, Liebman, and Katz (2007), I created a mean effects index to serve as the primary outcome variable. This approach is both statistically efficient and theoretically appropriate. Each policy item included in the index corresponds to a position publicly endorsed by President Vučić, making aggregation across these items meaningful: higher scores consistently reflect greater alignment with the president's stance. Thus, treating strong support as indicative of alignment with Vučić across all five domains allows for a valid and interpretable composite measure of presidential influence on public opinion. To assess robustness, I also disaggregate the results and report treatment effects for each individual outcome question separately in the analysis.

Estimation Strategy To evaluate the main empirical implications of this study, I estimate a linear regression model of the following form:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PTS_i + \beta_2 DT_i + \mathbf{X}'_i \theta_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{4.1}$$

where i indexes individual respondents. The dependent variable Y_i represents the respondent's outcome index, constructed as detailed in the previous section. This index serves as the primary measure of policy support across the five issues examined in the survey.

In the model, β_0 captures the average outcome in the control group; PST_i and DT_i are indicator variables for assignment to the Presidential Support Treatment and the Disagreement Treatment, respectively. The vector $\mathbf{X}'_i$ includes pre-treatment co-variates, including demographic controls and quasi-pretest measures of policy preferences, in accordance with best practices in experimental analysis (Gerber and Green 2012). The error term is denoted by ε_i. Robust standard errors are used throughout the analysis to account for heteroskedasticity.

Given the repeated-measures design, I include pre-treatment measures of political attitudes to improve precision. As a robustness check, I also estimate models using change scores, where the outcome is defined as the difference between post-treatment and pre-treatment responses.

The primary quantity of interest is the average treatment effect (ATE) among supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party. If citizens are influenced by the president independently of the party's stance, we should observe increased support for endorsed policies in both treatment conditions relative to the control group. Specifically:

- β_1 is estimate of the difference in expected outcomes between the control group

and respondents exposed solely to President Vučić's endorsement.

- β_2 is estimate of the difference in expected outcomes between the control group and respondents exposed to Vučić's endorsement accompanied by explicit SNS opposition.

Accordingly, support for arguments developed in the study requires that both treatment effects be positive, such that:

$$\beta_1 > 0 \text{ and } \beta_2 > 0$$

This pattern would indicate that endorsement by the president increases support for a policy, even when it is in conflict with the party's stated position.

Pre-Treatment Outcome Variables This study employs a repeated measures design, specifically a quasi-pretest-posttest (QPP) framework, as described by Clifford, Sheagley, and Piston (2021). This design captures the dependent variable both before and after exposure to the experimental treatment. Unlike a traditional pretest-posttest design, which measures the same dependent variable at both time points, the QPP design instead uses a closely related proxy as the pre-treatment measure. To minimize priming effects and maximize the temporal distance between measurements, the treatment block (Block 6) was placed near the end of the survey, while the quasi-pretest measures were administered earlier (Block 2).

In Block 2, respondents were asked to express their opinions on a series of international and domestic actors and policies. The exact wording of these items is provided in Appendix C. Specifically, respondents evaluated five international actors: the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), China, the Russian Federation, and the United States. They also gave their opinions on

five domestic issues: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian military, same-sex marriage, mineral extraction, and the status of Kosovo.

Incorporating pre-treatment outcomes enhances the precision and interpretability of experimental estimates, particularly in repeated-measures designs like the quasi-pretest-posttest framework. To capitalize on this advantage, I selected five conceptually aligned indicators from Block 2–attitudes toward the EU, NATO, same-sex marriage, mineral extraction, and the Serbian military–to construct a pre-treatment outcome index. These items closely mirror the post-treatment measures, allowing for improved statistical efficiency and more robust causal inference.

Demographic Covariates In addition to the pre-treatment outcome measures, the survey collected a set of demographic and socioeconomic covariates. These include gender, age, level of education, income level, and employment type, all of which are included in Appendix C, Block 3. To further contextualize respondent attitudes, participants were also asked to evaluate the current state of the economy and democracy in Serbia (Appendix C, Block 4). All of these covariates were measured prior to treatment exposure. These variables serve two primary purposes: (1) they enhance the precision of the estimated treatment effects when included in regression models, and (2) they are used to assess the success of randomization via balance tests across experimental conditions.

4.7 Results

Before turning to the analysis of the experimental results, I first discuss findings from the final section of the survey, which included two direct questions aimed at understanding the basis of support for the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). These questions were designed to assess the relative importance of President Vučić versus

the SNS as a political organization.

Given that President Vučić has publicly suggested he may retire from politics at the end of his second term in 2027, respondents were presented with a hypothetical scenario in which the president and the party diverge. In Question 33, SNS supporters were asked: *'If there were a political conflict between President Vučić and the SNS, whom would you support in a future election?'* In Question 34, they were asked to identify the main reason for their support of the SNS.

Figure 4.6 displays the distribution of responses to both questions. The results provide additional evidence in support of the argument. A clear majority of SNS supporters indicated that, in the event of a conflict, they would back the candidate endorsed by President Vučić rather than the one supported by the party. This finding suggests that Vučić's personal influence may outweigh the institutional loyalty to the party itself.

Similarly, although to a somewhat lesser extent, many respondents identified President Vučić as the primary reason for their support of the SNS. Interestingly, a significant portion of respondents also cited the lack of better alternatives as more important than the party's policy platform or ideological program.

Taken together, these responses reinforce the central claim of the study: that President Vučić exerts a stronger influence over SNS voters than the party organization itself.

To rigorously test the stated hypothesis, I applied the estimation strategy outlined above. Table 4.2 presents a summary of the main findings. Model 1 uses the mean effects index of the post-treatment responses as the dependent variable, controlling

Figure 4.6: Direct Questions
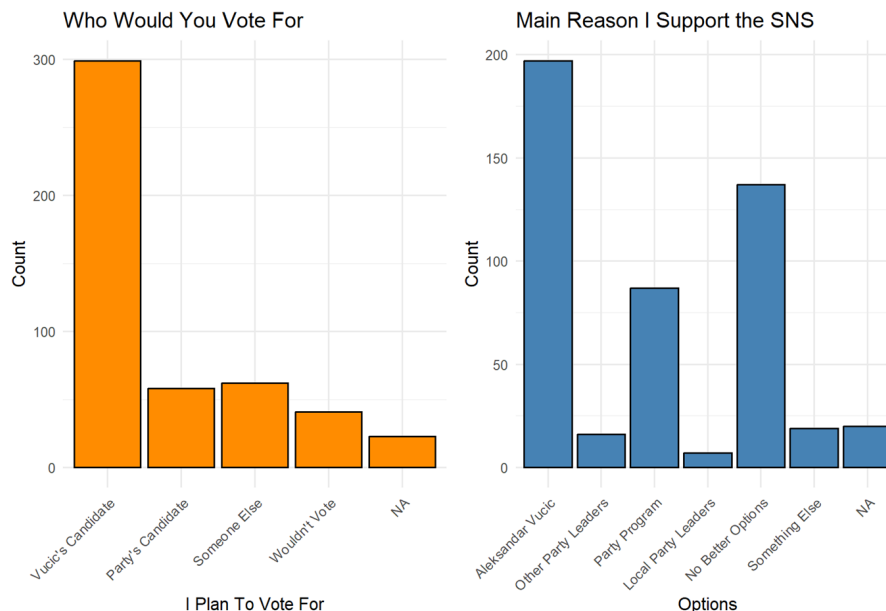
for pre-treatment outcome covariates. Model 2 employs the change score,[9] defined as the difference between post-treatment and pre-treatment indices, as the outcome variable. Although all four treatment coefficients point in the expected direction, the results do not provide statistically significant support for the hypothesis. Table C.3 replicates the results controlling for individual characteristics.

Table 4.3 extends this analysis by examining each outcome question separately. The individual-level results mirror those of the aggregated index, offering no empirical evidence to support the argument developed in the study. Similarly, Table C.4 replicates the results controlling for individual characteristics.

One possible problem with my results is that the experiment was underpowered. Prior to launching the Facebook ad campaign, I conducted a power analysis to estimate the minimum sample size required to detect a meaningful treatment effect (appendix C3). The analysis assumed a treatment effect size of 0.2 standard devi-

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9. This version of the outcome was not pregegistered.

Table 4.2: Main Findings (Index)

	Dependent variable:	
	Outcome Index (posttreatment) (1)	Outcome Index (difference) (2)
President Support Treatment (PST)	0.005 (0.062)	0.092 (0.093)
Disagreement Treatment (DT)	0.074 (0.062)	0.105 (0.090)
Outcome Index (pre)	0.140*** (0.038)	
Constant	0.540*** (0.088)	0.209* (0.126)
Observations	478	478
R^2	0.034	0.003
Residual Std. Error	0.549 (df = 473)	0.796 (df = 474)
F Statistic	4.120*** (df = 4; 473)	0.530 (df = 3; 474)

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Notes: OLS models. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4.3: Main Findings (Individual Questions)

	Dependent Variable:				
	EU (post) (1)	NATO (post) (2)	LGBTQ (post) (3)	Military (post) (4)	Minerals (post) (5)
PST	0.226 (0.248)	0.327 (0.236)	0.015 (0.198)	-0.211 (0.188)	-0.070 (0.241)
DT	0.626** (0.245)	0.547** (0.219)	0.139 (0.187)	-0.188 (0.170)	-0.065 (0.225)
EU (pre)	0.628*** (0.066)				
NATO (pre)		0.476*** (0.102)			
LGBTQ (pre)			0.464*** (0.103)		
Military (pre)				0.630*** (0.081)	
Minerals (pre)					0.622*** (0.050)
Constant	0.982*** (0.207)	0.979*** (0.202)	0.830*** (0.170)	2.196*** (0.544)	1.124*** (0.269)
Observations	373	327	336	454	417
Adjusted R^2	0.284	0.169	0.191	0.239	0.287
Residual Std. Error	1.903 (df = 369)	1.683 (df = 323)	1.454 (df = 332)	1.555 (df = 450)	1.936 (df = 413)
F Statistic	50.111*** (df = 3; 369)	23.146*** (df = 3; 323)	27.303*** (df = 3; 332)	48.467*** (df = 3; 450)	56.766*** (df = 3; 413)

Note: $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

Note: OLS models. Robust SE.

ations, with statistical power k=0.8 and a significance level α of 0.05. The results indicated that, with approximately 1,100 to 1,200 respondents evenly distributed across the three experimental arms, and when incorporating pre-treatment covariates correlated with outcomes, the study would have about an 80% chance of detecting significant effects for both treatments (i.e., $\beta_1 > 0$ & $\beta_2 > 0$ 0). Without accounting for covariates, the required sample size increases to around 1,400 respondents.

The survey sample includes a relatively small number of SNS supporters. Given the current political climate in Serbia and the widespread use of social media among opposition supporters, it is possible that some potential SNS voters felt uncomfortable disclosing their support for the ruling party. I address this broader context in the discussion section of the paper.

To account for this potential bias, my analysis includes not only declared opposition and SNS supporters but also respondents who reported that they do not plan to vote in the upcoming elections, as well as those who skipped the question on vote intention.[10] In Table C.5 (Appendix C), I compare this expanded group with the original voter-identified sample across the same 15 covariates used to assess randomization success in Table 1. No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups.

Table 4.4 replicates the main analysis using this expanded sample of respondents. All four coefficients are in the expected direction, and three are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Notably, the disagreement treatment, compared to the control group, has a stronger effect: citizen support for a policy increases more when the president endorses it in opposition to his own party. This suggests that visible intra-party conflict, when the president breaks with party lines, can enhance his persuasive

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10. This analysis was not preregistered.

power among voters.

It is also plausible that some respondents, particularly those employed in the public sector or reliant on state-affiliated institutions—may not ideologically support the ruling party but nonetheless vote for it to safeguard employment, access to resources, or other privileges. This instrumental logic of political support, rooted in job security or clientelist incentives, may further complicate the interpretation of declared vote intention. By incorporating non-voters and non-respondents into the analysis, I aim to partially account for this strategic dimension of electoral behavior.

Table 4.4: Main Findings (Expanded Sample)

	Dependent variable:	
	Outcome Index (posttreatment) (1)	Outcome Index (difference) (2)
President Support Treatment (PST)	0.079	0.150**
	(0.051)	(0.072)
Disagreement Treatment (DT)	0.159***	0.165***
	(0.050)	(0.069)
Outcome Index (pre)	0.241***	
	(0.035)	
Constant	0.311***	0.179*
	(0.036)	(0.051)
Observations	755	755
Adjusted R^2	0.091	0.006
Residual Std. Error	0.564 (df = 751)	0.777 (df = 752)

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Notes: OLS models. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

4.8   Discussion and Conclusion

The direct questions suggest that President Vučić is a highly influential political figure, particularly among potential SNS voters. However, the regression analysis' support for this hypothesis is less convincing. What might explain this discrepancy?

To begin with, I have already addressed concerns about the experiment's statistical power. Another potential issue lies in the survey's length. It included 34 questions, with key outcome measures placed near the end to separate them from the pretreatment items. However, many respondents dropped off before completing the survey. On average, it took approximately 14 minutes to complete, with three-quarters of respondents finishing within 16 minutes. In retrospect, I would shorten the survey in future iterations by removing less essential questions to reduce fatigue and improve completion rates.

Another potential explanation for the unexpected results is the presence of unobserved factors influencing respondents' answers. To investigate this possibility, I examined how frequently respondents increased their level of support for the outcome questions relative to their pre-treatment responses. Figure 4.7 illustrates these patterns.

Overall, the data reveals a general tendency for respondents to increase their support for the policies after treatment exposure. In particular, approximately 40% of respondents showed increased support for the EU and NATO-related questions across all treatment conditions. Smaller, yet notable, increases are evident for the other policy questions as well.

Importantly, a similar upward shift in support is also observed within the control group, which did not receive any endorsements from political actors. This trend

Figure 4.7: Mean Increase Trends Across Treatments
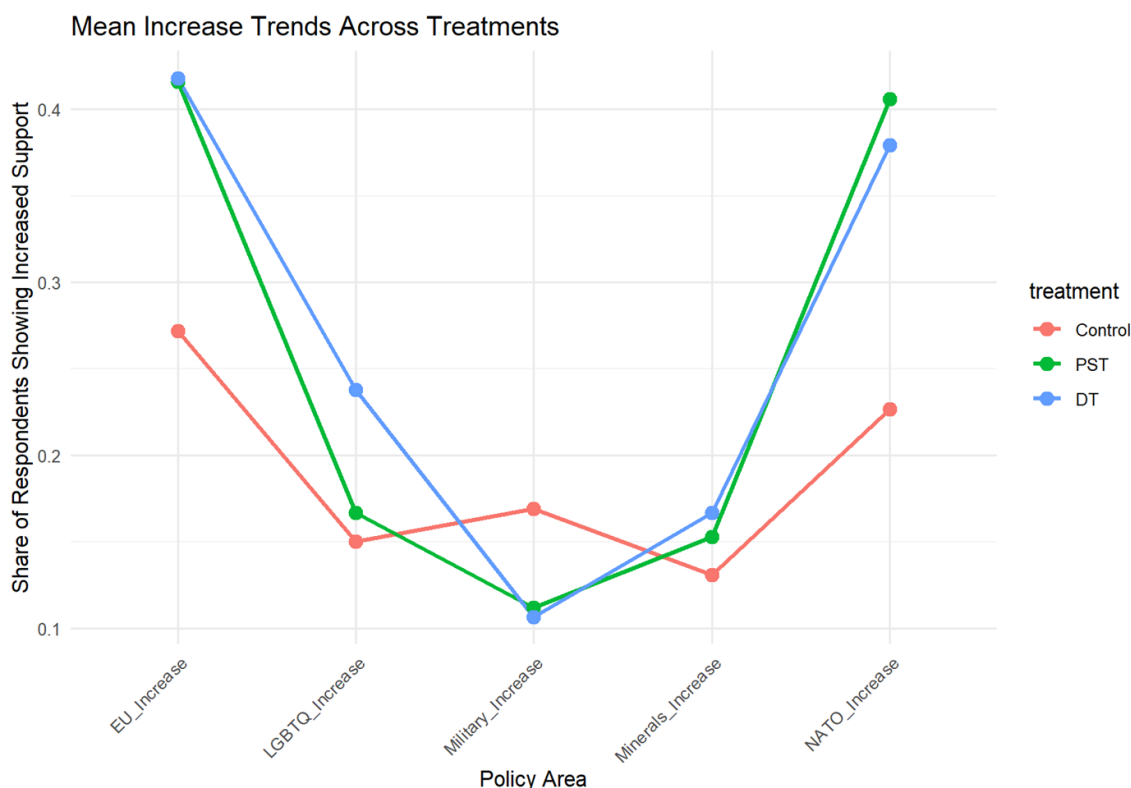
is unexpected, as one would anticipate no systematic change in the control group's responses. The presence of such an increase in the control condition suggests that factors beyond the experimental manipulation may be driving shifts in respondents' reported support.

Finally, there is another explanation for the observed results that is not rooted in data analysis but rather in the broader political context during the survey period. The survey was conducted between April and May 2025, a particularly turbulent time in Serbia. Following a tragic accident in Novi Sad, the country's second-largest city, which resulted in the deaths of 16 people in November 2024, widespread protests were organized against the government and the ruling party. One immediate consequence was the resignation of Prime Minister Miloš Vučević and the mayor of Novi Sad. These protests remain ongoing, and given the restricted media environment in Serbia, social

networks have played a crucial role in mobilizing anti-government supporters.

My Facebook advertisement ran for one month during this volatile period and attracted over 300 comments on the post. Most comments were hostile toward the research team, with frequent accusations that the survey was orchestrated by the SNS and that I was working on behalf of the government. Initially, the first 800 to 900 respondents completed the survey in full. However, as negative comments became visible and circulated, engagement quality declined sharply. While clicks on the survey link increased, many of the last 2,000 respondents who consented rarely completed the entire survey, which negatively impacted the data quality.

This context may explain why my sample does not align with typical findings from established public opinion research agencies in Serbia. Notably, the majority of respondents in my sample expressed support for the opposition, a finding inconsistent with election results since 2012. Possible explanations include electoral fraud, a genuine rise in anti-government sentiment and declining support for the ruling party, or that opposition supporters are more active on social media and thus disproportionately represented in my survey.

Trust in public opinion research in Serbia has historically been low. During the 2012 presidential election, all major research firms predicted a victory for the incumbent president, Boris Tadić, who ultimately lost to SNS candidate Tomislav Nikolić. Following the election, a scandal emerged when a research marketing director admitted to errors in polling. This incident reinforced the perception that research agencies tend to favor the ruling party, which is their primary client. Under President Vučić's tenure, this skepticism has intensified, as he is known to be a frequent consumer of public opinion research.

When I attempted to conduct my survey in Serbia, many research agencies either ceased communication after learning the study's political focus or declined to conduct politically sensitive public opinion research altogether. Recently, the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability–a Serbian NGO known for its critical stance toward the government–published findings indicating widespread dissatisfaction with President Vučić's rule. The president publicly dismissed these results, accusing the NGO of lacking the expertise to conduct proper public opinion research. In summary, there is widespread mistrust of public opinion research in Serbia, which profoundly affects the willingness of citizens to participate openly and the reliability of collected data.

The results show that the second treatment—where the president supports a policy opposed by both the party and its official program—is more likely to generate public support for the policy and strengthen alignment with the president, compared to the control group. This finding has important implications for intraparty dynamics. It suggests that the president, recognizing the strength of voter support, can exert greater influence over the party and reshape it according to his preferences. Party members who disagree face a difficult choice: either fall in line with the leader or risk leaving the party—and likely losing their office.

These dynamics underscore the role of voters in shaping intraparty democracy, which can, over time, influence the broader democratic institutions of a country. Ironically, this influence may run counter to what voters actually want. As shown in Figure 4.8, both SNS and opposition voters agree that democracy is the best form of government (average support is around 3.4 out of 4). Yet their evaluations of democracy in Serbia diverge sharply: opposition supporters rate it poorly (1.6 out of 4), while SNS supporters see it more positively (3.4 out of 4).

Figure 4.8: Support for and Evaluation of Democracy
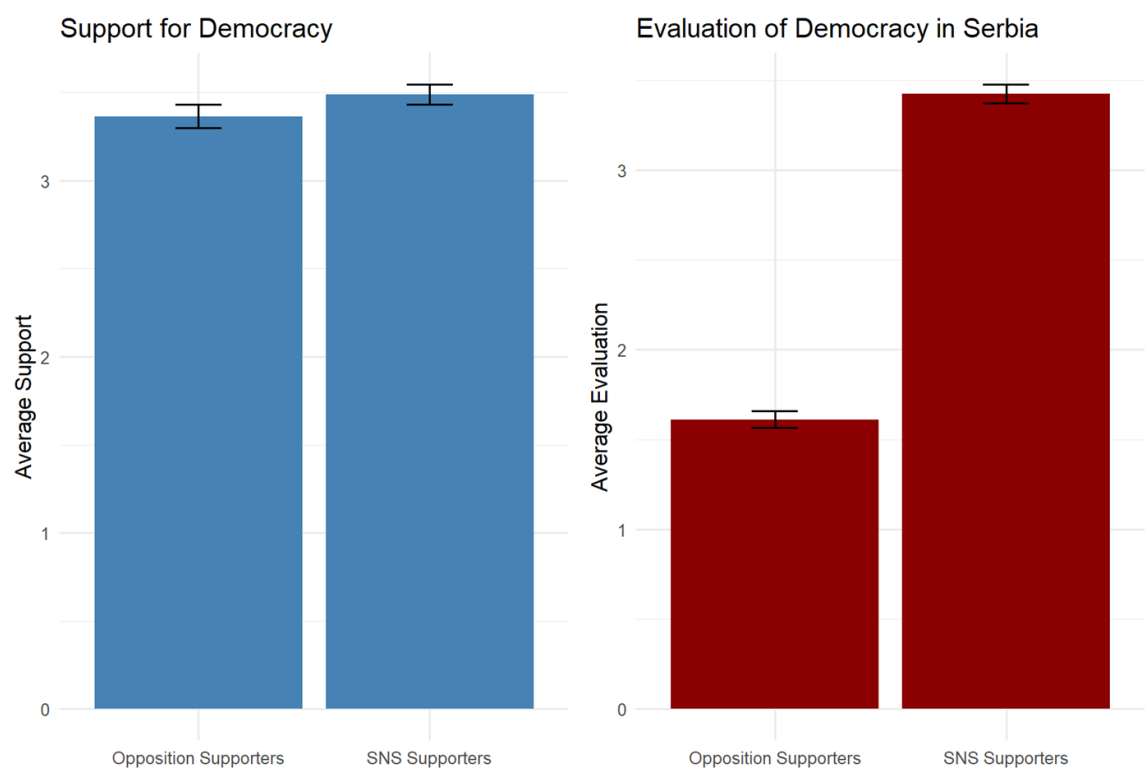
Appendix A

Supplemental Appendix for Chapter 2

A.1   Serbia and Foreign Direct Investments

Why would Serbia promote foreign investments? Milosevic and Miljkovic (2017) point out potential benefits. FDI presents a unique chance to generate a large number of jobs, that should in the long run increase wages and domestic consumption while reducing unemployment in the short term. In addition, it allows for the inflow of badly needed capital. Next, foreign investments lead to technology transfers which allow the workforce to perfect their skills and be more competitive on the job market. Further, they explain the role of FDI on municipalities' budgets and how it can improve tourism in the area. Finally, a lot of foreign companies create partnerships with local educational institutions, support athletic teams, and conduct similar community-oriented activities through their Corporate Social Responsibility budgets. However, these projects can also have a negative effect, specifically competition for local companies and a negative influence on the environment.

Milosevic and Miljkovic (2017) also offer an explanation of why foreign companies would invest in Serbia. First and foremost, companies can save money. Income in Serbia is among the lowest in Europe. In addition, Serbia has an advantageous geographical position and fertile soil. With highways and train tracks that are part of European corridors, and through the Danube, there is easy access to a majority of the continent. Next, Serbia is a candidate for the European Union and has tariff-free access to the market, and also has a treaty with Russia with similar conditions. Further, companies expand their business and implement horizontal and vertical integration. Finally, the highly educated workforce, where a majority of the younger population speaks English, presents a good opportunity for communication with foreign managers.

A.2 Figures

A.2.1 FDI Allocation Trends

Figure A.1: FDI Allocation Among Strongholds and Competitive District
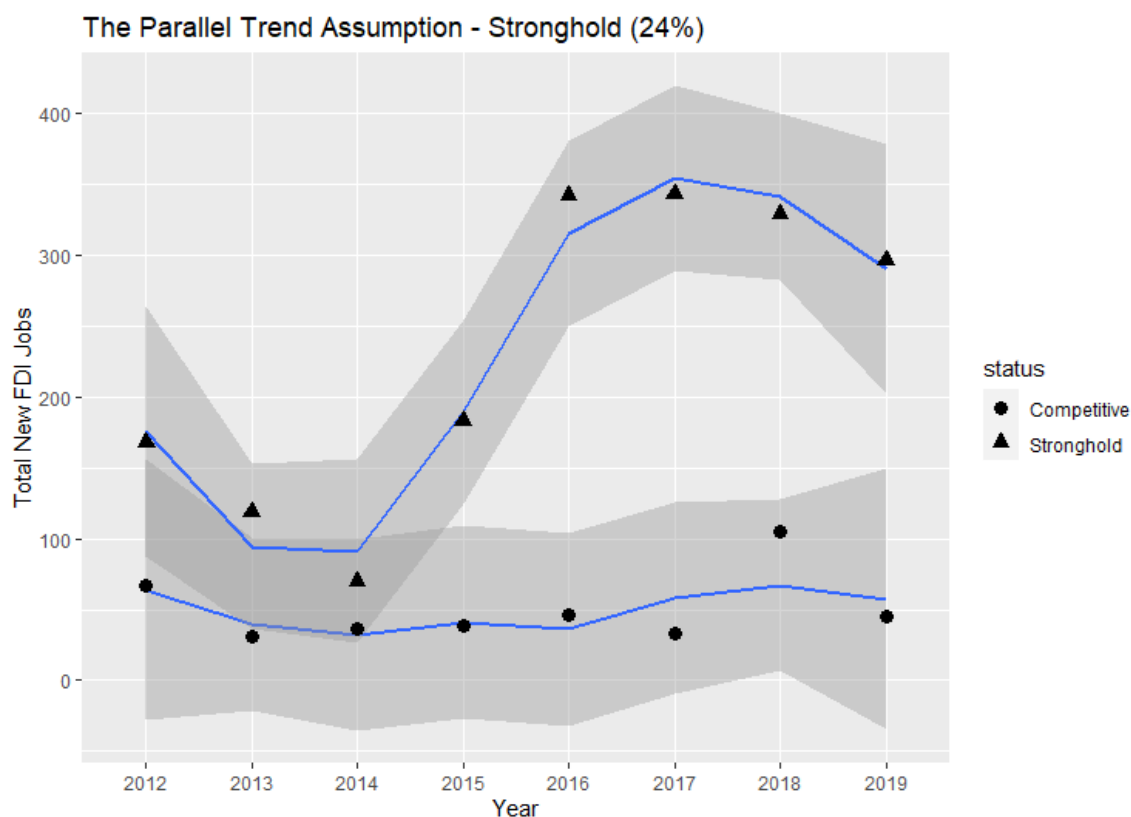
A.2.2 Sensitivity Analysis

Figure A.2: Sensitivity Analysis
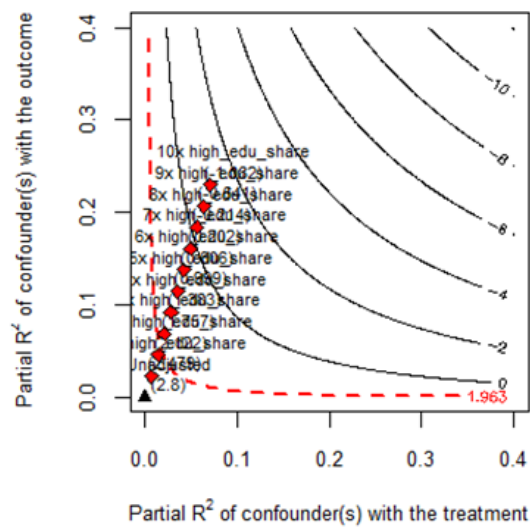
A.3 Tables

A.3.1 Robustness Checks

Table A.1: Robustness Checks

Dependent variable: Jobs Created	County Cluster		Without Belgrade	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
SNS_Stronghold_1 × post2016	158.257*		58.210	
	(88.344)		(35.435)	
SNS_Stronghold_2 × post2016		203.231**		110.270***
		(85.779)		(40.734)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	976	976	936	936
Adjusted R^2	0.562	0.565	0.254	0.257

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$. OLS models using the specification from Equation 1. Robust standard errors clustered at the county (Models 1 and 2) and municipality level (Models 3 and 4) are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of new jobs created by greenfield FDI projects.

A.3.2 Different Outcomes (SNS_Stronghold_1)

Table A.2: Different Outcomes (SNS_Stronghold_1)

Dependent variable:	fDi Market - Greenfield					NALED	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
SNS_Stronghold × post2016	0.131	0.129	115.941	0.272	737.419*	1.055***	1.170***
	(0.087)	(0.096)	(89.047)	(0.257)	(430.663)	(0.367)	(0.384)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	976	976	976	976	976	976	976
Adjusted R^2	0.871	0.584	0.670	0.443	0.602	0.717	0.718

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$. OLS models using the specification from Equation 1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variables are, in order:
(1) Number of greenfield projects; (2) Number of large greenfield projects; (3) Log of jobs created; (4) Value of total investments; (5) Number of jobs accumulated over the period; (6) Number of greenfield and brownfield projects; (7) Number of greenfield, brownfield, and privatizations.

A.3.3 Different Outcomes (SNS_Stronghold_2)

Table A.3: Different Outcomes

Dependent variable:	fDi Market					NALED	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
SNS_Stronghold × post2016	0.206**	0.211**	121.761	0.437**	800.608*	0.463	0.584
	(0.089)	(0.095)	(86.281)	(0.219)	(419.983)	(0.426)	(0.445)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	976	976	976	976	976	976	976
Adjusted R^2	0.871	0.586	0.671	0.444	0.605	0.710	0.711

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$. OLS models using the specification from Equation 1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variables are, in order:
(1) Number of greenfield projects; (2) Number of large greenfield projects; (3) Log of jobs created; (4) Value of total investments; (5) Number of jobs accumulated over the period; (6) Number of greenfield and brownfield projects; (7) Number of greenfield, brownfield, and privatizations.

A.3.4   Different Types of Transfers

Table A.4: Different Transfers (SNS_Stronghold_2)

Dependent variable:	Transfers (log) (1)	Subsidies (log) (2)	Donations (log) (3)
SNS_Stronghold × post2016	-0.125	-0.335*	-0.382
	(0.162)	(0.181)	(0.435)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y
Observations	944	944	944
Adjusted R^2	0.419	0.726	0.406

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$. OLS models using the specification from Equation 1. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variables are: (1) the natural log of formula-based transfers, (2) the natural log of discretionary subsidies, and (3) the natural log of foreign donations.

A.3.5 Core, Swing and Deputy Hypotheses

Table A.5: Testing Core, Swing, and MP Hypotheses

Dependent variable: Jobs Created	Core Voter (1)	Swing Voter (2)	Close Elections (3)	Deputies' Influence (4)
Presidential SNS Vote Share	-7.743			
	(5.195)			
Parliamentary SNS Vote Share		-8.160*		
		(4.736)		
Close Elections			-81.081*	
			(45.674)	
Deputies				-65.107
				(49.447)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200
Adjusted R^2	0.487	0.484	0.483	0.482

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of new jobs created by greenfield FDI projects.

A.3.6 Core (alternative) , Swing and Deputy Hypotheses

Table A.6: Testing Core (Alternative), Swing, and MP Hypotheses

Dependent variable: Jobs Created	Core Voter (1)	Swing Voter (2)	Close Elections (3)	Deputies' Influence (4)
Presidential SNS MoV	-4.036			
	(2.869)			
Parliamentary SNS MoV		-1.845		
		(1.497)		
Close Elections			-81.081*	
			(45.674)	
Deputies				-65.107
				(49.447)
Municipality FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200
Adjusted R^2	0.480	0.482	0.483	0.482

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are shown in parentheses. The dependent variable is the number of new jobs created by greenfield FDI projects.

A.3.7 Stronghold Distribution

Table A.7: Stronghold Distribution

Dependent variable:	Stronghold.17 (1)	Stronghold.24 (2)
Danube	1.609**	0.688
	(0.702)	(0.571)
Highway	-0.163	-0.176
	(0.420)	(0.413)
Development Level	0.072	0.008
	(0.226)	(0.221)
University Center	-1.035	-1.530
	(1.084)	(1.107)
Higher Education (share)	-5.023	-3.685
	(7.086)	(6.877)
High School (share)	9.154**	7.924*
	(4.389)	(4.294)
Population (log)	0.433	0.538
	(0.347)	(0.332)
Age (average)	0.085	0.118
	(0.090)	(0.092)
Minority	-0.836	-0.448
	(0.666)	(0.671)
Gross Earning	-0.00000	0.00002
	(0.00003)	(0.00003)
Vojvodina	0.115	-0.354
	(0.519)	(0.500)
Constant	-11.010	-14.304**
	(7.056)	(6.887)
Controls	Y	Y
Observations	150	150
Akaike Inf. Crit.	203.198	210.706

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

A.4   Data Description

Outcomes   The outcome of interest is FDI project allocation. These projects can be classified into three types. Greenfield projects are projects where foreign companies build their own facilities from scratch and train and employ new workers. Brownfield projects also train and employ new workers but use existing infrastructure and facilities. Finally, privatization exploits existing infrastructure and maintains previously employed workers. Here I focus on greenfield projects for two reasons. First, as projects that are completely new–in terms of facilities and personnel–they are the types of projects for which central leaders can claim the most credit. Second, the quality of the data for greenfield projects is substantially higher. The primary dependent variable is the accumulated total number of jobs created by greenfield FDI projects in a municipality-year (*jobs_created*). Later, I discuss some alternative measures to check for the robustness of the results. The data are coded at the firm level; thus, I aggregate up to the municipality-year level. The data comes from the fDi Markets database that contains only greenfield projects, in this case cross-border investments in new physical projects or the expansion of existing facilities, but not cross-border mergers and acquisitions. This is suitable for the analysis here since these projects request an explicit location decision.

Electoral Competitiveness   Municipalities are split into two different groups based on their local electoral competitiveness, which is measured by the ruling party's margin of victory or loss in the local elections. The treatment is coded as a dummy variable that takes on a value of one if a municipality is the party's stronghold. A municipality is considered a local stronghold if the ruling party's margin of victory exceeds 17.7% (*SNS_Stronghold_17*) or 24% (*SNS_Stronghold_24*). I choose these thresholds because they represent the average margin of victory of the ruling party across all municipalities regardless of which party is in power (MoV 17.7%) as well

as across only SNS-ruled municipalities (MoV 24%).

Control variables In order to control for potential confounders, I include a series of economic and administrative measures. First, I include the employment rate (*employment_rate*). The supply of available labor may affect wages, and consequently investment and employment decisions by the firms. The employment rate may also affect voting behavior, as it may increase ruling party vote share since there is a larger amount of people dependent on social programs. Next, I include a municipality's population (*population_total* and *population_log*), average age (*age_average*), the proportion of high school-educated people in the population (*hs_share*), and a dummy for whether the municipality has a university within its borders (*university_center*) as various measures of human capital. Human capital represents one of the most important factors sought by companies when deciding to invest in a municipality (Milosevic and Miljkovic 2017). In addition, SNS voters are older and less likely to have a university degree (Stojiljković, Spasojević, Lončar, et al. 2015). Furthermore, as a level of infrastructure development, I leverage a government regulation that assigned every municipality to a level of development (*level*) based on their GDP per capita. Based on the regulation, all municipalities are ranked in five different categories of development.[1] Moreover, I create a binary indicator for municipalities where national minorities exceed the local Serbian population (*minority*) to account for potential SNS electoral results, as minorities are usually represented by ethnic minority-focused parties. Next, I include binary variables denoting whether or not the Danube flows through the municipality (*Danube*), as well as the presence of a highway within the municipality's borders (*highway*), as they allow faster transport of products to the European Union, which could impact investors' choice of location. Additionally, binary indicators for the City of Belgrade and the larger Belgrade Dis-

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1. Category 1 has 20 municipalities whose GDP is higher than average GDP of Serbia; category 2 has 34 municipalities (80%-100% of GDP); Category 3 has 47 municipalities (60-80%); Category 4 has 25 municipalities (50-60%); and Category 5 has 19 municipalities (less than 50%).

trict (*Belgrade*) and Vojvodina region (*Vojvodina*) are included to account for regions that have been traditionally more developed. Finally, I control for the number of national deputies on the SNS lists (*deputies*) that are residents of a municipality to account for the possibility that they may use their influence to push projects into their municipality. Also, they could use their personal prestige to boost the party's local branch vote share.

Appendix B

Supplemental Appendix for Chapter 3

B.1 Tables

B.1.1 Balance Check I

Table B.1: Balance Check I

	Dependent variable: Observers Presence	
	CRTA	OSCE
	(1)	(2)
Belgrade District	2.189***	-0.268**
	(0.123)	(0.123)
Invalid Votes (2017)	-0.011	-0.007
	(0.011)	(0.009)
Registered Voters (2017)	-0.0002	0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.0004)
Voter Turnout (2017)	-0.449	-0.817

Table B.1: Balance Check I

	Dependent variable: Observers Presence	
	CRTA	OSCE
	(1)	(2)
	(0.650)	(0.532)
Vucic Vote Share (2017)	-0.577	-1.568***
	(0.517)	(0.410)
Vucic Win (2017)	0.215	-0.053
	(0.180)	(0.186)
Invalid Votes (2016)	-0.002	0.002
	(0.006)	(0.004)
Registered Voters (2016)	0.0002	-0.0002
	(0.001)	(0.0004)
Voter Turnout (2016)	0.778	1.488***
	(0.667)	(0.551)
SNS Vote Share (2016)	0.203	-0.733
	(0.556)	(0.456)
SNS Win (2016)	0.055	0.544**
	(0.255)	(0.214)
Constant	-3.028***	-1.957***
	(0.408)	(0.339)
Observations	7,645	7,645
Log Likelihood	-2,022.823	-2,694.707
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,069.646	5,413.414

Note: $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.1.2 Balance Check II

Table B.2: Balance Check II

	Dependent variable: Observers Presence	
	(1)	(2)
SNS Parliament Victory (2012)	0.213	0.099
	(0.181)	(0.127)
SNS Presidential Victory (2012)	-0.115	0.214
	(0.195)	(0.138)
Vojvodina	0.118	0.403**
	(0.244)	(0.179)
Danube	0.049	0.058
	(0.210)	(0.152)
Highway	-0.010	0.215**
	(0.148)	(0.103)
Development Level	-0.004	-0.002
	(0.093)	(0.068)
University Center	-0.239	0.245
	(0.397)	(0.278)
Wage	-0.00001	-0.00001
	(0.00001)	(0.00001)
Employed Citizens	-0.00001	0.00001
	(0.00002)	(0.00001)
Age (average)	0.021	0.022
	(0.032)	(0.023)
Square (km)	-0.0001	-0.0005
	(0.0004)	(0.0003)
Number of Towns	-0.0004	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.003)
High School Degree (share)	-0.449	2.341**
	(1.556)	(1.183)
College Degree (share)	-0.661	-1.379

Table B.2: Balance Check II

	Dependent variable: Observers Presence	
	(1)	(2)
	(3.624)	(2.518)
Population (log)	-0.002	-0.284*
	(0.217)	(0.159)
Employment (rate)	0.855	-1.492**
	(0.554)	(0.628)
Deputies	0.076	0.033
	(0.112)	(0.088)
Minority Area	-0.082	0.447***
	(0.235)	(0.158)
Central Transfers	0.00002	-0.0001**
	(0.0001)	(0.00004)
Foreign Donations	-0.0003	0.0005
	(0.0005)	(0.0003)
Subsidies	0.00004	0.0001
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Jobs Created (FDI)	0.00000	0.0001*
	(0.00004)	(0.00003)
Constant	-3.391	0.069
	(3.379)	(2.447)
Observations	6,648	6,648
Log Likelihood	-1,357.764	-2,225.707
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,761.529	4,497.414

Note: *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$

B.1.3   Results (H1)–Figure 3

Table B.3: Main Results (H1)

	SNS		Vucic		SNS / Vucic	
	Dependent variable: Ruling Party Vote Share					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
CRTA Observers	0.001	-0.007				
	(0.006)	(0.006)				
OSCE Observers			-0.028***	-0.034***		
			(0.005)	(0.005)		
OSCE (Network) Observers					-0.036***	-0.047***
					(0.004)	(0.004)
Belgrade District	-0.147***	-0.212***	-0.145***	-0.213***	-0.144***	-0.211***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.492***	0.676***	0.495***	0.679***	0.497***	0.682***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Observations	7,947	7,947	7,947	7,947	7,947	7,947
Adjusted R^2	0.104	0.218	0.108	0.223	0.111	0.229
Residual Std. Error (df = 7944)	0.144	0.136	0.144	0.136	0.143	0.135
F Statistic (df = 2; 7944)	463.401***	1,106.848***	480.715***	1,140.126***	499.083***	1,184.391***

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.1.4   Results (H2)

Table B.4: Main Results (H2)

	Dependent variable: Voter Turnout Rate	
	(1)	(2)
CRTA Observers	-0.003	
	(0.005)	
OSCE Observers		-0.004
		(0.004)
Belgrade District	-0.027***	-0.028***
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Constant	0.618***	0.618***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	7,947	7,947
Adjusted R^2	0.007	0.007
F Statistic	28.445***	28.676***

Note: $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.1.5 Spillover Effects (No Belgrade District)

Table B.5: Spillover Effects (No Belgrade District)

	Dependent variable			
	SNS %	Vucic %	SNS %	Vucic %
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
CRTA Observers	-0.001	-0.003		
	(0.014)	(0.014)		
OSCE Observers			-0.009	-0.009
			(0.009)	(0.009)
Constant	0.448***	0.622***	0.449***	0.623***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Observations	1,847	1,847	1,847	1,847
R^2	0.00000	0.00003	0.001	0.001

Note: $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.1.6 Opposition Results

Table B.6: Opposition Results

	Parliament (1)	President (2)	Parliament (3)	President (4)	Parliament (5)	President (6)
	Dependent variable: Opposition Vote Share					
CRTA	0.0004	-0.002				
	(0.003)	(0.004)				
OSCE			0.022***	0.029***		
			(0.002)	(0.003)		
OSCE (Network)					0.030***	0.040***
					(0.002)	(0.003)
Belgrade District	0.141***	0.174***	0.141***	0.172***	0.139***	0.170***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Constant	0.081***	0.112***	0.078***	0.108***	0.077***	0.106***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	7,946	7,947	7,946	7,947	7,946	7,947
Adjusted R^2	0.314	0.293	0.321	0.301	0.330	0.311
F Statistic	1,817.131***	1,649.604***	1,879.930***	1,713.027***	1,957.425***	1,796.329***
	(df = 2; 7943)	(df = 2; 7944)	(df = 2; 7943)	(df = 2; 7944)	(df = 2; 7943)	(df = 2; 7944)

Note: $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.1.7   Coalition Partner Results

Table B.7: Coalition Partner's Results

	Dependent variable		
	SPS Vote Share (Parliament)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
CRTA Observers	-0.003		
	(0.003)		
OSCE Observers		-0.013***	
		(0.003)	
OSCE (Network) Observers			-0.015***
			(0.003)
Belgrade District	-0.040***	-0.040***	-0.039***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Constant	0.136***	0.137***	0.138***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	7,947	7,947	7,947
Adjusted R^2	0.026	0.028	0.030
Residual Std. Error (df = 7944)	0.083	0.083	0.083
F Statistic (df = 2; 7944)	107.119***	116.444***	123.178***

Note: $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.1.8 Main Results (systematic differences–without Belgrade District)

Table B.8: Main Results (Systematic Differences–Without Belgrade District)

	Dependent variable:			
	SNS % (1)	Vucic % (2)	SNS % (3)	Vucic % (4)
CRTA Observers	0.005		-0.007	
	(0.007)		(0.005)	
OSCE Observers		0.006		0.004
		(0.005)		(0.004)
<250 Registered Voters	0.005	0.006	0.024**	0.025**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
<500 Registered Voters	0.019**	0.019**	0.027**	0.027**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Administrative Center	-0.036*	-0.037**	-0.046**	-0.046**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Campaign (President)	0.001	0.001	-0.006**	-0.006*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Local Elections	0.050*	0.050**	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Vucic Vote Share (2017)	0.466*	0.467**	0.481**	0.482**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Constant	0.195**	0.194**	0.372**	0.371**
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Observations	6,666	6,666	6,666	6,666
Adjusted R^2	0.297	0.297	0.475	0.475
F Statistic (df = 7; 6658)	402.515**	402.749**	862.736**	862.578**

Note: $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$

B.1.9   Mission Allocation (Subsample)

Table B.9: Mission Allocation (Subsample)

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
| | OSCE Observers | | CRTA Observers | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<500 Registered Voters		0.043		0.001
		(0.027)		(0.017)
Campaign (President)	0.004	0.034**	0.001	-0.019*
	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Local Election	0.007	-0.066**	0.013	-0.015
	(0.020)	(0.032)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Vucic Share (2017)	-0.083**	-0.126*	-0.023	-0.038
	(0.038)	(0.074)	(0.038)	(0.046)
Voter Turnout (2017)	0.033	-0.187**	0.011	0.042
	(0.037)	(0.086)	(0.037)	(0.054)
Administrative Center	0.061		0.027	
	(0.041)		(0.041)	
Constant	0.085***	0.328***	0.055*	0.064
	(0.033)	(0.065)	(0.033)	(0.041)
Observations	1,712	2,149	1,712	2,149
R^2	0.005	0.007	0.001	0.002
Residual Std. Error	0.211 (df = 1706)	0.373 (df = 2143)	0.211 (df = 1706)	0.234 (df = 2143)
F Statistic	1.556	3.189***	0.247	0.930
	(df = 5; 1706)	(df = 5; 2143)	(df = 5; 1706)	(df = 5; 2143)

Note: $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

B.2   Figures

B.2.1   Observers' Allocation - Subotica

Figure B.1 focuses on the municipality of Subotica, located in northern Serbia near the Hungarian border. Subotica includes the city proper–Serbia's fifth-largest, with approximately 94,000 residents–and 18 surrounding towns that collectively add another 30,000 residents. In the 2022 elections, the city contained 66 precincts, with an additional 36 spread across the rest of the municipality. Panel A displays the municipality and the distribution of its towns. The city of Subotica serves as the administrative center of the municipality. Panel B presents the city itself and the layout of its precincts.

Panel A visualizes the presence of observers across these precincts based on my detailed review of election commission reports. The OSCE (represented by red numbers) deployed four teams–each with two members–to 26 precincts. Of these, 25 teams observed precincts within the city, while just one visited a precinct in a neighboring town (an urban, tourist-heavy area). In contrast, CRTA (blue numbers) sent three teams: two to precincts in the city and one to a rural area outside city limits.

Panel B maps OSCE and CRTA presence within the city itself. Team 1 (red numbers) visited precincts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9. Team 2 (orange) covered precincts 15, 17, 18, 19, 23, and 26. Team 3 (purple) observed precincts 27 through 33. Team 4 (black), the only one operating outside the city, covered precincts 36, 42, 44, 59, 64, and 67. CRTA teams observed precincts 7 and 23. This distribution suggests concentrated patterns: teams 1 and 3 focused exclusively on downtown precincts, and even team 3 targeted precincts along a single street. Only team 4 visited more diverse locations. Although CRTA's sample is limited, it is notable that they sent more teams to rural areas, however minimal, than OSCE did.

Figure B.1: OSCE vs CRTA
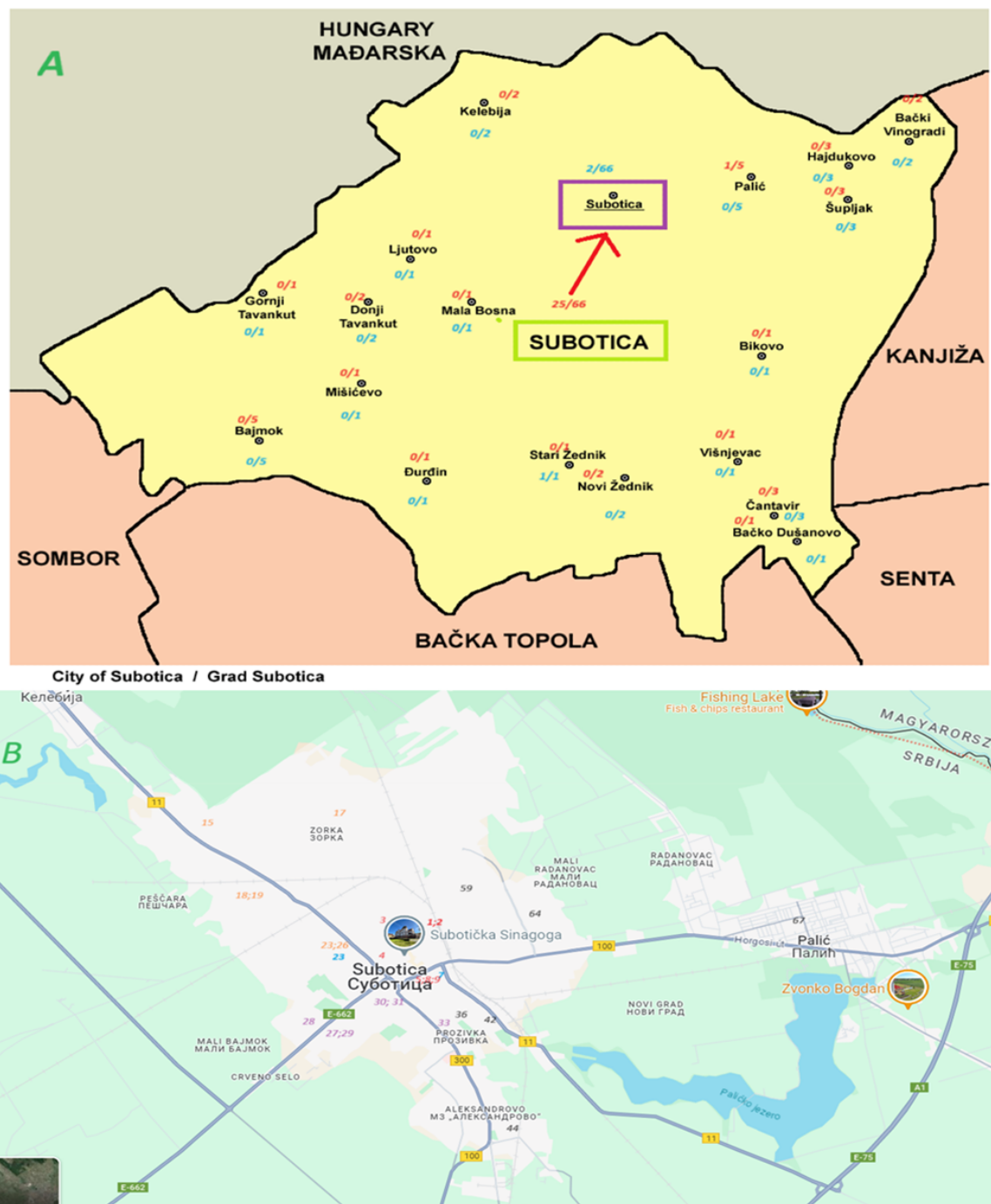
Appendix C

Supplemental Appendix for Chapter 4

C.1   Tables

C.1.1   Balance Test

Table C.1: Balance Test

	Dependent variable: Randomization Success	
	Control vs Treatment	
Gender	-0.05	(0.04)
Age	-0.04	(0.03)
Income	0.0003	(0.02)
Education	0.01	(0.02)
Material Status	0.01	(0.02)
Investment	-0.01	(0.02)
Local Economy	0.01	(0.02)
Immigration	0.03	(0.02)
Democracy (Support)	-0.01	(0.02)
Democracy (Serbia)	-0.002	(0.02)
Ideology	-0.03	(0.02)
Party Membership	0.01	(0.03)
Protests Participation	-0.02	(0.11)
SNS Rally Participation	-0.05	(0.06)
Interest in Politics	0.02	(0.02)
Following Politics	-0.03	(0.03)
Constant	0.91***	(0.27)
Observations	417	
R^2	0.02	

Note: OLS model. Standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

C.1.2 Multinomial Regression: Balance Test

Table C.2: Multinomial Regression: Balance Test

Predictors	Treatment Assignment	
	Estimate	**p-value**
(Intercept)	0.91	0.001
Gender	-0.05	0.240
Age	-0.04	0.239
Income	0.00	0.990
Education	0.01	0.799
Material Status	0.01	0.820
Investment	-0.01	0.468
Local Economy	0.01	0.439
Immigration	0.03	0.124
Democracy (Support)	-0.01	0.607
Democracy (Serbia)	-0.00	0.933
Ideology	-0.03	0.206
Party Membership	0.01	0.676
Attending Protests	-0.02	0.877
Attending SNS Rally	-0.05	0.362
Interest in Politics	0.02	0.444
Following Politics	-0.03	0.273
Observations	417	
R^2 / Adjusted R^2	0.025 / -0.014	

Note: Multinomial logistic regression testing covariate balance across treatment groups. No predictors are statistically significant at conventional levels, suggesting successful randomization.

C.1.3 Main Findings (Robust SE)

Table C.3: Main Findings (Robust SE)

	Dependent variable:	
	Index (Post)	Index (Diff)
	(1)	(2)
PST	-0.024	0.089
	(0.063)	(0.099)
DT	0.009	0.034
	(0.060)	(0.092)
Index (Pre)	0.115**	
	(0.046)	
Gender	-0.053	-0.075
	(0.051)	(0.073)
Age	-0.006	0.022
	(0.037)	(0.053)
Income	0.013	0.022
	(0.025)	(0.042)
Education	0.041	0.019
	(0.025)	(0.041)
Material Status	0.041	-0.023
	(0.025)	(0.044)
Investment	-0.006	-0.018
	(0.022)	(0.035)
Local Economy	-0.026	-0.028
	(0.018)	(0.027)
Immigration	0.103***	0.093***
	(0.021)	(0.029)
Democracy Support	0.058***	0.064**
	(0.019)	(0.030)
Democracy Serbia	0.074***	-0.005
	(0.024)	(0.034)

Table C.3: Main Findings (Robust SE)

	Dependent variable:	
	Index (Post)	Index (Diff)
	(1)	(2)
Ideology	-0.047**	-0.002
	(0.022)	(0.037)
Party Membership	0.061*	0.144***
	(0.034)	(0.052)
Protests	-0.027	-0.171
	(0.111)	(0.175)
Rally	-0.025	0.083
	(0.058)	(0.085)
Interest in Politics	0.015	-0.021
	(0.023)	(0.036)
Follow Politics	-0.113***	-0.184***
	(0.034)	(0.055)
Constant	-0.137	0.029
	(0.281)	(0.492)
Observations	416	416
Adjusted R^2	0.174	0.070
Residual Std. Error	0.501 (df = 396)	0.764 (df = 397)
F Statistic	5.600*** (df = 19; 396)	2.728*** (df = 18; 397)

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

C.1.4 Individual Questions (Robust SE)

Table C.4: Individual Questions (Robust SE)

	c *Dependent variable:*				
	EU (Post) (1)	NATO (Post) (2)	LGBTQ (Post) (3)	Military (Post) (4)	Minerals (Post) (5)
PST	0.178 (0.248)	0.252 (0.236)	-0.044 (0.198)	-0.193 (0.188)	-0.140 (0.241)
DT	0.456* (0.245)	0.421* (0.219)	-0.023 (0.187)	-0.187 (0.170)	-0.177 (0.225)
EU (Pre)	0.542*** (0.066)				
NATO (Pre)		0.501*** (0.102)			
LGBTQ (Pre)			0.449*** (0.103)		
Military (Pre)				0.623*** (0.081)	
Minerals (Pre)					0.574*** (0.050)
Gender	-0.141	0.140	-0.030	-0.105	-0.447
Age	-0.242	-0.042	-0.043	-0.227	-0.114
Income	0.123	0.065	0.002	0.053	0.097
Education	0.070	0.014	0.197	-0.103	-0.018
Material Status	0.080	0.043	0.243	0.082	0.014
Investment	-0.075	-0.054	-0.107	0.033	-0.015
Local Economy	-0.096	0.008	-0.072	0.105	-0.160
Immigration	0.280	0.168	0.337	-0.189	0.107
Democracy Support	0.282	0.123	0.032	0.060	0.125
Democracy Serbia	0.198	0.152	0.128	-0.015	0.280
Ideology	-0.252	-0.097	-0.091	-0.106	-0.146
Party Membership	0.298	0.252	0.300	-0.271	0.171
Protests	0.359	0.064	-0.523	-0.751	-0.236
Rally	-0.100	0.169	-0.174	-0.251	-0.017
Interest in Politics	0.137	0.173	0.059	-0.019	-0.011
Follow Politics	0.020	-0.047	-0.027	-0.177	-0.258
Constant	-1.504*** (0.207)	-1.626*** (0.202)	-1.088*** (0.170)	5.122*** (0.544)	1.230*** (0.269)
Observations	331	286	293	399	366
Adjusted R^2	0.365	0.220	0.326	0.329	0.348
Residual Std. Error	1.793 (df = 311)	1.629 (df = 266)	1.335 (df = 273)	1.457 (df = 379)	1.810 (df = 346)
F Statistic	10.966*** (df = 19; 311)	5.242*** (df = 19; 266)	8.431*** (df = 19; 273)	11.278*** (df = 19; 379)	11.256*** (df = 19; 346)

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$

C.1.5 Balance Test: SNS Supporters vs No Voters

Table C.5: Difference Between SNS Supporters and No Voters

Dependent variable: Party Affiliation	SNS (1) / No Vote (0)
Gender	-0.008
Age	0.024
Income	0.006
Education	-0.022
Material Status	0.084
Investment	0.020
Local Economy	0.014
Immigration	-0.039
Democracy Support	0.005
Democracy Serbia	0.080
Ideology	-0.0002
Party Membership	-0.019
Protests (Participation)	-0.312
SNS Rally (Participation)	0.113
Interest in Politics	0.001
Following Politics	-0.021
Constant	1.428
Observations	640

Note: Logistic regression model comparing declared SNS supporters to non-voters. $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

C.2 Coding scheme: Covariates for Effect Heterogeneity

- For each of the two political interest questions, I will code responses as "0" if respondents indicate "I am not interested at all", "I am a little bit interested" (for Question 27), "Never", or "rarely" (for Question 28), and "1" for other answers. I will create three levels of interest in Serbian politics by calculating the sum of the codes. If this sum equals "0," it would indicate "No interest" in politics. A sum equal to "1" indicates "Some interest," and "2" indicates "High interest."

- For each of the three political participation questions, I will code responses as "0" if respondents indicate "No" for all questions (Question 24, Question, 25, and Question 26), and "1" for "Yes." I will create three levels of participation in Serbian politics by calculating the sum of the codes. If this sum equals "0," it would indicate "No participation" in politics. A sum equal to "1" indicates "Some participation," and "2" or "3" indicates "High participation."

- Finally, for each of the five political knowledge questions, I will code responses as "0" for incorrect responses and "1" for correct responses. I will create three levels of knowledge of Serbian politics by calculating the sum of the codes. If this sum equals "0" or "1" it would indicate "Low knowledge" in politics. A sum equal to "2" or "3" indicates "Some knowledge," and "4" or "5" indicates "High knowledge."

C.3 Power Analysis

I conducted power analysis to estimate the smallest sample (and lowest budget) with which it is possible to measure the impact of the treatment, or in other words, the smallest sample that will allow meaningful differences in outcomes between the treatment and comparison groups to be detected. The power analysis has been conducted under the assumption that I will be able to detect a treatment effect of 0.2 standard deviations at k = 0.8 and $\alpha = 0.05$. The estimation is presented in the figure below. The results show that with approximately 1100-1200 subjects equally allocated between the three arms, and when using covariates that are correlated with outcomes, this experiment is about 80% likely to achieve two significant results (for implications $\beta_1 > 0$ and $\beta_2 > 0$), compared to needing around 1400 respondents when I do not account for the covariates. To perform more conversative estimates, I set a treatment effect size to 0.15 standard deviations and keep other

Figure C.1: Power Analysis
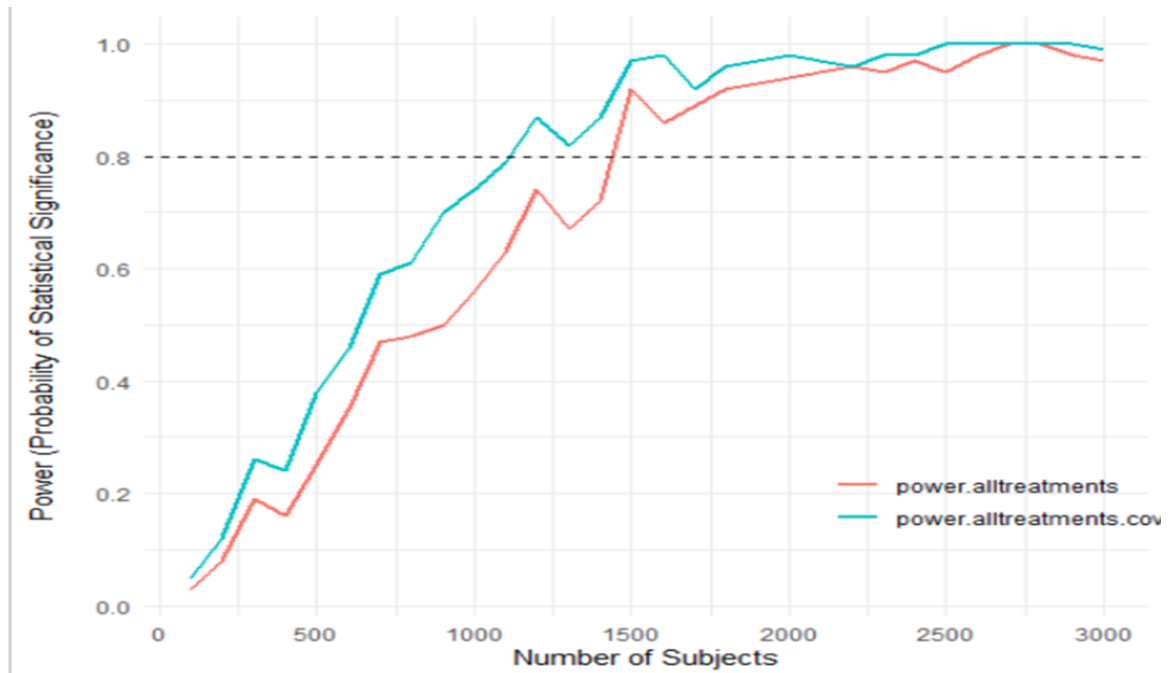
parameters same. The more conservative estimation requires around 1600 subjects. I perform the analysis for several outcome variables based on the available data. The most conservative estimate is for the outcome variable of support among Serbian citizens for joining the EU (the Ministry of European Integration 2020). I recoded publicly available data for a question that asks if respondents support Serbia's accession to the EU in the following manner: "1" for 'strongly oppose," "2" for "somewhat oppose," "3" for "neither oppose nor support," "4" for "somewhat support," and "5" for "strongly support." The sample size of the original survey was 1050 respondents, with a mean value of 3.71 and a standard deviation of 1.44.

C.4   Survey Questionnaire

Puppet Masters

Q1:
Thank you for your interest in our study on voters' support for a series of important policies for Serbian society. We will outline everything you need to know about the study so that you can make an informed decision about joining. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to participate, but change your mind later, you have the option of withdrawing from the research study. The goal of our study is to understand how the word phrasing of government actions as they are presented to the public affects their favorability. The study is funded by Emory University and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If you agree to participate, you will answer a few demographic questions, followed by your attitudes toward certain policies. The risks associated with this study are minimal. As with standard online social surveys, our survey will not elicit sensitive information that may discomfort you. It will not expose you to any harmful images and information either. This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn about the citizens' attitude toward government response to social issues. Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include the Emory Institutional Review Board, and the Emory Office of Compliance. Study funders may also look at your study records. Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. You will not be asked to submit your name or any other characteristic that would make possible to connect you to your answers. If you have questions about this study, your part in it, you may contact the study team: Danielle Jung (danielle.jung@emory.edu) and Sinisa Miric (sinisa.miric@emory.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, or concerns/complaints, you may contact the Emory University Institutional Review Board: irb@emory.edu. By checking the box below, you acknowledge the information above and consent to participate in this survey.

○ I acknowledge that I have read and consent to the information above. (1)

Q2: If the election were held this weekend, how would you vote?

○ Vote for the coalition built around the Serbian Progressive Party (1)

○ Undecided, but leaning toward voting for the coalition built around the Serbian Progressive Party (2)

○ Undecided, but leaning toward voting for the coalition built around the opposition parties (3)

○ Vote for the coalition built around the opposition parties (4)

○ Abstain from voting (5)

Q3 In general, what image do the following entities conjure up for you? The scale is 1-7, with 1 being the most negative, 4 neutral, and 7 the most positive:

	Dislike a great deal	Dislike somewhat	Neither like nor dislike	Like somewhat	Like a great deal
			1		7
The European Union ()					
NATO ()					
People Repulic of China ()					
Russian Federation ()					
United States of America ()					

Q4 In general, what are you feelings toward the following political issues? The scale is 1 to 7, with 1 being that you strongly oppose them, 4 neutral, and 7 that you strongly support them:

	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Extremely positive
	1				7
Same-sex marriage ()					
Serbian Military ()					
Mineral Extraction ()					
Serbian Orthodox Church ()					
Independent Kosovo ()					

Q5 What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary / third gender (3)

○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q6 In what age group do you belong?

○ 18-29 (1)

○ 30-39 (2)

○ 40-49 (3)

○ 50-64 (4)

○ 65 and over (5)

Q7 What is your highest level of education attained?

○ Primary School (8 grades) (1)

○ High School (2)

○ College Degree (3)

○ University Degree (4)

Q8 In what range is your monthly income, in dinars?

○ No regular monthly income (1)

○ Up to 40,000rsd (2)

○ Between 40,000 rsd and 65,000 rsd (3)

○ Between 65,000 and 85,000 (4)

○ Over 85,000 (5)

Q9 Which of the following best describes your employment status?

○ Unemployed (1)

○ Retired (2)

○ Student (3)

○ Farmer (4)

○ Private entrepreneur - owner (5)

○ Private sector - small firm (up to 20 employees) (6)

○ Private sector - large firm (over 20 employees) (7)

○ Public sector – bureaucracy or state-owned firms (8)

○ Public sector – schools/health/social service (9)

Q10 In your opinion, compared to 3 years ago, is your material wealth:

○ Much worse (1)

○ Somewhat worse (2)

○ About the same (3)

○ Somewhat better (4)

○ Much better (5)

Q11 Are you planning on making significant monetary investment in the next 365 days (apartment, house renovation, car, etc.)?

○ Definitely not (1)

○ Probably not (2)

○ Might or might not (3)

○ Probably yes (4)

○ Definitely yes (5)

Q12 Would you advise your child to emigrate, given the opportunity?

○ Definitely not (1)

○ Probably not (2)

○ Might or might not (3)

○ Probably yes (4)

○ Definitely yes (5)

Q13 In your opinion, who is the most responsible for the state of economy in your municipality/town?

○ Local government (1)

○ Central government (2)

○ President (3)

○ International companies (4)

○ Domestic private entrepreneurs (5)

Q14 To what extent do you agree with this statement: In spite of all difficulties, democracy is the best political system for our country?

○ I strongly disagree (1)

○ I disagree (2)

○ I somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither disagree nor agree (4)

○ I somewhat agree (5)

○ I agree (6)

○ I strongly agree (7)

Q15 Generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in Serbia?

○ Extremely dissatisfied (1)

○ Moderately dissatisfied (2)

○ Slightly dissatisfied (3)

○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (4)

○ Slightly satisfied (5)

○ Moderately satisfied (6)

○ Extremely satisfied (7)

Q16 Where would you place yourself on the left-right ideological spectrum?

○ Left (1)

○ Leaning toward the left (2)

○ Center (3)

○ Leaning toward the right (4)

○ Right (5)

End of Block: Attitudes

Start of Block: Political interest, participation, and knowledge

Q17 Did you vote during the most recent elections?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

○ Unsure (3)

Q18 Have you ever been a member of a political party?

○ Yes, and I am a member still. (1)

○ Yes, but I am not anymore. (2)

○ No, I have never been a member of a political party. (3)

Q19 Have you participated in any type of protest in the last three years?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

Q20 Have you participated in any type of political rally in last three years?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

Q21 To what extent are you personally interested in politics?

○ I am very much uninterested (1)

○ I am uninterested (2)

○ I am somewhat uninterested (3)

○ I am neither uninterested nor interested (4)

○ I am somewhat interested (5)

○ I am interested (6)

○ I am very much interested (7)

Q22 How often do you follow political events in the country?

○ Regularly (1)

○ Often (2)

○ Rarely (3)

○ Never (4)

Q23 Please indicate how important the following issues for you are, on a scale 1-7, where 1 means not important at all, while 7 means very important:

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Serbia's EU ascension: ()	
Serbia's NATO ascension: ()	
Serbia's relationship with China: ()	
Serbia's relationship with the Russian Federation: ()	
Serbia's relationship with the United States: ()	
Corruption problems: ()	
Kosovo independence: ()	
Economic development: ()	
Reinstitution of mandatory military services: ()	
Protection of nature: ()	

Q24 The mandate of the President of the state lasts how many years?

○ 3 years (1)

○ 5 years (2)

○ 7 years (3)

○ 10 years (4)

○ Unsure (5)

Q25 The National Assembly is composed of how many deputies?

○ 100 (1)

○ 250 (2)

○ 500 (3)

○ Unsure (4)

Q26 Who is the current Prime Minister of the Republic?

○ Djuro Macut (1)

○ Ana Brnabic (2)

○ Ivica Dacic (3)

○ Dragan Djilas (4)

○ Unsure (5)

Q27 Which political party is the largest coalition partner of the Serbian Progressive Party in the National Assembly?

○ Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) (1)

○ Democratic Party (DS) (2)

○ Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) (3)

○ Dveri (4)

○ Unsure (5)

Q28 What is the minimum threshold for political parties to gain seats in the National Assembly?

○ 1% of total votes (1)

○ 3% of total votes (2)

○ 6% of total votes (3)

○ 10% of total votes (4)

○ Unsure (5)

Q29 How has Serbian government reacted after the start of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict?

○ Adopted sanctions on Russia (1)

○ Adopted sanctions on Ukraine (2)

○ Adopted sanctions on both countries (3)

○ Did nor adopted sanctions on either country (4)

○ Unsure (5)

Q30 Please, indicate how much you agree with the following statement: I believe that the SNS represents my interests fully.
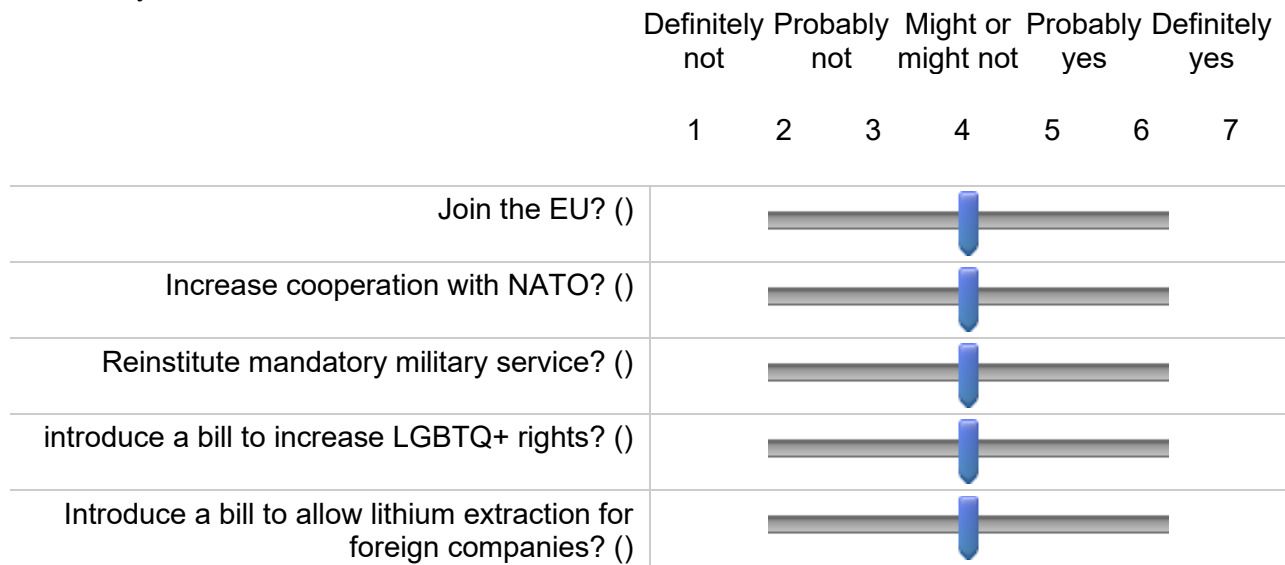
○ None at all (1)

○ A little (2)

○ A moderate amount (3)

○ A lot (4)

○ A great deal (5)

Q31 Do you think Serbia should:

	Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Join the EU? ()							
Increase cooperation with NATO? ()							
Reinstitute mandatory military service? ()							
introduce a bill to increase LGBTQ+ rights? ()							
Introduce a bill to allow lithium extraction for foreign companies? ()							

Q32 President Vucic supports Serbia's EU accession, increase in cooperation with NATO, the reinstitution of mandatory military service, the introduction of a bill to increase LGBTQ+ rights, and the introduction of a bill allow lithium extraction for foreign companies. How about you? Do you think Serbia should:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

join the EU? ()	
increase cooperation with NATO? ()	
reinstitute mandatory military service? ()	
introduce a bill to increase LGBTQ+ rights? ()	
introduce a bill to allow lithium extraction for foreign companies? ()	
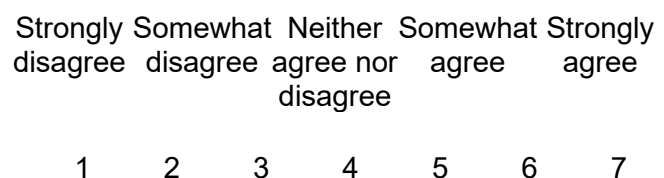
Q33 President Vucic supports Serbia's EU accession, increase in cooperation with NATO, the reinstitution of mandatory military service, the introduction of a bill to increase LGBTQ+ rights, and the introduction of a bill allow lithium extraction for foreign companies. However, the SNS party program states its opposition to these issues. How about you? Do you think Serbia should:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Join the EU ()	
increase cooperation with NATO? ()	
reinstitute mandatory military service? ()	
introduce a bill to increase LGBTQ+ rights? ()	
introduce a bill to allow lithium extraction for foreign companies? ()	

End of Block: Treatment

Start of Block: Post-Treatment

Q34 President Aleksandar Vucic implied that he plans to resign as the SNS president and retire from politics after his second term as Serbian president. In a hypothetical situation, if a candidate endorsed by Aleksandar Vucic faced a candidate endorsed by the SNS, would you:

○ Vote for Aleksandar Vucic endorsed candidate (1)

○ Vote for the SNS candidate (2)

○ Vote for someone else (3)

○ Not vote at all (4)

Q35 The main reason why I would consider voting for the SNS is:

○ President Vucic (1)

○ Other leaders of the party (2)

○ The party program (3)

○ Lack of alternative (4)

○ Other reasons (5)

End of Block: Post-Treatment

Anketa - Zvanična II

 Hvala Vam na interesovanju za našu anketu. Cilj ove istraživačke studije jeste akademski. Želimo da saznamo stavove punoletnih gradjana o odredjenim društvenim i političkim pitanjima bitnim za naše društvo. Svi odgovori će biti poznati samo timu koji stoji iza ove ankete i ne postoji mogućnost da bilo ko poveže učesnike ankete sa odgovorima. U svakom trenutku možete da napustite anketu. Anketa traje 10 do 15 minuta.

○ Potvdjujem da sam pročitao/la navedene informacije i da se slažem sa njima (1)

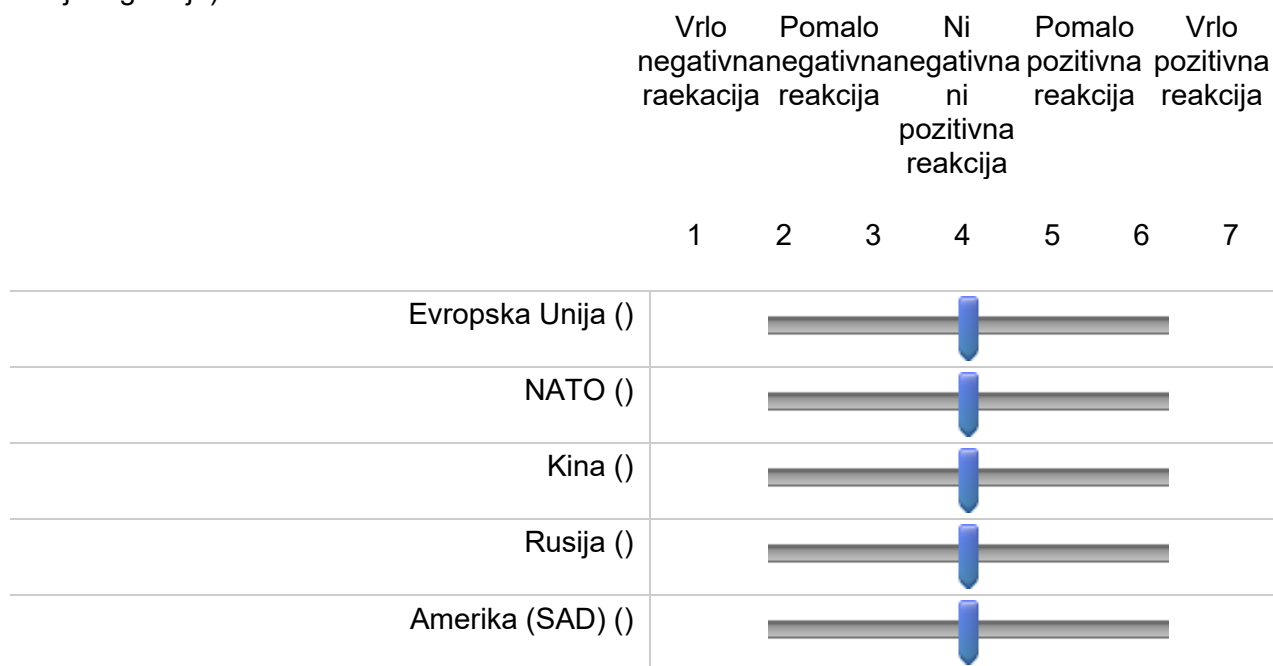Pitanje 1: Da su izbori za Skupštinu Srbije sledećeg vikenda, kako biste glasali?

○ Glasao/la bih za Srpsku naprednu stranku ili partije bliske njoj. (1)

○ Neodlučan/na, ali naginjem ka koaliciji sastavljenoj oko Srpske napredne stranke. (2)

○ Neodlučan/na, ali naginjem ka opozicionim strankama. (3)

○ Glasao/la bih za neku od opozicionih stranaka. (4)

○ Ne planiram da glasam. (5)

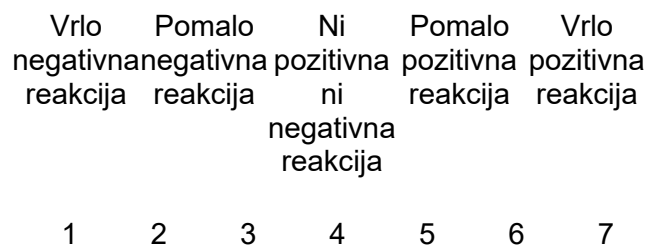Pitanje 2: Uopšteno govoreći, da li postojeća slika međunarodnih organizacija i država navedenih ispod, izaziva reakciju u Vama koja je? Odgovori su na skali od 1 do 7, gde je 1 pretstavlja vrlo negativnu rekaciju, 4 neutralnu, a 7 vrlo pozitivnu (prevucite prstom na desno do željenog broja):

	Vrlo negativna raekacija	Pomalo negativna reakcija	Ni negativna ni pozitivna reakcija	Pomalo pozitivna reakcija	Vrlo pozitivna reakcija		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Evropska Unija ()				▮			
NATO ()				▮			
Kina ()				▮			
Rusija ()				▮			
Amerika (SAD) ()				▮			

Pitanje 3: Uopšteno govoreći, da li postojeća slika političkih ustanova i stavova navedenih ispod, izaziva reakciju u Vama koja je? Odgovori su na skali od 1 do 7, gde je 1 pretstavlja vrlo negativnu rekaciju, 4 neutralnu, a 7 vrlo pozitivnu (prevucite prstom na desno do željenog broja):

	Vrlo negativna reakcija	Pomalo negativna reakcija	Ni pozitivna ni negativna reakcija	Pomalo pozitivna reakcija	Vrlo pozitivna reakcija
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Brak između osoba istog pola ()	
Vojska Srbije ()	
Kopanje minerala (ruda, litijuma...) ()	
Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva ()	
Nezavisno Kosovo ()	

Pitanje 4: Koji je vaš pol:

○ Muški (1)

○ Ženski (2)

○ Ne želim da odgovorim (5)

Pitanje 5: Kojoj starosnoj grupi pripadate:

○ 18-29 godina (1)

○ 30-45 godina (2)

○ 46-65 godina (3)

○ 66 ili više godina (4)

Pitanje 6: Koji je najviši nivo formalnog obrazovanja koje ste postigli do ovog trenutka:

○ Osnovna škola (1)

○ Srednja škola (2)

○ Viša škola (3)

○ Fakultet (4)

○ Više od fakulteta (5)

Pitanje 7: U koju grupu spada visina Vaših mesečnih prihoda u dinarima?

○ Bez redovnih mesečnih prihoda (1)

○ Do 50.000 rsd (2)

○ Izmedju 50.000 rsd i 77.000 rsd (3)

○ Izmedju 77.000 rsd i 100.000 rsd (4)

○ Više od 100.000 (5)

Pitanje 8: Šta od sledećeg najbolje opisuje Vaš radni status?

○ Nezaposleni (1)

○ Penzionisani (2)

○ Student (3)

○ Zemljoradnik (4)

○ Privatni sektor - vlasnik svog preduzeća (5)

○ Privatni sektor - zaposleni u maloj firmi (do 50 zaposlenih) (6)

○ Privatni sektor - zaposleni u velikoj firmi (više od 50 zaposlenih) (7)

○ Javni/državni sektor – državni/lokalni organ ili preduzeće u vlasništvu države (8)

○ Javni/državni sektor – drugo (školstvo/zdravstvo-socijalne službe...) (9)

End of Block: Demografska pitanja

Start of Block: Politički stavovi:

Pitanje 9: Prema Vašem mišljenju, kada uporedite trenutnu situaciju sa situacijom od pre 3 godine, da li je Vaš materijalni status danas:

○ Znatno gori (1)

○ Nešto gori (2)

○ Sličan (3)

○ Nešto bolji (4)

○ Znatno bolji (5)

Pitanje 10: Da li planirate značajnu novčanu investiciju u narednih godinu dana (kupovinu stana ili automobila, renoviraje kuće, ili nešto slično)?

○ Ne, sigurno (1)

○ Ne, verovatno (2)

○ Niste sigurni (3)

○ Da, verovatno (4)

○ Da, sigurno (5)

Pitanje 11: Ako bi vaše dete imalo priliku da emigrira, da li biste ga ohrabrili da to učini?

○ Potpuno se ne slažem (1)

○ Delimično se ne slažem (2)

○ Neutralan stav (3)

○ Delimično se slažem (4)

○ Potpuno se slažem (5)

Pitanje 12: Prema Vašem mišljenju, ko je najodgovorniji za trenutno stanje privrede u Vašem gradu/opštini?

○ Lokalna uprava (1)

○ Vlada Republike Srbije (2)

○ Predsednik Republike Srbije (3)

○ Inostrane kompanije (4)

○ Kompanije u domaćem vlasništvu (5)

Pitanje 13: U kojoj meri se slažete sa sledećom konstatacijom: Uprkos svim poteškoćama, demokratija je najbolji politički sistem za našu državu.

○ Ne slažem se, u potpunosti (1)

○ Ne slažem se, donekle (3)

○ Niti se slažem niti se ne slažem (4)

○ Slažem se, donekle (5)

○ Slažem se, u potpunosti (7)

Pitanje 14 Uopšteno govoreći, koliko ste zadovoljni funcionisanjem demokratije u Srbiji?

○ Izuzetno nezadovljni (1)

○ Donekle nezadovoljni (3)

○ Niti zadovoljni niti nezadovoljni (4)

○ Donekle zadovoljni (5)

○ Izuzetno zadovoljni (7)

Pitanje 15: Gde biste sebe svrstali na ideloškoj skali (levica-desnica)?

○ Levica (1)

○ Naginjem ka levici (2)

○ Centar (3)

○ Naginjem ka desnici (4)

○ Desnica (5)

Pitanje 16 Da li ste glasali na poslednjim republičkim izborima?

○ Ne (1)

○ Da (2)

○ Nisam siguran/na (3)

Pitanje 17: Da li ste ikada bili član neke političke stranke?

○ Da, i danas sam (1)

○ Da, bio/la sam, ali više nisam (2)

○ Ne, nikada (3)

Pitanje 18: Da li ste učestvovali na nekom od društvenih protesta u protekle 4 godine?

○ Ne (1)

○ Da (2)

Pitanje 19: Da li ste učestvovali na nekom od političkih skupova u protekle 4 godine?

○ Ne (1)

○ Da (2)

Pitanje 20 U kojoj ste meri Vi lično zainteresovani za dešavanja u politici?

○ Vrlo nezainteresovani (1)

○ Donekle nezainteresovani (3)

○ Niti zainteresovani niti nezainteresovani (4)

○ Donekle zainteresovani (5)

○ Vrlo zainteresovani (7)

Pitanje 21: Koliko često Vi lično pratite politička dešavanje u zemlji i inostranstvu čitajući novine ili gledajući političko-informativne emisije?
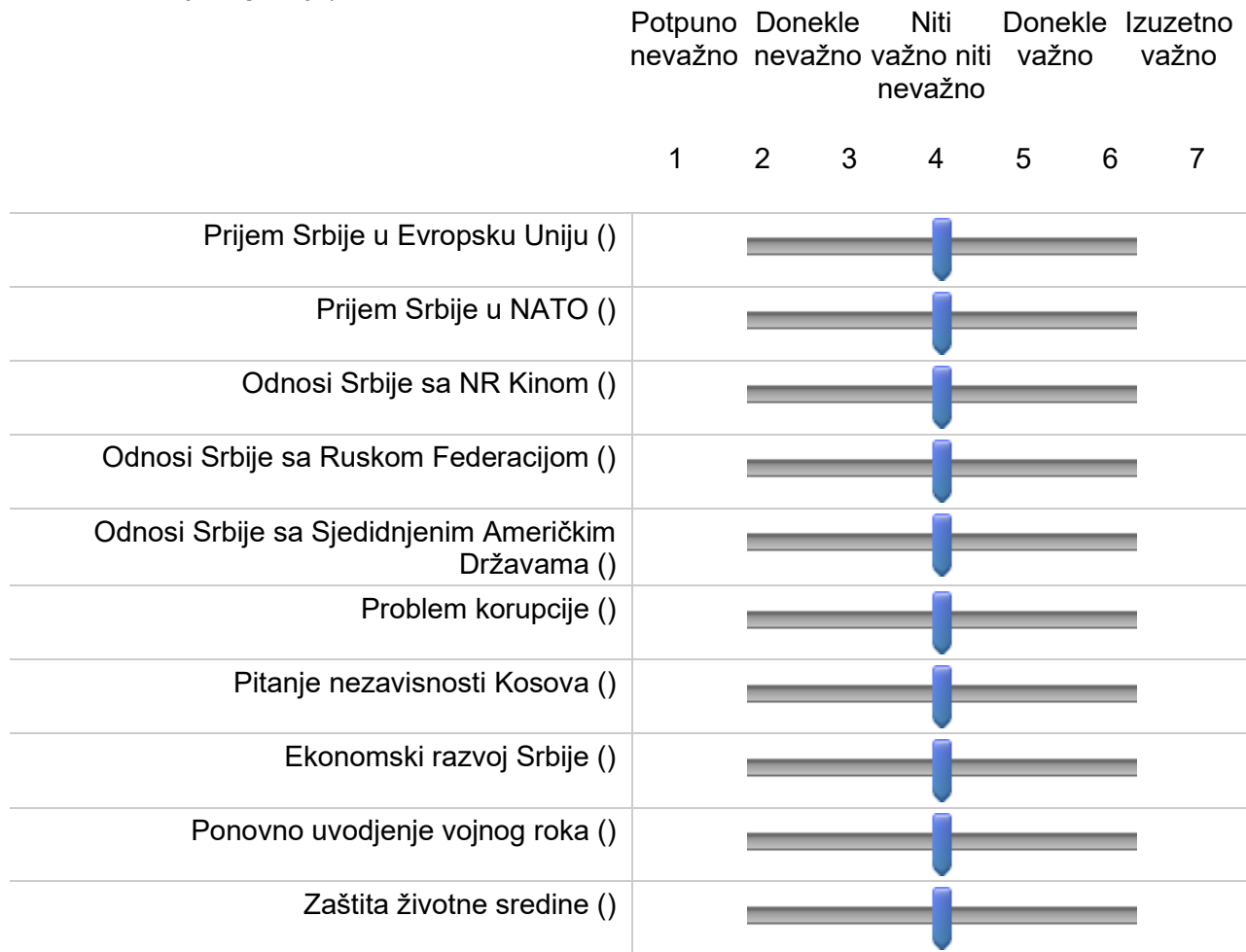
○ Više puta dnevno (1)

○ Jednom dnevno (2)

○ Jednom u nekoliko dana (3)

○ Vrlo retko (4)

Pitanje 22: Molimo Vas da naznačite koliko su sledeća pitanja važna za Vas lično, na skali od 1 do 7, gde 1 znači da Vam uopšte nije važno, a 7 da Vam je jako važno (prevucite prstom na desno do željenog broja):

	Potpuno nevažno	Donekle nevažno	Niti važno niti nevažno	Donekle važno	Izuzetno važno		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Prijem Srbije u Evropsku Uniju ()				●			
Prijem Srbije u NATO ()				●			
Odnosi Srbije sa NR Kinom ()				●			
Odnosi Srbije sa Ruskom Federacijom ()				●			
Odnosi Srbije sa Sjedidnjenim Američkim Državama ()				●			
Problem korupcije ()				●			
Pitanje nezavisnosti Kosova ()				●			
Ekonomski razvoj Srbije ()				●			
Ponovno uvodjenje vojnog roka ()				●			
Zaštita životne sredine ()				●			

Pitanje 23: Koliko traje mandat Predsednika Republike Srbije?

○ 3 godine (1)

○ 5 godina (2)

○ 7 godina (3)

○ 10 godina (4)

○ Niste sigurni (5)

Pitanje 24: Saziv Narodne Skupštine Srbije se sastoji od koliko narodnih poslanika?

○ 100 (1)

○ 250 (2)

○ 500 (3)

○ Niste sigurni (4)

⤨

Pitanje 25: Ko je trenutni Predsednik Vlade (Premijer) Republike Srbije?

○ Miloš Vučević (1)

○ Ana Brnabić (2)

○ Ivica Dačić (3)

○ Djuro Macut (4)

○ Niste sigurni (5)

⤨

Pitanje 26: Koja politička stranka je najveći koalicioni partner Srpske napredne stranke u Narodnoj Skupštini Republike Srbije od 2012. godine do danas?

○ Socijalistička partija Srbije (SPS) (1)

○ Demokratska stranka (DS) (2)

○ Demokratska stranka Srbije (DSS) (3)

○ Dveri (4)

○ Niste sigurni (5)

Pitanje 27: Koji je minimalni prag (izborni cenzus) koji standardne političke stranke moraju da ostvare da bi učestvovale u raspodeli mandata za Narodnu skupštinu Republike Srbije?

○ 1% ukupog broja glasova (1)

○ 3% ukupnog broja glasova (2)

○ 6% ukupnog broja glasova (3)

○ 10% ukupnog broja glasova (4)

○ Niste sigurni (5)

Pitanje 28: Kako je Vlada Republike Srbije reagovala nakon početka Rusko-Ukrajinskog sukoba?

○ Uvela je sankcije Rusiji (1)

○ Uvela je sankcije Ukrajini (2)

○ Uvela je sankcije obema državama (3)

○ Nije uvela sankcij ni jednoj od sukobljenih strana (4)

○ Niste sigurni (5)

Q30 Molimo Vas da naznačite koliko se Vi lično slažete sa sledećom konstatacijom: Srpska napredna stranka (SNS) u potpunosti zastupa moje interese.

○ U potpunosti se ne slažem (1)

○ Donekle se ne slažem (2)

○ Niti se slažem niti se ne slažem (3)

○ Donekle se slažem (4)

○ U potpunosti se slažem (5)

⤬

Pitanje 30 Da li smatrate da Srbija treba da (prevucite prstom na desno do željenog broja):

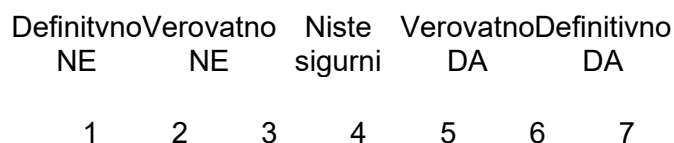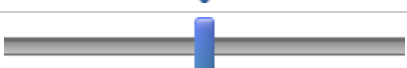|	Definitivno NE	Verovatno NE	Niste Sigurni	Verovatno DA	Definitivno DA
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Postane član Evropske Unije? ()				▮			
Uveća saradnju sa NATO savezom? ()				▮			
Vrati obavezno služenje vojnog roka? ()				▮			
Donese zakon o unapredjenju statusa LBGT zajednice? ()				▮			
Donese zakon po kome bi se omogućilo kopanje litijuma stranim kompanijama? ()				▮			

⤬

Pitanje 31: Predsedik Vučić podržava pristupanje Srbije Evropskoj Uniji, unapredjenje saradnje sa NATO savezom, povratak obaveznog služenja vojnog roka, donošenje zakona kojim bi se

unapredio status LGBT zajednice, kao i zakona kojim bi se omogućilo kopanje litijuma stranim kompanijama.   Šta vi mislite o ovim pitanjima? Da li smatrate da Srbija treba da (prevucite prstom na desno do željenog broja):

	Definitvno NE	Verovatno NE	Niste sigurni	Verovatno DA	Defitivno DA		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Postane član Evropske Unije? ()				▮			
Uveća saradnju sa NATO savezom? ()				▮			
Vrati obavezno služenje vojnog roka? ()				▮			
Donese zakon o unapredjenju statusa LGBT zajednice? ()				▮			
Donese zakon po kome bi se omogućilo kopanje litijuma stranim kompanijama? ()				▮			
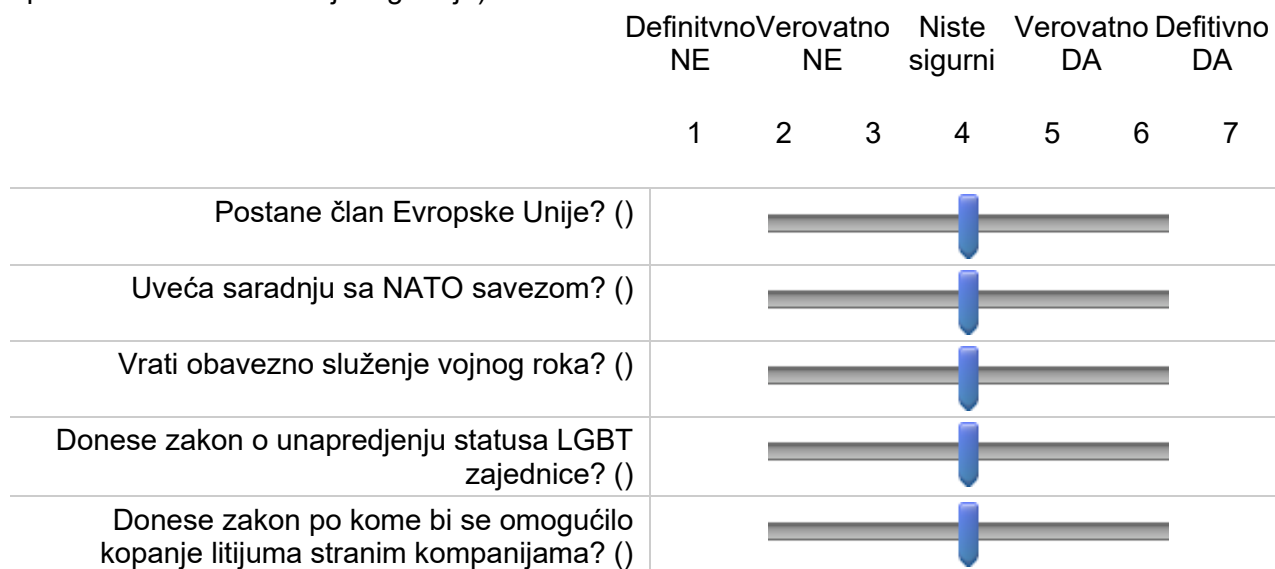
Pitanje 32: Predsedik Vučić podržava pristupanje Srbije Evropskoj Uniji, unapredjenje saradnje sa NATO savezom, povratak obaveznog služenja vojnog roka, donošenje zakona kojim bi se unapredio status LGBT zajednice, kao i zakona kojim bi se omogućilo kopanje litijuma stranim kompanijama.   Nasuprot ovome, program Srpske napredne stranke (SNS) ima suprotan stav po ovim pitanjima.   Šta vi mislite o ovim pitanjima? Da li smatrate da Srbija treba da (prevucite prstom na desno do željenog broja):

	Definitvno NE	Verovatno NE	Niste sigurni	Verovatno DA	Definitivno DA
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Postane član Evropske Unije? ()	⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯❚⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯
Uveća saradnju sa NATO savezom? ()	⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯❚⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯
Vrati obavezno služenje vojnog roka? ()	⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯❚⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯
Donese zakon o unapredjenju statusa LBGT zajednice? ()	⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯❚⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯
Donese zakon po kome bi se omogućilo kopanje litijuma stranim kampanijama? ()	⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯❚⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

🔀

Pitanje 33 Predsednik Vučić je najavio da će po isteku svog drugog predsedničkog mandata 2027. godine povući iz političkog života. U potencijalnoj situaciji gde bi se pojavila dva kandidata ispred Srpske napredne stranke, jedan koji je podržan od strane Aleksandra Vučića i drugi koji je podržan od strane predsedništva stranke, da li biste Vi glasali:

○ Za kandidata koga podržava Aleksandar Vučić (1)

○ Za kandidata koga podržava predsedništvo SNS-a (2)

○ Za nekoga drugog (3)

○ Ne biste glasali (4)

Pitanje 34 Glavni razlog zašto bih glasao/la za Srpsku naprednu stranku (SNS) je:

○ Aleksandar Vučić (1)

○ Stranački lideri (Miloš Vučević, Ana Brnabić, Siniša Mali, Aleksandar Šapić...) (3)

○ Program stranke (4)

○ Lokalni stranački lideri (5)

○ Nezadovoljstvo opcijama drugih stranaka (6)

○ Neki drugi razlog (7)

End of Block: Post-Treatment

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