
Elections, Parties and Democracy in Croatia

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Interest in Elections and Electoral Participation

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Summary

The author stresses that participation has an intrinsic value for the citizens. In addition, it is also important as a means of civic education, a process in which citizens learn civic values. A comparison of electoral participation in democratic polities shows great differences among them. The author argues that the level of voter turnout depends on a number of factors, such as the features of electoral law, the characteristics of social situation, voters' motivation and political mobilization. Electoral law influences electoral participation in two ways: directly through legal provisions regulating the voting procedure and indirectly through basic characteristics of the electoral system, which more or less motivate the voters. The features of social situation that have an impact on voter turnout include importance of elections, voters' emotional involvement and uncertainty of electoral outcome. Voters' motivation depends on the type of individual involvement in politics, which ranges from a minority of political activists to a majority of political spectators, whose involvement is confined to voting, and a large number of apathetic citizens, who don't care for politics at all. Electoral campaigns can be considered mainly as an instrument to mobilize the supporters of political parties, not the apathetic. In the second part of the article the author looks more closely into features of electoral participation or abstention in Croatia, based on empirical survey data from 1990 to 2003. His findings show that mainly two factors are important for the level of participation: the individual feeling of either helplessness or positive impact in politics and the sense of political responsibility. Unlike in most other democracies, socio-economic status doesn't have a significant impact on participation in Croatia.

Key words: elections, electoral participation, abstention, Croatia, democracy, voter turnout, electoral system, motivation



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The participation in political processes, especially in the processes of constituting representative bodies, is the key assumption of a democratic society. Just as Franklin (1996) pointed out that “participation is the blood stream of democracy, it involves a various number of people into various activities at various times.” Normally it is considered, that the key indicator of elementary political interest is the act of voting at the elections (Campbell, 1962). While sometimes political participation is understood as exclusively referring to electoral participation, Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1976) think that political participation comprises all forms of behaviour in the sphere of politics. According to these authors, in line with the theory of democracy, participation is a process that defines goals and means in relation to all sorts of social problems. The assumption is that through participation the goals of society are set in a way to maximize the allocations of social goods, in relation to the needs and wishes of the population. Participation is not directed towards a specific social goal, but is rather the procedure for the determination of goals, the choice of priorities and the decision about the way they are accomplished. Apart from that, participation has two additional aims:

1. It is a source of *contentment by itself* – the fact that one participates in the decision-making process creates the contentment of citizens. This is the so-called *intrinsic motivation*, in other words a feeling that something useful is done, that the individual is an active participant of that process. Of course, in all that, the goals that the activities want to achieve are not irrelevant, but also the activity as such is a source of contentment in itself.¹
2. Participation is an *educational process* that teaches basic *civic values* – through participation, people are taught to take *responsibility*². Although an individual vote does not mean much by itself, the election result is a sum of such individual decisions.

The data analysis – at first statistical data based on election results and later survey data – has shown that voters’ real behaviour is far from the generally proclaimed postulates of the democratic society, in which all adult citizens influence political processes with their electoral decisions in the society they live in. The first research of electoral behaviour was that by Merriam and Goswell (1924), who in 1923 did a research on the reasons for electoral abstention. In their research, the opinion polling method was used for the first time. In his often quoted and well laid out work on the issues of voter behaviour, Rossi (1959) gives a special emphasis to Rice’s book, *Quantitative Methods in Politics* (1928), which, according to him, for the first time tried to develop political sci-

¹ Herzberg (1959) introduced the problem of intrinsic motivation, and is very prominent in the framework of the so-called participatory methods of management (Likert, 1961; Smith/ Tannenbaum, 1962; Adizes, 1989). There is no relevant *psychological* difference between participation in decision-making within politics and at workplaces.

² The activities of non-governmental organisations, e.g. *Glas 99* before the elections in January 2000, are a typical example of precisely this kind of educational activity, in other words explaining to the citizens that going to the elections is their democratic right, that elections determine who will get the mandate to govern, and that every vote is valuable. These kinds of activities are especially valuable in the societies that are establishing democratic conditions with a historical lag. It is to be wished that political parties themselves would take more care of this dimension of political education in their political campaigns.

ence liberated of value biases. This book, which consists of 18 studies of different orientations, covers four main problems.

The first problem relates to the *political behaviour as an expression of political attitudes*. According to Rice, political facts are the results of individual views. In their electoral choice, the citizens state their attitudes just like in any decision-making process. Rice points out, that the views are only partially the result of reality, to a larger degree they serve, as Katz (1960) has shown later, to give a meaningful insight into the world where the individual is placed. As opposed to other characteristics of the personality, attitudes are not distributed according to the logic of normal distribution, but rather – because of a number of influences – show the tendency towards the “U” distribution (higher percentage on both ends of the dimension, and significantly less in the middle). Rice understands political attitudes as specific derivations of one basic continuum: the continuum radicalism–liberalism–conservatism, and voters, political parties and candidates are distributed along that continuum. The task of the politicians is to keep their voters on one end of the continuum and to try to gain the support of those in the middle.

The second problem that Rice analyses is related to *political differences between different social groups*. Using electoral statistics, he points out the differences between the urban and the rural districts, protestant or catholic districts, constituencies with a worker or middle class majority, etc. and thus establishes the so-called *ecological analyses* of electoral behaviour.

The third problem is the *spatial distribution* of political attitudes. Analysing the results of election statistics, Rice has come to the conclusion that the regions in the US that are closely inter-connected also have similar political preferences, thus creating specific clusters of liberal or conservative options. This is not the case only where there are some outstanding structural differences between the regions (e.g. religious, etc.).

The fourth problem that Rice deals with concerns the *changes of political preferences* over a longer period. On the one hand he uses the electoral statistics data and on the other the “before-after” method in studying the effects of some intervening variable, for example a candidate’s lecture.

Regardless of the very simplified operationalizations of individual problems and variables of the research, as well as of the low level of the statistical processing of the obtained results, Rice has managed to point out the problems that are present today – the structure of the attitudes, the relationship between the attitudes and the political choice, the influence of campaigns, etc.

The analyses have shown that political passivity is rampant and perhaps most noticeable in electoral abstention. To understand the reasons for this indifference we should ask ourselves why people get interested in participating in political processes in the first place. To be able to answer these questions the attempt was made to identify the profile of “passive” voters. At first, the authors have limited themselves to the analysis of demographic and social-economic categories, having in mind of course that the interpretation of the results cannot avoid socio-psychological categories which are the intervening variables between these features and the electoral decision, in this case the deci-

sion to participate in the elections. If we look at the analysis from another angle, we can say that psychological analysis demands the understanding of a person and the psychological world surrounding him/her; or, as K. Lewin (1951) says: “The behaviour depends on the position of the person and its environment. To be able to understand or predict the behaviour, the person and its environment need to be examined as a constellation of interdependent factors.”

A simple statistical fact about the smaller electoral participation of women means the relationship of one demographic variable (gender) and political activity, and in itself comprises socio-psychological categories, primarily attitudes and motivation that are the result of the socioeconomic position of women and the cultural patterns of a society.

Just as some countries differ regarding the voter turnout, they also differ in the degree and the type of participation in electoral processes.

In short, voter turnout depends on four types of variables: the features of electoral law, the characteristics of social situation, voters’ motivation and political mobilisation.

Generally it is considered (Franklin, 1999) that the differences between individual countries regarding the electoral abstention are far greater and more relevant than the differences in the characteristics of voters that lead to electoral abstention. The differences among countries are explained by the differences in their electoral systems (highly proportional electoral systems lead to high voter turnouts); obligatory voting (the fines for not voting are not high, but are fines nevertheless); voting on Sundays (which is most common); the possibility of postal voting; and the very significance of elections. Table 1 shows an average voter turnout in some countries in the period 1961-1999 (Franklin, 2003).

Table 1: Percentage of voter turnout in the period 1961-1999

Australia 95	Greece 82	Spain 74
Malta 94	Netherlands 82	Bulgaria 73
Belgium 92	Brazil 81	Ireland 73
Italy 90	Venezuela 81	Japan 69
Austria 90	Norway 81	Estonia 68
Iceland 89	Costa Rica 80	India 59
Luxemburg 89	Israel 80	Russia 58
Sweden 88	Latvia 79	Hungary 57
New Zealand 87	Portugal 77	Switzerland 52
Denmark 86	Rumania 76	USA 52
Germany 86	Finland 76	Poland 51
Argentina 83	Canada 75	Lithuania 50
Czech Republic 83	Great Britain 75	
Chile 83	France 75	<i>Croatia 73,4³</i>

³ For Croatia we took an average of all 5 democratic parliamentary elections in the 1990-2003 period.

Just as some countries differ in the percentage of voter turnout, they also differ in the degree and type of participation in electoral processes. While in the United States only about 50% of citizens vote, in Austria this percentage is 90%; in the United States 14% of citizens actively participate in election campaigns, while in Austria only 5% of them (Verba/ Schlozman/ Brady, 1998)!

1. Characteristics of electoral law

In reference to Duverger (1951), Blais and Massicotte (1996) cite two kinds of consequences of the type of electoral law: *psychological* and *mechanical*. Psychological consequences, which we are faced with, refer to the electoral participation (and, of course, to the political preferences), while the mechanical ones refer to the distribution of mandates, depending on the obtained votes and the electoral rules.

There are two basic characteristics of electoral law which affect voters' behaviour and casting or not casting their vote:

a. Legal provisions on voter turnout

Through its electoral law every state determines who can vote, when, how and where. There are countries e.g. Belgium and Greece, where going to elections is a legal duty which necessarily leads to higher level of electoral participation. In some other countries, on the other hand, for instance in the United States, citizens need to register as voters i.e. confirm with their signature that they wish to participate in elections. Some countries hold elections exclusively on Sundays, some on workdays, and some over a period of several days. In some countries postal voting is possible. All these factors influence a bigger or smaller electoral participation.

b. Characteristics of electoral system

For the purposes of this analysis, we will mention only the differences between the proportional and the majoritarian electoral system, and their influence on political participation. Proportional electoral systems are considerably more responsive to different political programs; they enable representation in representative bodies and smaller political parties, which means taking the variety of interests of the electorate into consideration. Majoritarian systems aspire to decrease the number of political parties, especially in the plurality systems.

From the perspective of voters' motivation, proportional systems are considerably more motivating, because they make it possible for even some minor interests to be represented, based on a certain number of votes. In line with the postulates of the economic theory of democracy (Dawns, 1957), the question is why an individual, having in mind some institutional solutions of the electoral law that makes it harder to achieve specific minority interests, would put in an effort that obviously does not lead to the achievement of the goal?

In the framework of proportional election systems it is also worth noting the meaning of the electoral threshold i.e the percentage of votes that is required for the participation in the distribution of mandates. Logically, a high electoral threshold is explicitly discouraging, while a low one gives also the smaller parties and their potential voters the chance to participate in sharing the “electoral cake”.

The legal definition of a electoral district is another element that can effect electoral participation. Due to the existing election law in Croatia, with 10 electoral districts, the Istrian Democratic Assemvly (IDS) in its district (which merges a part of the Primorsko-goranska and the whole of Istrian county) regularly wins (according to the results of the previous elections) up to 25% of votes, which secures the party up to four representatives on its own, independently of any electoral coalitions. If Croatia was one electoral district, the IDS would get about 2,5% of the votes, which means that with the electoral threshold of 5% and if participating in the elections alone, they would not be represented in the Croatian parliament. The current legal solution is, of course, much more motivating for the IDS voters. Let us have a look at what the composition of the Croatian Parliament would look like with some different solutions regarding the number of electoral districts and the threshold, based on the results of the 2003 parliamentary elections.⁴

Table 2: Influence of the electoral law on the composition of the Parliament – elections of 2003

Political party	Election results	One electoral district (5%)	One electoral district (3%)
HDZ	62	59	53
SDP	43	42	38
HNS	11	15	13
HSS	9	13	12
HSP	8	11	10
HSLs-DC	3	-	7
HSU	3	-	7
HDSS	1	-	-

There is no doubt that the solution with one electoral district and a lower electoral threshold (3%) better reflects the will of the electorate in the elections of 2003. These are the mechanical consequences of the electoral law – as we have already said quoting Duverge – but there is no doubt that this solution would also have some psychological consequences – a larger participation of potential voters of relatively smaller parties.

⁴ This is just a simulation based on the percentages of the voter turnout and the obtained votes of individual electoral lists within the framework of the existing legal solutions. Different solutions of the Election law would probably result in a larger or smaller voter turnout, or in other words, a different voters' electoral choice. There is no need to emphasize that the problem of forming parliamentary majority would also be very different depending on particular solutions of the Election law.

2. Characteristics of social situation

In the so-called stable democracies, elections are a continuing process of remaining or alternating in power of some political parties or individuals based on their general success in solving social and economic problems, or some especially pressing problems in election time. If a country is faced with an outstanding problem of domestic or foreign affairs, then the public is mobilized to a higher degree and the turnout also increases. The so-called transitional countries, i.e. those that have only begun to establish liberal democracy, are faced with many more issues that motivate the public and the need to change things through elections or to give support. On the other hand, the citizens of those countries still do not have an adequately formed political culture and a sense of responsibility which are also the requirements for a high level of participation. In relation to the question of social situation, we can determine three elements that result in a higher or lower electoral participation: the importance of elections, the voters' emotional involvement and the uncertainty of the election outcome. Of course, they are interconnected and it is hard to establish their individual contribution.

a. The importance of elections

There is no doubt that in the short history of the Croatian multiparty system the first free democratic elections of 1990 were the most important ones. Besides deciding about who will come to power, which is the usual role of elections in parliamentary democracies, those elections also decided on the break-up with the former political system, and also paved the way for the break-up with the former state union. The elections of 1992 and 1995 did not have that content, and they were held in the wake of the euphoria following the international recognition of Croatia (1992) and the military victories (1995). The elections of 2000 were primarily characterized by the desire of a large number of voters for a change in the way of governing (from authoritarian to democratic), while the elections of 2003, probably for the first time, were based on the evaluation of success, or failure, of the government.

b. Voters' emotional involvement

This factor that influences electoral participation depends to a large degree on the nature of the opposed options. If social circumstances are stable, if political parties base their programs more or less on common general value orientations, if they see each other (and behave accordingly) as political opponents and not as enemies, then the emotional involvement is small. And vice versa, when the value orientations are "either-or", when the relations are seen as "us" and "them", or in other words when we have the "friend-foe" relationship, then the emotional involvement is exceptionally high, and consequently electoral participation is higher. In the analysis of the Croatian political scene and voter turnout one would assume that the voters' emotional involvement has been decreasing from the first elections in 1990 to the elections of 2003. However, it should be pointed out that emotional tension is often created on purpose in election

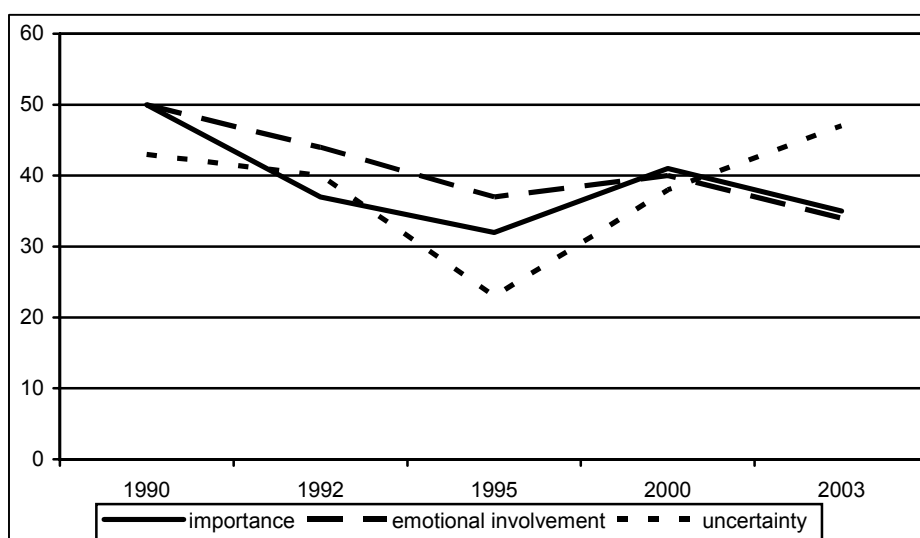
campaigns, even to the point of mutual exclusivity, because emotional saturation brings voters to the ballot-boxes!

c. Uncertainty of the electoral outcome

When we talk about electoral outcome uncertainty, then we primarily refer to the voter perception, and not so much to the results of polls or media comments (which, of course, create the atmosphere of uncertainty). In short, the general rule is that the greater the uncertainty, the bigger the importance of every individual vote and consequently the motivation of voters to go out and vote. In line with that thesis the greatest uncertainty concerning the electoral outcome should have been for the elections of 1990 and 2003, while the uncertainty was exceptionally small in the elections of 1992 and 1995.

These three features of the social situation, the importance of the elections, the emotional saturation and the uncertainty of the outcome, and their assumed influence on the electoral participation can also be shown graphically.⁵

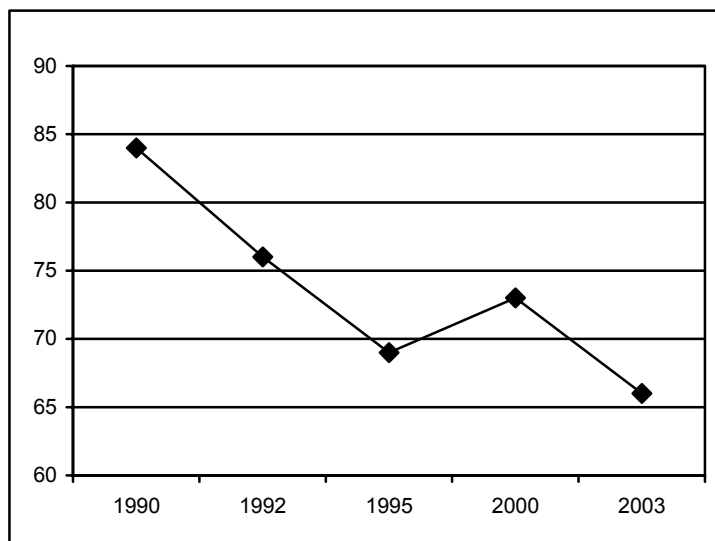
Picture 1. Estimation of importance, emotional involvement and uncertainty of the elections in 1990-2003



⁵ These are, of course, subjective estimates. In this case, individual aspects of electoral situations were estimated by 32 graduate students of comparative politics, participating in the course on “Comparative political behaviour”.

The next picture demonstrates the electoral participation in the elections from 1990 to 2003.

Picture 2. Percentage of the voter turnout in the elections from 1990 to 2003

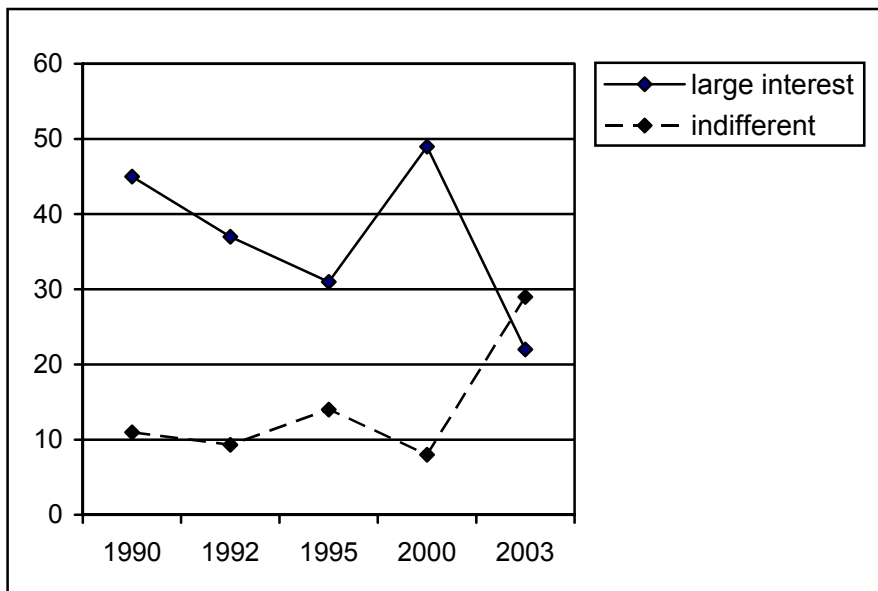


It is interesting to compare the voters' interest for individual parliamentary elections, based on systematic surveys conducted on the eve of the elections.⁶

As we can see by comparing the data on these two pictures, the interest in the elections gauged by the replies of the respondents in the survey conducted on a sample of citizens and the percentage of citizens who actually voted, show identical regular patterns. The elections of 1990 and 2000 were the most important ones in the short history of free democratic elections in Croatia. This certainly does not mean that the other elections did not play a significant role in the development of democratic relations and determining who would get the mandate to govern in Croatia. However, the nature of the problems in 1990 and 2000 about which the Croatian voters were deciding were crucially important not only for the election of the government, but also for the establishment of a different political regime.

⁶ These are systematic surveys conducted by the Faculty of Political Science within the project "Elections, political parties and the parliament in Croatia". All the data in the article related to the Republic of Croatia, were collected during the project. It should be noted that the modalities of the answers in the survey conducted in 2003 were somewhat different (in previous surveys the modalities were: very interested, moderately interested and indifferent, while in the survey conducted for the 2003 elections one more modality was introduced: poorly interested). However, we do not think that this has had any significant impact on the basic trend of the responses.

Picture 3. Interest in elections 1990-2003



3. Voters motivation

According to A. Campbell (1962) "...a truly passive citizen is the one that does not vote for a lack of motivation". To understand the motivational structure of the social situation which underlies political passiveness, it is not enough to know its characteristics, but also to know how the voters' perceive the situation and what kind of expectations they have. To understand political motivation, this time applied to the domain of voting behaviour, we can use the well-known thesis from Vroom's theory of expectations (1964): "The motivational force of the situation in which we choose will be proportional to the perceived possibility that the choice of one and not some other alternative will lead to the wanted results."

The circumstances connected to this kind of motivation are:

- It is discouraging if a candidate is a person who will not have any influence in the representative body he/she is elected to. This occurs when the ruling authority wants to give itself a democratic form, although the power is in someone else's hands.
- The bigger the number of voters, the smaller the motivation, because the individual vote is "lost" and the individual feels he/she is not deciding about it.
- The level of the elections: presidential or parliamentary elections are more stimulating than the elections for municipal or city assemblies.

These are the reasons connected with the so-called *interest voting* or the voting brought on by some values or interests and needs of the voters who seek to achieve them through the participation in electoral processes. People, however, often participate in elections not because they believe that any of the offered options has any bearing on them, but simply because they are subjected to the group pressure that demands from them to perform their “civic duty”. This form of participation is often called *conformist voting*.⁷ According to that, passiveness can be the result of a lack of “interest” motivation i.e. lack of belief that one’s needs will be met through election activities and the absence of social “pressure” to participate in electoral activities.

Based on this, we can identify four rules which determine the electoral participation of various groups. A group will participate in elections more if:

1. its interests are substantially connected with the competences and the policies of the authority being elected⁸;
2. there are more possibilities to be informed about the importance of the policies that the authority being elected has been implementing or can implement in its interest;
3. it is exposed to social pressure that voting demands⁹;
4. the pressure to vote is not dispersed in various political directions so that it creates a conflict on how to vote.¹⁰

Certainly, the basis of voting motivation, as one of the key indicators of political activism, is not identical in single-party (totalitarian) and multi-party (democratic) political systems. Nevertheless, one should not have illusions that the sole fact of existence of a democratic system leads automatically to an increase in the interest for politics in general, especially for elections.

⁷ Conformist voting is rampant in totalitarian societies where voting is mostly a form of controlled plebiscitary support for a particular ruler, independently of the will of the electorate.

⁸ Most probably in Croatia these are now primarily groups of displaced people, participants of the homeland war and pensioners.

⁹ In this thesis we can find the answer to the question why there is a significantly higher electoral participation by voters in traditional, small communities in Croatia, which also means a potentially greater support for the parties that have identified such voters as their focus group or they enjoy a high level of support in them. In Croatia this foremost refers to the HSS (Croatian Peasants’ Party). This thesis is best illustrated by the data from the Zagreb Municipal Assembly elections of 2001, when the voter turnout was 65%, and the HSS got about 3,5% of the votes, compared to the elections for the neighbourhood councils a year later, where the voter turnout was 15%, and the HSS got 20% of the votes, primarily from suburbs and villages.

¹⁰ In literature the most often cited example is that of the United States i.e. the conflict deriving from party alignment and one’s own and presidential candidate’s religious affiliation. To be more concrete, a conflict arises with a protestant supporter of the Democratic Party who is faced with the fact that his/her party’s candidate is – a catholic! It has been observed that many voters confronted with this kind of a dilemma stay at home. In Croatia it is possible to have this kind of conflict with the voters from a national minorities who have to decide whether to vote as members of their minority for their minority representatives or to vote as the citizens of Croatia for their political choice.

In his seminal work on political participation Milbrath (1965) distinguished between four groups of voters: the so-called *gladiators*, *transients*, *spectators* and the *apathetic*. Picture 4 shows concrete forms of behaviour of these groups.

Picture 4. Hierarchical display of political inclusion (Milbrath, 1965)

Public or party function Candidate for the function Collecting means for political activities Visiting meetings where decisions are made Active member of political party Contribution to political campaign	<i>Gladiator activities</i>
Visiting political meetings Giving financial means to the party Contacting the public or political leaders	<i>Transitive activities</i>
Wearing badges or labels on the car Persuading others how to vote Starting political conversations Going to the polls Exposure to political influences	<i>Observer activities</i>
Apathetics	<i>Apathetics</i>

Analyzing the share of individual groups in the American population he writes: “Around one third of the American adult population can be described as politically apathetic or passive; mostly they are, literally, unconscious of the political content they live in. The next 60% are mostly observers of political processes; they observe, clap, vote, but do not go into battles. Literally, it is probable that only 1 to 2% of citizens can be called “gladiators”.

In his analysis of political activism, R. Rose (1989) begins with a somewhat sarcastic attitude about “the little man in high politics” and, accordingly, offers some generalisations on the degree and the sort of activism. According to his estimate:

1. 10% of the population is politically very active; they participate on the local and the state level, as well as in the preparation and organization of elections;
2. 20% of the population is moderately active and their activity is mainly manifested at election time;
3. About 50% of the population participates only in elections, the only form of their political activity;
4. The remaining 20% of the population do not participate in politics at all, not even in elections.

Analysing the motivational base of political activism, R. Rose on the one hand emphasises the spontaneous adoption of values within the family, and on the other the

conscious process of “indoctrination” through the institutions of society. In line with this, Rose gives the following systematization of voters:

1. 20% of the population forms their attitudes entirely within the family; these are the individuals with “traditional values” who automatically follow and repeat their parents’ choices.
2. For 10% of the electorate the social environment can be taken as the “explanatory principle”. This is the interaction between the family origin and the membership in different social groups.
3. More than 1/3 of the voters have “informed” political attitudes and motives. Their political attitudes and their electoral choices are determined by the system of values they have adopted as adults. They have very specific understandings about the values of liberalism, conservatism or socialism, in other words about the left-right orientation.
4. About 10% of the population is the active part of the public that does not participate in party activities, but attentively monitor the activity of the parties and the government bodies, critically evaluate them, and make their choices on the grounds of their performance.
5. About 10% of the electorate are the so-called party activists and active participants in political life. They are loyal partisans of some party, regardless of a party activity and performance.

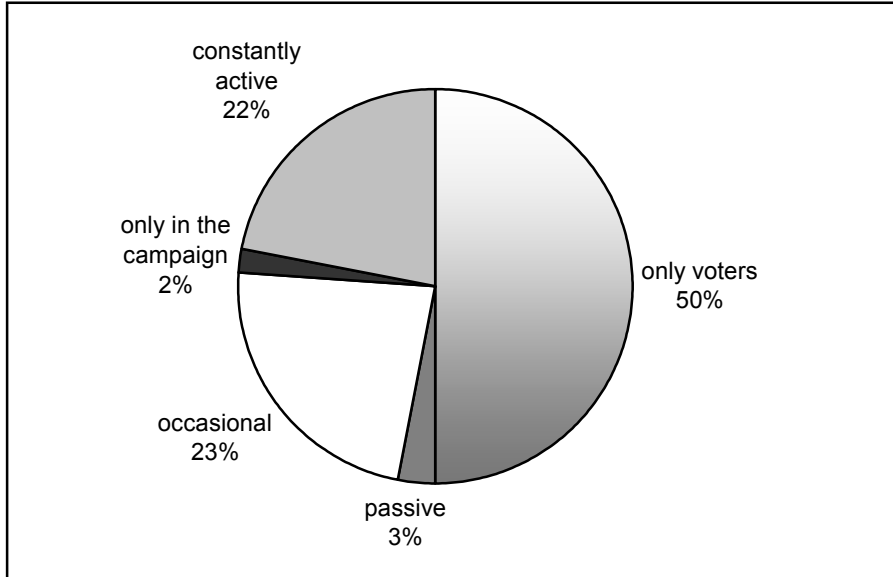
In their comparative analysis of citizens' behaviour at the level of local elections in Great Britain and France, A. Mabileau and others (1989) have come up with the findings shown in Picture 5.

Without questioning the general findings of political interest research, primarily the high number of disinterested, apathetic, passive citizens, Neuman (1986) offers the so-called “model of stratified pluralism”. The basic assumption of that model is that at every level of expressed political interest and participation (with the exception of the passive “silent majority”) there are subgroups that are interested, informed and active regarding different problems. In other words, according to Neuman, it is difficult to talk about a general political interest in the circumstances of complex social problems. His theses are probably more and more topical considering the decreasing visibility of classical political cleavages, ideological patterns and parties in making political choices, and the increasing role of specific concrete problems that, from election to election, rally interested groups and individuals. His model is shown in Picture 6.

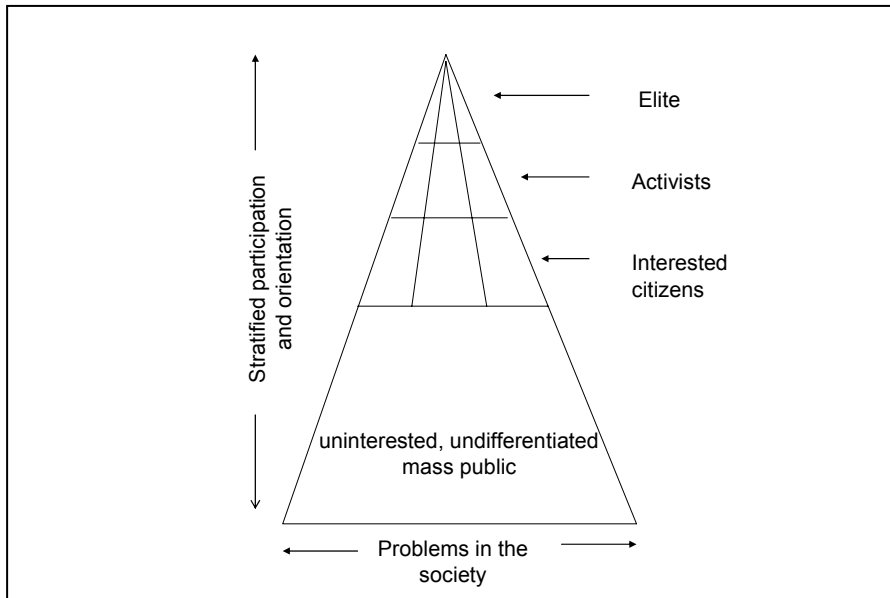
Since in most countries participation in politics is voluntary, it depends primarily on the motivation and individual capabilities. Besides, we should also have in mind some specific social relationships i.e support or social pressures for participation. In other words, the explanation of a person’s passivity lies in three simple reasons (Verba/Schlozman/ Brady, 1995):

- because “they can’t” (shortage of time or some other reasons)
- because they don't want to (disappointed in politics, perceived inability of influence)
- because nobody persuaded them (isolated from others, inadequate mobilisation).

Picture 5. Structure of political participation



Picture 6. Model of stratified pluralism (Neuman)



It is usually thought that election campaigns are some sort of a competition of programs, leaders, promises and so on in order to sway the voters and gain their affection. In these campaigns everyone tries to impose their view of current and acute social problems, identify social priorities (the so-called *agenda setting*), define the perception of oneself as the 'God given' leader into the bright future, and the perception of the political opponent as simply incompetent to cope with social problems.¹¹ However, analyses show that election campaigns have a relatively small influence on the change of electoral choice (3% to 5%), but that significantly influence the turnout. In other words, election campaigns are more in the function of the mobilisation of the potential voters of individual parties than they aspire to change electoral choice. The statements like: "We enjoy a considerably higher support, but our voters stayed at home", as a rationalisation of electoral failure of individual parties, actually signify the inadequate political mobilisation of their potential voters. The already mentioned example of the campaign *Glas 99* (Vote of 99) shows how political mobilisation of the electorate is possible even independently of concrete party programs.

4. *(Non)Participation in Croatian elections and the attitude towards politics*

It is quite difficult to unequivocally operationalize the problem of electoral participation, the reasons for voting or non-voting, especially in comparison to other research. It is especially difficult if the research itself is not entirely focused on that type of problems. Since we depend on the surveys in Croatia, there is an additional problem: a large percentage of respondents reject to participate in the surveys and it is very difficult to objectively determine the reasons for this rejection, the more so because in Croatia the rejection is markedly greater in big urban areas, which contradicts the general findings worldwide about the greater rejection in rural areas. Also, the assumption is that there would be more resistance to participating in the survey by those who will probably abstain from voting. However, based on the obtained responses, it is possible to come to certain conclusions by comparing the responses of the respondents who had already made their electoral choice at the time the research was conducted, and those who had not and generally have doubts about voting or they had already decided not to vote.

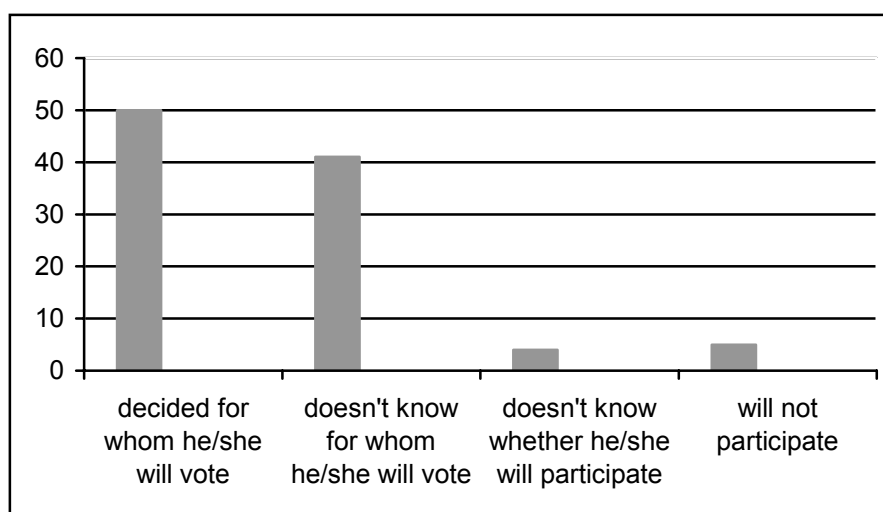
In Picture 7 we have shown the structure of the so-called independent variable i.e. the intention of electoral participation.

The structure of the responses on this variable shows us that mostly those respondents were willing to participate in the survey who were also more willing to vote. From the metric point of view it is difficult to expect big statistical differences in relations to these key variables and the other research variables. However, the fact that considering the size of the sample in the categories "I don't know whether I will participate" and "I won't participate" we have 48 and 58 respondents (which is usually taken as the limit for the so-called "small groups"), enables us to use some statistical procedures. It needs

¹¹ See further arguments in Edelman (2003) and Šiber (2003).

to be emphasized in explaining the differences between the groups of responses regarding the willingness to vote that *there are no differences regarding the demographic characteristics* of the respondents. This means that, at least in our sample i.e the respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, there are no differences regarding the gender, age and education.

Picture 7. Readiness to participate in elections



a. Reasons for electoral (non)participation

In order to get answers to this, we listed nine different reasons in the form of statements with the corresponding Likert scale. The responses were subjected to factor analysis and we got three consistent and interpretable factors.¹²

These three isolated factors explain 55% of the overall variance (the difference among the respondents on the applied scale). The *first factor* is bipolar; on one pole it comprises the statements that refer to a certain feeling of helplessness: all politicians are the same, I cannot change anything, and I have enough problems of my own. On the other pole are the statements about the importance of participating in political life and the importance of elections for the future of the country. We will call this factor the *feeling of helplessness*.

¹² In the study of the elections of 2000, we got four factors that also explained 55% of the overall variance of the responses (Šiber, 2001). It is difficult to say whether this is due to a higher structuring of the responses stemming from the firmer attitudes because of the political “maturing”, or to considerable statistical deviations, often a result of the logic of big numbers. In any case, the content of the factors is identical, having in mind that two factors obtained in 2000 are compressed into one in the 2003 survey.

Table 3: Reasons for participation – factor structure

Statements	F1	F2	F3
I am occupied with my own problems and I don't have time or will for politics and elections	.796		
The elections are of no interest to me, because there are no new people and ideas in Croatian politics	.729		
My vote is unimportant, I cannot change anything by participating in the elections	.706		
It is important to me that I participate in the political life of the community	-.536		.362
If I go out to vote it will be exclusively on the persuasion of my family, friend or colleague from work	.397		
I don't want HDZ to come back into power		.827	
I expect that the ruling coalition and SDP get removed from power at these elections		-.814	
If I go out to vote, it will be exclusively because I consider it my civic duty			.834
I consider these elections very important for the future of the country	-.430		.609
Percentage of the explained overall variety:	28,33	14,68	12,15

The second factor is also bipolar and comprises mutually opposed statements about the wish to prevent “the others” from winning. In some way this is about *ideological exclusivity* i.e. the perception of danger in case the SDP or the HDZ come to power.

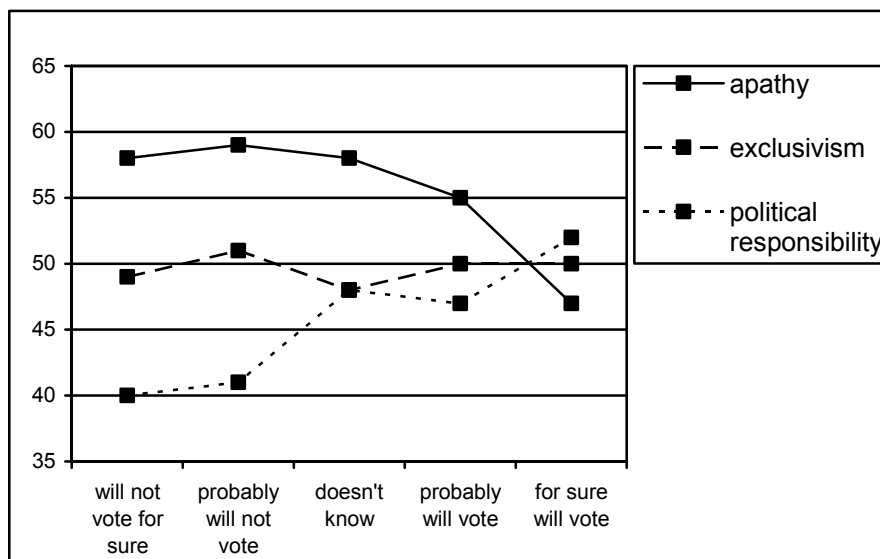
The third factor comprises the statements about civic duty and the importance of elections; we will call this factor *political responsibility*.

What kind of assumptions can be made about the relationship between political participation and the obtained factors? First, it is to be expected that the individuals who will not participate in the elections, as well as the ones who have not yet decided, will show a far higher degree of *political helplessness* (factor 1) and a smaller degree of *political responsibility* (factor 3). Regarding factor 2 (*ideological exclusivity*) we assume there will not be any significant differences considering the degree of electoral participation.

The obtained data are congruent with the starting assumptions. For the factor of the *feeling of helplessness* the ETA of 0.346 was obtained, which indicates a significant correlation of that factor and the potential participation in elections. Those who have decided not to participate, many more express the view that elections do not solve anything and that their vote will not make any difference. The other extreme are the ones who have already decided who they are going to vote for and who believe that electoral participation enables a person to influence social processes. A similar but contrary relationship has been obtained for the factor of *political responsibility*. Those who know

who they are going to vote for emphasize the importance of participating in the political life of the community and the importance of elections for the future of the country. As predicted, there is no such connection with the factor of *ideological exclusivity*. With this factor, the voters' political orientation (primarily in the opposition HDZ-SDP), has a significantly bigger, even the deciding role. This is visible from the next table.

Picture 8. Participation in elections and reasons for (non) participation



Note: The factor results (the arithmetic mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1), have been converted into the standard values with AM=50 and SD=10.

The data in this table show the perpetuation of the conflict between the HDZ and the SDP i.e. a sort of the domination of passion in political orientations. Despite great similarity between the elections in 2000 and 2003, there are some significant changes. The HSLs voters from 2000 who, according to these data, at that time wanted to remove the HDZ from power, in the elections of 2003 wanted to remove the SDP. The IDS voters, probably due to the electoral coalition with the SDP, became significantly more critical towards the HDZ, just as the criticism of the HNS voters towards HDZ is more evident.¹³ The reason why the HSP voters are less exclusive towards the SDP in comparison to the HDZ voters perhaps lies in the fact that those voters who mainly vote

¹³ This is probably a result of the fact that many people who in 2000 gave their vote to the SDP in the 2003 elections voted for HNS.

to thwart someone, to vote “against”, give their vote to the party they perceive as the one that has a chance to achieve it – the HDZ or the SDP.

Table 4: Choice of political party and “ideological exclusivity” 2000-2003

Political Party	2000	2003
HDZ	61.21	61.17
HSP	53.64	54.10
HSS	49.95	48.31
HSLŠ	47.13	52.31
HNS	46.65	43.42
IDS	45.92	39.99
LS	44.04	45.52
SDP	42.27	40.35
Eta:	0.668	0.762

b. Emotions towards politics

Although not directly bearing on political behaviour, it is interesting to look at the perceptual aspect of politics regarding this problem, or at the emotions that politics arouses in individuals. In the operationalization of this variable, we have come up with three groups of emotions which cover the dimension positive-negative. The first group are the positive emotions to politics: excitement, enthusiasm and interest; in second group are the negative emotions: mistrust, anger and discomfort; in the third group are the neutral emotions: indifference, boredom and the answer “I don't know”. Since we applied the identical variable in an earlier research, in completely different social conditions¹⁴, we can compare the emotional aspect of politics in two different political systems in the same society.

Table 5: Emotions towards politics 1986–2003 (in %)

Emotions towards politics	1986	2003
<i>Positive emotions</i> : excitement, enthusiasm, interest	39	22
<i>Negative emotions</i> : mistrust, anger, discomfort	37	45
<i>Neutral emotions</i> : indifference, boredom, “I don't know”	24	33

The presented data unmistakably show that the institution of the democratic system strengthened the negative emotions towards politics! The explanation of this fact should probably be sought on two sides. One is the feeling of the freedom of expression. Regardless of the fact that these surveys were anonymous, the respondents sometimes have

¹⁴ The data from the 1986 study of the delegate system (Šiber, 1991).

the feeling that their responses are controlled, judged, so that there might be unwanted consequences due to their answers. Of course, this kind of “auto-censorship” was much more present in the former political system. The other explanation that we are much more inclined to is related to the expectations regarding politics. By establishing a multiparty system, politics becomes a competitive process in which citizens have a genuine possibility, by choosing among different political options, to influence their position, the realisation of their interests and values and in a broader sense channel social developments. Big expectations such as these, which surfaced almost overnight, for there was no continued process of socialisation for democratic system, have clashed with the social reality, concrete political parties, politicians, restrictions within the country and in its surroundings. There is a well-known psychological truism that motivation and contentment of a person do not solely depend on what one has, but primarily on the discrepancy between what one has and what one wants. Big expectations accompanying the change of a political system and the difficulties in the realization stir up negative emotions towards the political sphere.¹⁵

But what about the emotions towards politics and the readiness to vote? At the level of assumption, those that are going to vote have more positive emotions towards politics than those who are not. On the one hand the indifference to politics and on the other the negative emotions to it results in electoral abstention.

Table 6: Electoral participation and emotions towards politics

Electoral participation	Positive emotions	Negative emotions	Indifference
For sure will vote	27.1	44.2	28.7
Probably will vote	8.1	49.4	42.5
Does not know	21.5	42.9	33.3
Probably will not vote	0.0	40.0	57.1
Will not vote for sure	2.0	45.2	58.0

The acquired contingency coefficient $C = 0.294$ shows there are significant differences among individual groups of respondents, considering their willingness to vote and the emotions towards politics. However, the starting assumption is not completely confirmed. The negative emotions towards politics are mostly equally present with all groups of respondents, which means they are not the ones who demotivate or lead to electoral abstention. Electoral abstention is primarily the result of the alienation from politics or, as it stands in the already quoted Campbell's sentence, the really passive citizens are those that do not participate in the elections.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, we do not have the data on the emotions towards politics for the period between 1990 and 2003. We just assume that in the function of time the positive feelings fade and the negative or neutral ones get stronger.

c. Electoral participation and political attitudes

Since it is very difficult to influence the already formed political choices, to what extent can a political party attract voters from the relatively sizeable group of those who do not vote.¹⁶ Regardless of what we have seen before and concluded that the citizens who do not vote are not interested in politics, they do have their political views, world-views, concrete political opinions. Upon analysing all the indicators of the respondents attitudes to various aspects of social life, the current problems and relationships, we have singled out only one indicator that distinguishes the respondents according to their interest in elections and their willingness to vote. This indicator is the obtained factor within the analysis of the perception of the future government's goals after the elections and consists of the following contents:

- Support to the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Protection of the dignity of the Homeland war
- Strengthening the military power and state security
- Spiritual renewal
- Stimulation of population growth

All these contents point to a latent dimension (factor) which we can call the *statebuilding-conservative*.¹⁷

The data in Picture 9 show that statistically there is a bigger interest in elections and the readiness to vote among the voters who want the future government to direct its efforts primarily to the so-called "statebuilding" problems that are, as all the analyses of previous and the last elections have shown, mainly the preoccupation of the right-wing voters and the right-wing parties.

This conclusion can be illustrated with the data in Table 7 on the relations between the political worldview and the statebuilding–conservative orientation, or by Picture 10 about the left-right self-identification and the statebuilding-conservative orientation.

¹⁶ It is widely held that the former American president Bill Clinton won the 1992 elections not because he had managed to persuade a part of the Republican constituency that he was the better candidate but mostly because he had managed to get to the polls the members of mainly marginal social groups who otherwise do not participate in elections.

¹⁷ The survey covers three sets of indicators: the focus of the future government on specific goals, the conservative-liberal values and the role of the state, the market, entrepreneurship and social politics. The indicators are subjected to the factor analysis. Specific factors of higher order were gained that point to the hierarchical structure of social and political views. Besides the statebuilding-conservative factor, within the perception of the desired goals of the future government, we singled out the factors that we tentatively called: the socio-liberal, the Euro-liberal and the entrepreneurially-liberal. Among those factors, however, there are no differences regarding the political interest and the willingness to vote.

Picture 9. Probability of voting and interest in elections and the statebuilding-conservative orientation

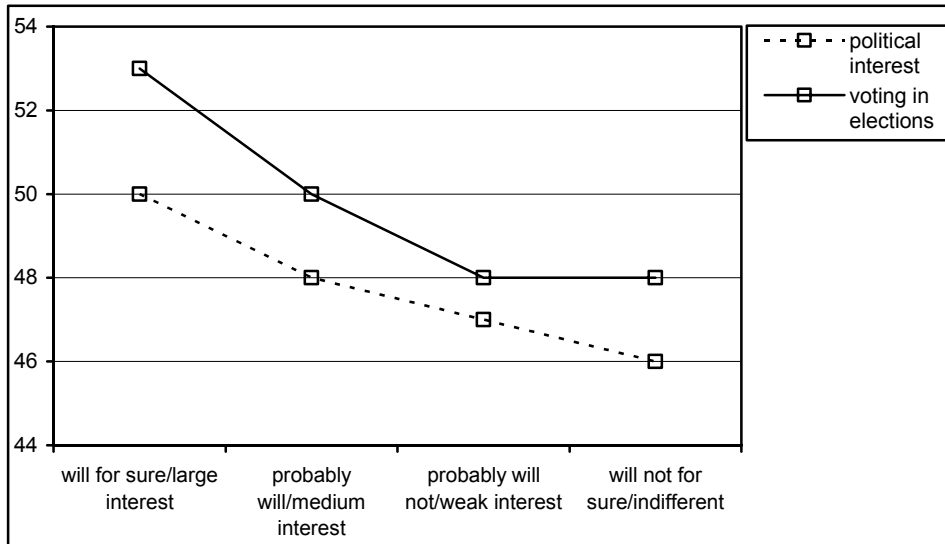
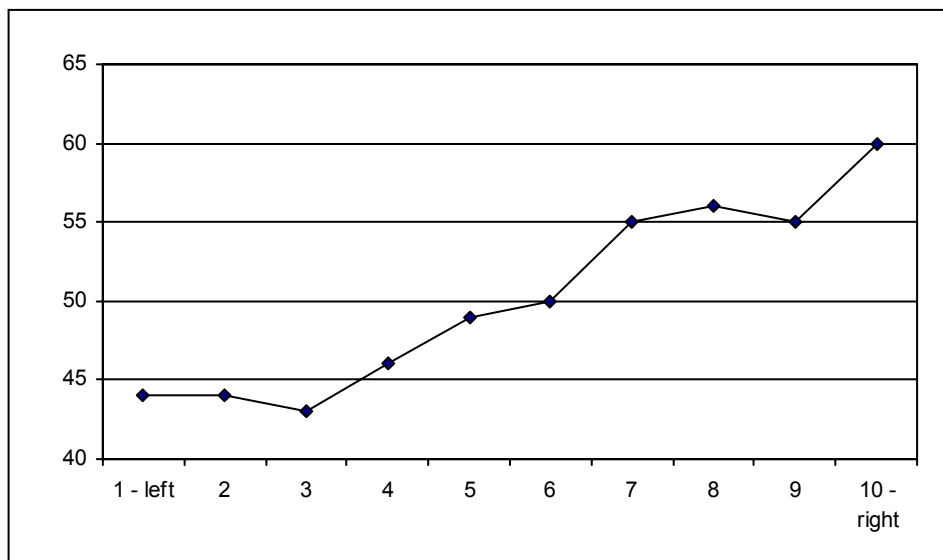


Table 7: Political worldview and the statebuilding-conservative orientation

Worldview	AM
Christian democracy	55.11
Nationalism	53.92
Conservatism	52.34
Liberalism	46.94
Social democracy	46.21
Communism	45.67

A plausible assumption can be made based on these findings, that among the voters who demonstrated a smaller interest in the previous elections and a smaller readiness to go to the elections, the potential voters of liberal and left-wing options predominate.

Picture 10. Left-right self-identification and the statebuilding-conservative orientation



5. Conclusion

The problem of participation and political interest in general can mainly be analysed through three types of comparisons: the *comparison in time*, meaning the analysis of the demonstrated interest and the electoral participation in the longitudinal analysis (in Croatia mainly in the period 1990-2003); the *comparison in space*, an analysis of political participation and interest in relation to other countries (the analysis can be focused on the transitional countries which share some common historical heritage and political culture with Croatia, or on the comparison with developed and stable democratic countries); the *comparison within Croatia*, a sort of a typological analysis within which the political participation and the interests of various social and political groups are analysed. Methodologically, there are two basic approaches to the analysis of electoral behaviour: the analysis of election statistics¹⁸, primarily based on the percentage of voter turnout, or the results of survey research by which we can get the data on motivation, views, interests, etc. which enables us to analyse the differences between individual groups of voters.

Our longitudinal analysis has shown that the electoral participation in Croatia depends, firstly, on the *importance of elections*; particularly important were the elections of 1990 and 2000, the elections when momentous political changes were at stake: the changes of the political system and the status of Croatia (1990), or the mode of rule –

¹⁸ In literature, this kind of analysis is called the aggregate study, ecological analysis or electoral geography.

democratic or authoritarian (2000), and secondly, on the *uncertainty of electoral winner* (elections of 1990 and 2003). We have also put forward some data showing that in the function of time and direct experience with the functioning of a democratic political system certain disappointment in politics sets in. That finding can be explained by a certain discrepancy between the starting expectations and the everyday experience which has not fulfilled these expectations. Since the political culture that is required by the democratic system necessarily needs some time and maturing (part of that is most certainly the formation of realistic expectations about what politics can achieve and under which circumstances), it is to be expected that this gap between the expectations and the possibilities will narrow with time, and that politics itself will lose that general importance and emotional saturation which often leads to apathy and passiveness when the expectations remain unfulfilled.

Within the agreeable comparative analysis to other countries, it has turned out that the electoral participation in Croatia is mainly at the level of the lower average values of the countries with a significantly longer democratic tradition, but that the level of participation is also significantly higher than in many former “socialist” countries in transition.

The analysis of the electoral participation and the political interest in Croatia has shown that the assumptions according to which the non-participation in the elections is the result of political discontent and disappointment that leads to apathy are not true, but that the politically passive persons are indeed not interested in politics and elections. Contrary to the findings of other research, primarily in the US, that people of a higher socio-economic status (higher education, higher income, certain professions, etc.) are significantly more politically active (Verba et al., 1998), in Croatia these differences do not exist.

One of the indicators of the reasons for electoral participation that most significantly distinguishes the electorates is more of an indicator of the nature of the political scene in Croatia than of the concrete interests of individual groups. There is a kind of a dichotomy of the negative voting of the HDZ and SDP constituencies: people vote in order to prevent the other party to come to power.

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