

Introductory remarks

The 18th International Annual Conference of the Serbian Political Science Association (SPSA), titled “Super Election Year 2024”, was held on October 26–27, 2024, at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. As a regular annual academic event, the conference gathered 175 participants from Serbia and abroad, with 130 presenting papers – further reinforcing its reputation as the most significant annual gathering in political science in Serbia and the region.

The conference featured both general and special sections (“Elections, Political Parties, Representation, and Ideologies”), conducted in English, and included two keynote speeches by distinguished international scholars – Professor Filip Kostelka (European University Institute) and Professor Nic Cheeseman (University of Birmingham). The program was structured into seven thematic sessions with 22 panels, covering political science, political theory, political economy, media studies, and international relations. Particular emphasis was placed on current research concerning Serbia and the broader region, alongside significant comparative topics. Additional events included a debate on electoral systems, book presentations, and a roundtable organized by the Balkan Association for Political Science.

The year 2024 was remarkable as a global “super election year”, with over 4.2 billion people eligible to vote in approximately 78 countries, including eight of the world’s ten most populous nations, such as India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil. This wave of elections reflected profound shifts in political landscapes and posed significant challenges and opportunities for democracies worldwide. These global trends and their implications for democratic processes were central to the conference, which brought together scholars and practitioners to deepen the understanding of contemporary challenges in political representation and democracy.

The substantial participation of domestic and international scholars, along with the quality and originality of presented research, underscored the importance of the SPSA Conference in advancing professional standards, fostering

academic collaboration, and promoting political science research to a broader audience. Many of the papers presented at the conference – particularly those by international participants and senior scholars – have since been published in leading domestic and international journals, further reflecting the academic value of the event and its broader impact beyond this volume.

The papers presented in this volume provide insightful analyses of various critical dimensions of political processes and structures. Several studies examine electoral dynamics in Serbia, with authors exploring campaign strategies in polarized contexts (Vujanović & Atlagić, Chapter 2), the role of political leadership in shaping citizens' perceptions of well-being (Bešić, Chapter 1), and the impact of populist discourse on political trust and cynicism (Ilić, Chapter 9). One study investigates mechanisms of political selection and accountability, proposing the random selection of political representatives as an alternative to traditional electoral systems (Novaković, Chapter 8). Additionally, the advantages and potential applicability of the directly elected mayor model in Serbia are analyzed through comparative experiences from other European countries (Stančetić, Chapter 6), as well as regional case studies from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kovačević, Chapter 7).

A detailed comparative study explores the political experience of local representatives in Serbia within a broader international framework (Bursać, Vučićević & Stamenković, Chapter 3), while another analyzes strategic narratives of EU enlargement in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections (Milutinović & Igrutinović, Chapter 5). Several papers engage broader theoretical and methodological questions, including the reconfiguration of party competition in the European Union following the 2024 EP elections (Tadić, Chapter 11). This analysis suggests a shift from centripetal to centrifugal models of competition, reflecting deeper transformations within European political systems. One contribution (Shikova, Chapter 4) examines the evolving political landscape in North Macedonia, with particular attention to the role of emerging political actors in shaping the trajectory of the country's EU integration process.

A historical-philosophical contribution (Mujević, Chapter 10) revisits the intellectual legacies of Valtazar Bogišić and Mihailo Konstantinović, offering valuable perspectives for ongoing debates in legal and political thought. Collectively, these papers reflect a wide range of methodological approaches and empirical case studies, offering a comprehensive insight into contemporary political phenomena.

The editors would like to thank all authors and reviewers for their valuable contributions, as well as the members of the conference organizing committee, whose efforts ensured both the academic quality and organizational success of the event. We hope that the papers collected here will serve not only as a reflection of the diverse and vibrant scholarly debates held during the conference, but also as a stimulus for future research, collaboration, and critical

engagement with the evolving challenges of political life in Serbia, the region, and beyond.

Looking ahead, the 19th Annual International Conference of the Serbian Political Science Association will be held on October 25–26, 2025, under the theme “Institutions as Battlegrounds: State Capture, Resistance and Academic Freedom under Siege.” Inspired by recent student protests, civic mobilization, and global democratic challenges, the upcoming conference will explore the pressures on institutions and the emergence of new civic and political forms of resistance. It will also provide space for comparative analysis of protest movements, democratic backsliding, and transformative potentials across different national and regional contexts. We invite scholars to reflect on both the vulnerabilities and the resilience of democratic institutions in times of crisis and contestation.

Dušan Vučićević
Marko Veković