

Unpacking the Elite–Public Foreign Policy (Dis)Connect: “Jealously Preserving” Military Neutrality in Serbia, Yet for Different Reasons?

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Abstract: Public opinion on foreign policy was for decades largely dismissed in international relations and foreign policy studies, typically under the assumption that it merely mirrored elite preferences. Subsequent scholarship, however, has challenged this view by documenting numerous instances of “foreign policy disconnects”, showing that public and elite attitudes diverge more frequently and persistently than initially assumed, with significant implications for policymaking. Distinguishing between preference-level (mis)alignment, understood as support for or opposition to a given policy, and belief-level (mis)alignment, which captures the reasoning behind such positions, this article seeks to unpack these disconnects, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the elite–public nexus in foreign policy. On this basis, it introduces a novel matrix of foreign policy (dis)connects, yielding four ideal types: full connect, divergent connect, convergent disconnect, and full disconnect. The framework is applied to the case of Serbia’s military neutrality, often portrayed as a stable consensus between policymakers and the public within Serbia’s multi-vector foreign and security policy. Drawing on discourse analysis of Serbia’s strategic framework since 2007 and original 2023 survey data, the article shows that while both policymakers and the public endorse neutrality, their underlying justifications diverge, with public attitudes appearing less normative and idealistic than elite narratives suggest. As a divergent connect, the case demonstrates that apparent preference alignment can obscure belief-level tensions, with such mismatches capable of both limiting and enabling policy change.

Keywords: foreign policy, elite-public nexus, public opinion, military neutrality, Serbia, discourse analysis.

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Introduction

While scholars and experts differ on whether military neutrality is an optimal stance for Serbia, or even whether it constitutes genuine neutrality at all, they generally agree that its demonstrated endurance largely stems from the public's swift and strong attachment to it and, consequently, from policymakers' reluctance to challenge it even if they privately question its strategic value. Notably, although military neutrality was introduced without prior public or political debate, without clear meaning and strong legal foundation, it was rapidly embraced by the Serbian public. Polls conducted shortly after its adoption showed support at 45% (BCBP 2012),² with that figure only rising steadily to around 60% in early 2020s (CRTA 2022). Moreover, since the citizens' opposition to the policy has never exceeded 10%, based on the publicly available data, and no public outburst against it has ever occurred, military neutrality stands out as Serbia's least contested foreign policy stance over the past two decades. Policymakers themselves often acknowledge the strength of this public support, occasionally even conceding its constraining effect (Rečević Krstić 2025, 144).

Nevertheless, despite consistent survey data indicating strong public support for Serbia's policy of military neutrality, little is known about what enabled its rapid consolidation and sustained it over time. The puzzle becomes more striking when considering that over one-third of respondents openly admit to not knowing what military neutrality entails, and more than half believe the policy should be more clearly defined (BCBP 2017). Thus, although political elites have provided little explanation and the public has shown only limited understanding, military neutrality in today's Serbia is widely accepted as a given by both its proponents and opponents. To unpack how a seemingly robust social consensus could emerge in the absence of clear elite messaging or broad public comprehension, and how it has not only endured but intensified, it is necessary to move beyond survey data that merely measure support or opposition to this policy and instead examine the belief structures underpinning these stances. To illuminate the broader policy lifecycle of military neutrality in Serbia, one must ask whether the public simply follows elite cues, however ambiguous, or

² The absence of any publicly available surveys on military neutrality prior to the late 2000s underscores that the policy of military neutrality was introduced without thorough preparation or genuine engagement with public attitudes. It also suggests a dubious historical continuity of military neutrality in the country's foreign policy discourse and doctrine, frequently invoked by its political proponents.

whether it has developed an independent logic that leads to the conviction that military neutrality must indeed be “jealously preserved” (RSE 2022), as officials frequently assert.

To unpack this issue, the first chapter draws on the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature that examines the role of the public and its relationship with policymakers in foreign policy. By distinguishing between preference-level and belief-level alignment, it introduces a novel matrix of foreign policy (dis)connects, allowing for a more nuanced assessment of the stability of political and social consensus in foreign policy and the effort required to sustain or alter it. The second chapter applies this framework to Serbia’s policy of military neutrality, combining an analysis of the official foreign policy narrative, as articulated in strategic documents since 2007, with regression analysis of original survey data collected in 2023 on a nationally representative sample. The conclusion underscores the broader significance of critically unpacking presumed political and social consensus – or dissensus – on foreign policy both in the examined case and more generally.

The Foreign Policy (Dis)Connect Matrix: Unpacking the Elite–Public Relationship Through the Preference–Belief Nexus

Over several decades of FPA scholarship on the role of the public in foreign policy, it became increasingly evident that citizens hold more prudent and coherent foreign policy attitudes than previously assumed (Almond 1950; Lippmann 1955; Page and Shapiro 1982; Shapiro and Page 1988; 1992). This recognition spurred a growing body of both public-centred and elite-centred studies exploring the political consequences of public opinion in this domain, primarily asking who listens to whom (for an overview, see Aldrich et al. 2006; Park and Hawley 2020; Kaarbo 2015). In response to mixed and often contradictory empirical evidence about whether and when publics and elites follow or ignore one another, attention increasingly turned to the phenomenon of “foreign policy disconnects,” in which publics and elites hold different views despite their mutual influence (Page 2007; Page and Bouton 2008). Drawing on diverse strands of social, political, cognitive, and clinical psychology – from genetic predispositions, via cognitive heuristics, to socially driven factors – scholars have produced valuable insights into the public–elite nexus in foreign policy, marked by theoretical eclecticism and a strong methodological individualism characteristic of FPA (Morin and Paquin 2018). While the

theoretical and methodological heterogeneity of this literature makes any attempt at a comprehensive synthesis or the identification of a singular “gap” largely futile, two levels of (dis)connect have emerged as dominant in the field.

The prevailing approach focuses on *preference-level* (dis)connects, assessing alignment between public preferences and policymakers’ foreign policy choices. Preferences are here outcome-oriented stances on specific options, expressed through yes-or-no judgments of support, opposition, or relative priorities. Usually captured through binary polls or electoral results, the preference-level approach has driven the field’s most significant advances. Early skepticism about the public’s role, initially reinforced by data suggesting volatile and inconsistent preferences (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; 1987), was later overturned by sustained opposition to the Vietnam War and improved polling techniques showing greater stability and coherence in public’s foreign policy preferences (Verba et al. 1967; Caspary 1970). While Page and Shapiro (1982; 1988) showed that apparent volatility in public opinion was largely prudent, responding to meaningful international developments, later studies confirmed the uneven stickiness of views on issues such as arms control, military intervention, and terrorism, is often shaped by heuristics that enable quick judgments without extensive knowledge (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999; Sobel, Furia, and Barratt 2012; Kertzer 2013). An illustrative line of research on public preferences for war and casualties, initially assumed to follow a linear pattern of declining support as casualties rose (Mueller 1971; 1979; Milstein 1974; Klarevas, Gelpi, and Reifler 2006), later demonstrated that tolerance is contingent on various cues such as perceived mission success, legitimacy, or elite consensus (Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007)

Typically captured through binary polls or electoral results, the study of preference-level (mis)alignment between elites and the public has been particularly valuable for understanding whether, when, and how the public constrains elite decision-making. The notion that foreign policy makers “waltz before a blind audience” has been increasingly challenged by evidence showing that voters perceive differences in candidates’ foreign policy positions and cast their ballots accordingly (Aldrich and McKelvey 1977; Aldrich et al. 1989; Anand and Krosnick 2003; Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007; Reifler, Scotto, and Clarke 2011; Tomz, Weeks, and Yahri-Milo 2020). Research has shown that foreign policy preferences can decisively shape electoral outcomes, while studies of the U.S. presidential approval further demonstrated that foreign policy performance may weigh more heavily on public evaluations of leaders than domestic policy does (Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007; Wilcox and Allsop 1991; Nickelsburg and Norpoth

2000; Campbell 2004). This research has, however, also highlighted the conditional nature of public's influence, showing that foreign policy becomes electorally relevant only when parties adopt clear and opposing positions, the public has access to these stances, and the issues achieve sufficient political and media salience (Aldrich et al. 1989; Baum and Groeling 2008; 2009; 2010; Baum and Potter 2008). Studies grounded in audience cost theory, for instance, showed how public's foreign policy preferences shift depending on whether policymakers uphold or abandon their commitments, particularly in the context of war (Tomz 2007; Guisinger 2009; Potter and Baum 2014; Kertzer and Brutger 2016).

A particularly rich body of literature on electoral outcomes and the political influence of public opinion in foreign policy has emerged from research linking public preferences to partisan alignment. While evidence remains mixed – even within the deeply consolidated two-party system of the U.S. – most studies indicate that party affiliation is one of the most powerful predictors of public foreign policy preferences (Brody 1991; Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2007; 2009; Reifler, Scotto, and Clarke 2011). Other studies emphasize the influence not only of party leadership but also of a broader range of elites from whom the public learns what it needs to know, including the military establishment (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2018), foreign leaders (Murray 2014), and international institutions (Thompson 2006; Chapman 2009; Grieco et al. 2011). While these studies suggest that the public can hold stable preferences, they nonetheless portray them as mere cue-takers, implying that “the balance of public opinion on foreign policy issues is largely driven in a top-down fashion by the balance of elite opinion” (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017, 2). Yet, considerable evidence shows that the public can hold divergent views even in the face of strong elite or partisan consensus, with studies demonstrating that elite influence is often mediated by bottom-up cues and frames (Hayes and Guardino 2010; Kreps 2010; Mayer and Armor 2012; Druckman 2001; Druckman and Nelson 2003; Steenbergen, Edwards, and De Vries 2007), but also that public attitudes are often more stable and deeply rooted than mere reliance on heuristics would suggest.

By probing beneath surface-level preferences, the *belief-level* studies examine the assumptions, convictions, worldviews, and causal understandings of international relations that anchor them. Unlike preferences, which reflect immediate stances on specific foreign policies, beliefs are embedded in cognitive-affective frameworks about how the world works, serving as stabilizing forces that shape or constrain preferences and condition their alignment with elite perspectives. Much of this research, centered on the U.S., has focused on beliefs about international engagement in both war and peace. Several studies have, thus, shown that the American public falls along a continuum between

cooperative and militant internationalism (Mandelbaum and Schneider 1978; Maggiotto and Wittkopf 1981; Wittkopf and Maggiotto 1983; Oldendick and Bardes 1982; Mayer 1992). Although earlier works differed somewhat in their emphases and findings (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964), most converge on the conclusion that, much like elites, the American public has consistently favored international involvement, particularly on traditional foreign policy issues, while remaining divided on the balance between militant and cooperative approaches. Importantly, while many studies of this kind were conducted outside the U.S., Gravelle, Reifler, and Scotto (2017) demonstrate that similar underlying structures shape foreign policy attitudes across the Atlantic, showing that publics in the U.S., the United Kingdom, Germany, and France share core constructs in how they form views on international engagement.

To explain the stability of foreign policy preferences, some studies highlight hierarchically organised belief structures in which core values shape general postures such as militarism, anti-communism, or isolationism, which in turn give rise to specific foreign policy orientations (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson 1993; Peffley and Hurwitz 1992). Building on this framework, Rathbun (2007) finds that conservative values are closely linked to assertive internationalism, reflecting a predisposition toward forceful foreign relations, whereas universalist values most strongly predict cooperative internationalism, characterized by a preference for multilateralism and cosmopolitan engagement. More recent work further examines how sets of values, including moral ones, shape foreign policy attitudes (Kertzer 2013; Kertzer and McGraw 2012). For instance, Kertzer et al. (2014) demonstrate that both cooperative and militant internationalism are rooted in moral values, though grounded in different moral logics. By unpacking the role of values and moral beliefs in structuring worldviews about international relations, this perspective, thus, suggests that public preferences reflect relatively stable and predictable orientations that delineate the outer boundaries of what is politically feasible, famously described as a “system of dikes” channeling elite action (Key 1961), or as a “slumbering giant” that awakens when foreign policy decisions threaten deeply held values (Rosenau 1961).

Both preference- and belief-level approaches have, therefore, provided important insights into the public–elite nexus in foreign policy, revealing that public opinion on foreign affairs is more of an “odd bird” than once assumed. Preference-level analyses have enabled scholars to trace moments of convergence and divergence between the public and policymakers, especially during politically salient periods such as elections. This line of research has shown how preferences can shift quickly in response to cues, both top-down

and bottom-up, underscoring that they are neither fixed nor self-evident but must be carefully unpacked to understand how they are formed, justified, and rendered politically salient. By contrast, belief-level research has often questioned whether apparent stability is simply the result of cue-following and instead sought to uncover the internal (in)coherence of public views. By tracing attitudes back to deeper cognitive-affective structures, such as moral foundations, value orientations, and identity narratives, this work highlights why public's foreign policy attitudes often tend to be "stickier," in contrast to earlier views that characterized public opinion in foreign policy merely as "mood" (Almond 1950). In doing so, it helps explain why certain foreign policies fail to resonate with the public despite elite consensus, and conversely, why others easily gain traction even when the public has little expertise or knowledge, as is often the case.

While these two approaches have mostly evolved in parallel, largely due to scholars' different research aims and methodological affinities, their stronger bridging and integration could, nonetheless, offer a more nuanced and layered understanding of the elite–public relationship in foreign policy. Examining whether elite–public (mis)alignment at the preference level is supported by shared belief structures as well – or conversely, whether similar beliefs still lead to divergent preferences among public and elites – can yield critical insights into the legitimacy of policymaking, the mechanisms that sustain the status quo, and the conditions under which meaningful change becomes possible. Theorizing this interplay can draw on insights into how beliefs translate into preferences through cognitive mechanisms, as shown in classic work on cognitive consistency (Festinger 1957) and motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990), as well as more recent dual-process models (Kahneman 2011), which demonstrate how individuals strive for coherence between values, beliefs, and choices. Equally important are studies on moral foundations theory (Haidt 2012), affective intelligence (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000), emotion regulation (Gross 2015), the somatic marker hypothesis (Bechara and Damasio 2005), and social neuroscience (Lieberman 2013), which show how intuitive moral judgments, embodied affective cues, and socially embedded emotions channel beliefs into concrete preferences, particularly under conditions of uncertainty or crisis. Leaving more elaborate theorization for later stages, this article takes an initial analytical step by introducing a novel matrix of foreign policy (dis)connect designed to capture the layered and often paradoxical nature of elite–public relations in foreign policy.

The interplay between these two dimensions generates four ideal types of foreign policy (dis)connect: *full connect*, where preferences and beliefs align;

divergent connect, where preferences align but beliefs diverge; *convergent disconnect*, where preferences differ but belief systems are similar; and *full disconnect*, where misalignment exists at both levels. Each type of the four types of (dis)connects between public and elite reveal distinct mechanisms shaping foreign policy support and legitimacy, as well as distinct risks and opportunities for foreign policy design and implementation. Full connect might represent the rarest, most stable and deeply legitimate configuration, but only if the pluralism of ideas and information is allowed. Divergent connect, more common in practice, involves agreement on policy but divergent underlying beliefs, making support fragile and potentially short-lived. Convergent disconnect captures cases where shared values exist but policy preferences diverge, highlighting opportunities for persuasion and reframing rather than deep conflict. In contrast, full disconnect signals a legitimacy crisis, often preceding foreign policy failure, mass dissent, or the rise of populist challengers. While this paper identifies (dis)connect through quantitative thresholds (e.g. an absolute majority of the population supporting or opposing a given policy stance) and qualitative indicators (e.g. the extent to which elites and the public prioritize similar arguments, causal logics, or normative frames in justifying their positions), the definitive criteria merit further exploration and theorization in future work.

Table 1. *The Foreign Policy (Dis)Connect Matrix:
Illustrating the Preference–Belief Nexus Underpinning
the Public–Elite Relationship in Foreign Policy*

Preference-level Belief-level	Alignment	Misalignment
	Alignment	Misalignment
Alignment	Full Connect	Convergent Disconnect
Misalignment	Divergent Connect	Full Disconnect

As a highly salient yet ambiguously defined foreign policy stance, Serbia's military neutrality offers a compelling case for probing the foreign policy (dis)connect matrix. Although it enjoys broad public support, the policy is rarely debated openly, with many citizens endorsing it without a clear understanding of its meaning – an illustration of how the public can hold firm foreign policy preferences even in the absence of knowledge, sustained by deeper belief structures. Moreover, by delineating the boundaries of other pillars of Serbia's foreign and security policy, military neutrality reveals how broader elite frames

and public worldviews interact in dynamic, and at times paradoxical ways, making it an especially illuminating case for examining both the public–elite (dis)connect and the preference–belief (dis)connect in Serbian public attitudes toward foreign policy. Finally, since its meaning and relevance are contested (Agius and Devine 2011) and debated not only in Serbia but elsewhere (Trapara 2016; Kuvekalović-Stamatović 2021; Kostić Šulejić 2024) – alternatively framed as essential or obsolete, as pragmatic strategy or normative commitment – unpacking the beliefs that sustain military neutrality reveals why it endures as a viable option within an evolving global order and security architecture.

Military Neutrality in Serbia: (Mis)Alignment of Elite and Public Preferences and Beliefs

Even before declaring military neutrality in 2007, Serbia's foreign policy was marked by a complex, multi-pillared, multi-vector approach that sparked ongoing debates about its coherence and effectiveness. Much of the literature remains critical, particularly in regard to Serbia's security and defence posture, portraying it as unsustainable (Novaković 2019; Ejodus 2008; 2011; 2014b; Milosavljević 2016; Teokarević 2016) or even schizophrenic (Ejodus 2008, 66; Varga 2018). Those criticizing neutrality *per se* question its relevance in contemporary international relations, calling it outdated (Teokarević 2016, 106), obsolete (Litavski 2012, 3), or costly strategic option (Ejodus 2008; 2014a).³ Other scholars, however, defend Serbia's multidirectional foreign policy and military neutrality as "wise," "foresighted," or the "only viable option," arguing that it ensures diplomatic flexibility and balanced cooperation, with justifications grounded not only in geopolitical reasoning and historical rationales, but economic benefits as well (Vuković 2016; Kovač 2016; Blagojević 2016, 2022; Gaćinović 2018; Jovanović 2022; Forca 2016; 2022; Stojanović and Šaranović 2022; Stojković and Glišić 2018). Finally, while some scholars stress the lack of legal codification as rendering Serbia's military neutrality void (Litavski 2012; Teokarević 2016; Beriša i Barišić 2016; Novaković 2019), others counter this critique by invoking the concept of "soft recognition," pointing to tacit acknowledgements of Serbia's neutrality by foreign officials (Jovanović 2022; Forca 2022, 170).

³ For an overview of media and civil society frames opposing military neutrality, see Mitić and Matić (2022).

Nevertheless, whether critical or supportive of the policy, nearly all researchers agree that Serbia's unique strategic posture is strongly shaped by prevailing public attitudes (Đukanović 2016, 272–273; Ejodus 2011, Forca 2022). The enduring appeal of military neutrality, in particular, stems largely from how swiftly and deeply it resonated with the public, so much so that it remains a political taboo. Even if some policymakers privately consider it suboptimal, they feel constrained from discussing it publicly (Rečević Krstić 2025), let alone advocating a change, a phenomenon some scholars refer to as “crypto-Atlanticism” (Ejodus and Hoeffler 2024). Yet, while available studies and data suggest that this political and societal consensus emerged with minimal effort from elites and has endured with similar ease, little is known about the underlying beliefs that sustain it. Explanations often highlight opposition to NATO or invoke the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement, yet such accounts remain incomplete, since the meaning of this legacy rests on particular beliefs about international relations that have been equated with neutrality and framed positively. Nor can opposition to NATO be reduced to outright rejection, given the paradoxical situation in which EU membership is not viewed as unacceptable by the Serbian public. Moreover, the steady growth of support for neutrality over time suggests that more durable and encompassing beliefs have taken root, extending beyond nostalgia or resentment over past events.

In this context, a fuller explanation requires tracing how policymakers have justified Serbia's policy of military neutrality and how the public has understood it. Is the apparent consensus merely the product of elite cues, or does it reflect independent public reasoning that renders neutrality a sensible option – helping to explain both its rapid adoption in 2007 and its continued maintenance despite shifting regional and global circumstances? If the consensus rests primarily on elite guidance, a policy shift would be relatively straightforward, provided elites take the lead – a scenario that runs counter to the prevailing view among policymakers and experts that military neutrality in Serbia is highly “sticky.” If, however, the consensus is rooted in the public's own reasoning, then it becomes crucial to identify these justifications and examine how they align with or diverge from the official elite narrative.

Policymakers' Narrative on Serbia's Military Neutrality

Serbia's 2007 proclamation of military neutrality, hastily adopted in anticipation of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, was defined in largely negative terms by Article 6 of the National Assembly's Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, which declared that “the Republic of Serbia shall

maintain a position of neutrality with regard to existing military alliances until a referendum is held to determine the final decision on this matter” (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2007). Describing neutrality as the most suitable option “for now” (Brozović 2010; RTV 2010), some official statements even suggested that the policy was not envisioned as a long-term strategic commitment. Perhaps the clearest indicator of the lack of political will to confidently define or institutionalize military neutrality was its complete absence from the 2009 National Security Strategy and Defence Strategy (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2009a; 2009b). Moreover, despite being increasingly invoked by state officials, and despite changes in regimes and governments, no steps were taken to clarify, codify, or legally entrench military neutrality for over a decade. It was only in 2019 that the new National Security Strategy and Defence Strategy (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2019a; 2019b) officially referenced military neutrality. Nonetheless, no substantial progress was made in defining it even then, as the originally negative definition of military neutrality has only slightly evolved to explicitly emphasize that neutrality does not entail isolation but is compatible with cooperation across a range of security and defence partners (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2019a).

Lacking a substantive or detailed official definition, unaccompanied by meaningful public debate, and never actively championed or contested by major political parties, references to military neutrality in Serbia have remained fragmented and repetitive. Over the years, the term has functioned as a convenient placeholder, readily invoked to legitimize a wide array of otherwise contradictory foreign policy choices, such as Serbia’s selective participation in international peacekeeping missions or its inconsistent voting patterns on UN resolutions addressing global crises (Rečević Krstić 2025, 112–120). Despite increasingly frequent affirmations that Serbia is and will remain militarily neutral, especially during moments of international or regional tension, the official discourse has offered little clarity on what this neutrality actually entails. When its rationale is, however, inferred from the broader narrative of Serbia’s multifaceted foreign policy 2007, as outlined in key strategic documents (e.g. National Security Strategy and Defense Strategy from 2009 and 2019, White Papers on Defence from 2010 and 2023) and foreign policy officials’ exposes (e.g. by presidents, prime ministers, foreign and defence ministers), neutrality emerges as a posture underpinned by three intersecting lines of justification: normative, geopolitical, and pragmatic.

The strong normative and affective appeal embedded in policymakers’ narratives has arguably been the most powerful component in justifying military neutrality since the very beginning. The wording of the 2007 Resolution – citing

“the overall role of NATO” – effectively institutionalized a sense of resentment and anger toward the existing security and defence order (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2007). It was made clear that the policy of military neutrality was an expression of dissatisfaction and spite against the unjust treatment of Serbia, primarily by the Western states, portraying neutrality as a morally superior position. Often echoing long-standing tropes that Serbia has always fought for ideals and resisted injustice and great power domination, even at significant sacrifice (Koštunica 2007; Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2010), military neutrality is constructed as a source of national pride, as “the right to be itself on its own land, to have the right to safeguard its freedom, its skies, and its land, alone, without anyone’s help” (Vučić 2022). While the occasions were rather different, the rhetoric kept presenting neutrality as unique, admirable, and noble, however difficult and costly – as a principled refusal to accept the rule of the stronger, not only in defence of Serbia but also in solidarity with other small and vulnerable states in the international order. When occasionally confronted with critiques that neutrality actually unethical in the face of contemporary global conflicts, or with accusations of hypocrisy and double standards, officials typically respond by emphasizing that Serbia’s neutrality is a military one, not political (Vučić 2022). In this way, normatively and affectively charged elements remain deeply embedded in the discourse surrounding military neutrality, portraying the refusal to take sides as Serbia’s continued commitment to being on the “right side of history” (Rečević Krstić 2025, 160–171).

The notion that Serbia stands between West and East, often invoked to further emphasize its European identity (Vučić 2016; 2022; Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2010; 2019a; 2019b), serves as yet another justification that renders the policy of military neutrality appear natural. Some references even draw a line from alleged medieval articulation of Serbia as “the West to the East and the East to the West,” through Yugoslavia’s Cold War policy of non-alignment, to Serbia’s present position. Although the 2007 proclamation of military neutrality was framed in an anti-Western tone and often emphasized ties with the East, it ultimately rests on a narrative of historical continuity that portrays Serbia’s unique position – frequently described through metaphors like “building a house at the crossroads” (Vulin 2018) – as a source of enduring strategic importance to great powers. The narrative of Serbia’s unique geographical and geopolitical position is often accompanied by reminders that such a position demands particularly vigilance and self-reliance. The most recent White Paper on Defence (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2023) reaffirmed that, as a militarily neutral state, Serbia “primarily relies on its own capabilities and resources” to address security challenges. This idea is also echoed in statements that neutrality must be

“jealously preserved” (Vučić 2016), implicitly invoking the presence of external threats to its sustainability and reinforcing the emphasis on self-reliance. Although public discourse occasionally features claims of “creeping NATO membership” (Novaković and Savković 2019), there has been no formal request for Serbia to abandon its military neutrality and both NATO and EU officials have repeatedly acknowledged its chosen stance.

Alongside more identity-based narratives, the pragmatic argument put forward by policymakers in support of military neutrality is that taking sides in international relations is not a viable strategy for a country like Serbia. While elite narratives in the early 2000s were not explicit in this regard – the strategic objective of a “return to Europe” implied a clear orientation, and the use of the term “Euro-Atlantic” suggested that NATO membership was not entirely excluded (Kancelarija Vlade Republike Srbije za pridruživanje Evropskoj uniji 2005) – this began to change over time. Especially after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, which served as a big test of Serbia’s military neutrality, official statements more frequently emphasized that Serbia should balance and avoid taking sides in international affairs. These hedging arguments are sometimes supported by references to the changing structure of the global order and the decline of unipolarity, and at other times to Serbia’s small size, implying that a small state should avoid entanglement in the rising rivalries of great powers (Rečević Krstić 2025, 160–163). Subsequent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Serbia’s vaccine diplomacy, were also cited as evidence of the advantages of maintaining equidistance from the global centres of power. When the war in Ukraine escalated in 2022, neutrality was once again invoked to justify Serbia’s decision to support selected UN resolutions condemning Russia’s aggression, while refraining from aligning with EU sanctions. Hence, although military neutrality was essentially proclaimed in opposition to a specific side, it has increasingly been interpreted as a balancing position within the evolving global security architecture.

Finally, while military alignment with any bloc is cast as unacceptable, the most direct positive framing of military neutrality rests on the idea that, in an interest-driven international system, cooperation with all actors is both necessary and desirable. The 2019 National Security Strategy, for example, states that Serbia develops partnership cooperation with both NATO and Collective Security Treaty Organisation “based on” or “in accordance with” the policy of military neutrality (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2019). Strategic documents place particular emphasis on security and defence cooperation with the EU, while also underscoring growing engagement with China and other countries, especially those in the immediate region (Ministarstvo odbrane 2009;

2010; 2019; 2023). Importantly, since this pragmatic framing appears primarily aimed at diffusing domestic opposition to cooperation with NATO, officials simultaneously emphasize that such engagement is balanced and extended equally to all international partners (Rečević i Krstić 2019). This balancing rhetoric fosters the illusion of equal engagement with Russia or the CSTO and NATO – an impression not supported by empirical evidence (Novaković and Savković 2019). In practice, Serbia has consistently conducted significantly more joint military exercises with NATO than with Russia.⁴ This illusion of balanced engagement was further undermined by the 2022 moratorium on international military cooperation, officially introduced to uphold neutrality amid escalating global tensions, as its only exceptions involved exercises with NATO partners (RSE 2023). Moreover, Serbia even deployed ten soldiers to the US-led Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai – its first mission outside the UN or EU frameworks since declaring military neutrality (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2025).

Therefore, although never clearly articulated, Serbia's policy of military neutrality has been sustained through a 'buffet-style' narrative that blends moral appeal, geopolitical determinism, and pragmatic rationality – not always in a coherent or consistent manner. From its very inception, it is framed as a symbol of national dignity, resilience, and moral superiority, rooted in Serbia's historical legacy of non-alignment, resistance to great power domination, and a principled refusal to take sides in unjust conflicts, particularly given its unique geopolitical position "in between" and "at the crossroads" of major powers. At the same time, policymakers justify neutrality as a pragmatic strategy for a small state navigating a polarized and unstable international environment, emphasizing the advantages of cooperating with all actors without formally aligning with any. This raises the key question of whether public support for military neutrality is grounded in the multilayered rationale articulated by political elites.

Public's Preferences and Beliefs on Serbia's Military Neutrality

Whether this was a matter of strategic foresight, political luck or both, despite being introduced abruptly in November 2007, military neutrality quickly captured public attention and resonance. According to the earliest publicly available data from 2012, when asked to choose between four options for the improvement of the security situation in Serbia, the vast majority chose military neutrality (45%), while the rest split between the option of strengthening

⁴ For instance, since joining the Partnership for Peace in 2006, Serbia has participated in 150 exercises with NATO member states, while it has conducted 12 exercises with Russia (BCBP 2018).

security cooperation with the Russia (18%), EU (16%), or NATO (4%) (BCBP 2011, 2012). Over the time, the support for military neutrality only grew in comparison to other options, reaching 69% in 2022, opposed to 17% who believed that Serbia should make a military alliance with Russia (17%) or with the West (9%) (CRTA 2022). Moreover, even though in the earliest stages the EU membership attracted slightly higher support, the portion of population opposing military neutrality has never crossed 10%, which makes it perhaps the most popular foreign policy of all in average (BCBP 2017). Such consistent support for military neutrality has been further evident during major international crises – while some events have prompted shifts in even in some of the so-called “old neutrals”, like Finland and Sweden (Forsberg 2024; Mitchell et al. 2025), they appear to have further solidified support for neutrality in Serbia. For instance, in response to the 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine, more than two thirds of the Serbian public believes that military neutrality should be kept, even at the cost of European integration (CRTA 2022).

Such strong support for military neutrality at the preference level becomes even more intriguing when considered alongside the public’s limited understanding of what this policy entails in practice. According to data from 2017, half of those who support military neutrality believed the policy should be preserved, but also that it requires further clarification (BCBP 2017). Although there is limited data investigating the public knowledge of military neutrality, survey results on other aspects of Serbia’s security and defence integration also indicate widespread confusion. Despite Serbia’s intensive security and defence cooperation with NATO under the Partnership for Peace framework and its far more limited cooperation with Russia (Topalović 2024), much of the public continues to downplay or even reject engagement with Western partners as incompatible with neutrality, while overstating ties with Russia (BCBP 2017; 2020).

The results of a survey conducted in 2023 further confirms that the policy of military neutrality has become notably ‘sticky’ among the Serbian public.⁵ Nearly

⁵ The survey was conducted face-to-face across Serbia (excluding Kosovo and Metohija) from July 1 to 9, 2023, using a three-stage stratified random sample of 1,213 adults (18+), with a margin of error of $\pm 2.8\%$. Data collection involved TAPI (Tablet Assisted Personal Interviewing), with fieldwork monitored via GPS and daily reports. The sample was weighted using census data and Wittgenstein Center estimates to ensure national representativeness. The survey was conducted by Sprint Insight for the project *Monitoring and Indexing Peace in the Balkans (MIND)*, led by the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science and supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (grant no. 7744512).

half of respondents (46.7%) support maintaining neutrality, either fully (20.7%) or mostly (26%), while only 20.3% consider it suboptimal. With 22.2% remaining ambivalent and additional 10.8% expressing uncertainty, a sizable portion of the population, however, remains undecided. Conversely, when asked whether abandoning neutrality would make sense in light of Serbia's international position, 44.1% rejected the idea, 20.1% supported it, and 24.5% remained neutral. These findings indicate that, while support for military neutrality is not universal even at the preference level, it obviously remains stable enough to serve as a meaningful constraint on elite decision-making. However, to fully grasp public–elite dynamics, it is essential to move beyond the question of whether the public supports neutrality and instead examine whether the rationale behind their support or the opposition to it resonates with what the officials' have offered as justification for this policy. Ranked by their mean values, Table 2 shows the extent to which various beliefs embedded in the strategic framework and policymakers' narratives resonate with the public.⁶

⁶ The beliefs presented in the Table 2 represent operationalizations of the tripartite elite justification of military neutrality outlined in the previous section, articulated through statements about international relations and Serbia's position within it. For a more detailed account of the discourse and content analysis conducted as part of the broader doctoral project, see: Rečević Krstić 2025.

Table 2. *Resonance of Policymakers' Strategic Beliefs on International Relations and Serbia's Military Neutrality Among the Serbian Public*

Belief	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know	Mean
<i>The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.</i>	1.0%	4.0%	17.8%	23.7%	50.5%	2.9%	4.22
<i>Serbia's role in history is unappreciated by European countries.</i>	1.6%	6.1%	18.7%	25.0%	41.8%	6.9%	4.07
<i>Serbia is located at the crossroads and is therefore important to great powers.</i>	2.1%	6.2%	17.4%	27.8%	41.9%	4.6%	4.06
<i>A state must fight for ideals and values at all costs.</i>	1.8%	6.6%	20.5%	26.6%	41.8%	2.8%	4.03
<i>Serbia has always been on the right side of history.</i>	3.0%	8.6%	22.3%	26.2%	32.3%	7.6%	3.82
<i>Serbia is part of Europe.</i>	3.0%	6.0%	25.4%	29.4%	27.6%	8.6%	3.79
<i>In international relations, there are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.</i>	9.4%	4.8%	22.0%	29.5%	30.0%	4.2%	3.69
<i>Serbia is between East and West.</i>	4.8%	9.4%	33.5%	25.1%	19.3%	8.0%	3.49
<i>A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.</i>	10.8%	10.7%	23.3%	27.2%	24.3%	3.6%	3.45

Belief	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know	Mean
<i>Serbia is part of the East.</i>	12.7%	13.1%	31.8%	20.3%	12.8%	9.3%	3.08
<i>Serbia is part of the West.</i>	11.8%	20.3%	36.6%	15.2%	6.6%	9.4%	2.83
<i>A state should not choose a side in international relations.</i>	26.1%	28.0%	27.8%	9.1%	5.1%	3.9%	2.37

The Table 2 reveals that, although the Serbian public does not uniformly adopt all elite-promoted positions, it nonetheless appears to accommodate a considerable degree of policymakers' eclecticism in strategic positioning within international relations. Judging by the beliefs' mean values, which indicate both their prevalence and strength, the Serbian's public's belief system is not particularly coherent, but rather a composite of normative and pragmatic elements that sometimes reinforce each other, yet very often come into conflict. For instance, a significant share of the public subscribes simultaneously to the realist maxim that in international relations there are no eternal friends, only eternal interests (mean = 3,69), and to the normative conviction that a state must fight for ideals and values at all costs (mean = 4,03). In some respects, the public appears slightly more consistent than Serbian officials, as in expressing the belief that Serbia has always been on the right side of history (mean = 3,82) and that taking sides in international relations is desirable (mean = 2,37). These convictions, however, coexist with considerable uncertainty about what that "right side" might entail today, as the findings suggest, that a significant share of citizens remain undecided about the country's orientation in terms of the East (mean = 3,08) and West (mean = 2,83), and that even the notion of a position "in between" fails to resonate with at least half of the public (mean = 3,49). Once the sizeable proportion of undecided respondents – sometimes close to half – is added to the picture, the overall belief structure indicates a state of solid confusion about international relations among the Serbian public, in which hardly any clear foreign policy direction can appear self-evident. Yet it might be precisely the layered and unstable nature of both elites' and the public's belief structures that paradoxically underpins the resilience of Serbia's multi-directional foreign policy and its policy of military neutrality.

Nevertheless, the regression analysis indicates that not all beliefs presented in Table 2 are equally relevant for citizens' judgments on military neutrality. Only five of the twelve tested beliefs show a statistically significant association with attitudes toward neutrality, while the remaining seven appear to exert little or no influence. This disparity suggests that the justifications for military neutrality advanced by Serbian policymakers over the years do not necessarily translate into public attitudes – rather than being directly opposed, public and elite beliefs may simply diverge in emphasis or structure. Identifying which beliefs from Table 2 are significantly associated with citizens' views on maintaining or abandoning neutrality provides, however, a clearer “profile” of the typical supporter or opponent of this policy in Serbia, revealing the layered structure of public reasoning on military neutrality (Table 3).

Table 3. *Regression analysis between the public's belief structure and the attitude on Serbia's military neutrality*

Belief	Coefficient	P-value
<i>A state should not choose sides in international relations.</i>	-0.26631	3.26e-14 ***
<i>In international relations, there are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.</i>	0.26165	7.74e-15 ***
<i>Serbia belongs to Europe.</i>	0.25935	6.64e-12 ***
<i>A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.</i>	0.24512	6.73e-15 ***
<i>Serbia is between the East and West.</i>	0.24150	2.95e-11 ***
<i>Serbia belongs to the West.</i>	0.13286	0.000269 ***

At the core of public reasoning about military neutrality lie beliefs that take the form of pragmatic, interest-based “recipes” for navigating international relations. Consistent with expectations, the analysis reveals that the more individuals believe that states must choose sides in international affairs, the less likely they are to support Serbia's military neutrality (coefficient = -0.26631, $p < 0.001$). Given the widespread nature of this belief among the Serbian public (with 54% considering the choice of sides sensible), it likely weakens the overall stickiness of military neutrality and contributes to the notable ambivalence or

indifference toward the policy observed among roughly a third of citizens. In this sense, the Serbian public may support neutrality despite simultaneously endorsing the logic of alignment, indicating that neutrality is not necessarily embraced as a form of covert alignment with or against some actor, but is instead sustained by other beliefs. Among these, the strongest positive association with support for neutrality is found in the belief that, in international relations, there are no eternal friends, only eternal interests (coefficient = 0.26165, $p < 0.001$), followed closely by the notion that a state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences (coefficient = 0.24512, $p < 0.001$). These beliefs point to a worldview in which hedging, flexibility, and transactional relations are seen as sensible – in a world where states are assumed to pursue their own interests, the Serbian public may regard neutrality as a stance that enhances Serbia's strategic autonomy.

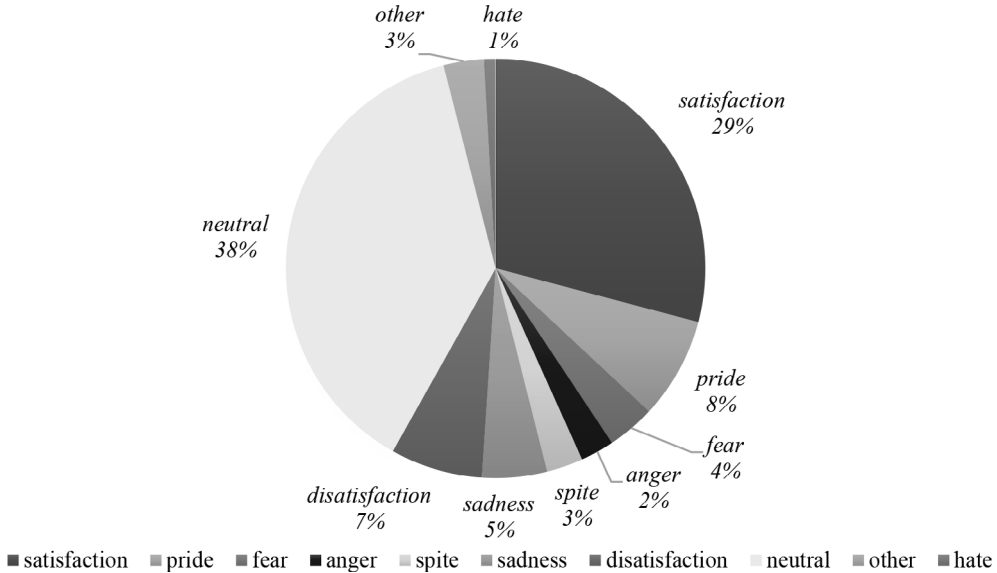
Surprisingly, one of the most overtly realist beliefs, that “the strong do what they want, and the weak suffer what they must”, while among the most widely endorsed statements by the Serbian public (mean = 4.22), shows no significant correlation with their attitude about military neutrality. This indicates that citizens' views on military neutrality are not shaped primarily by perceptions of global power distribution or by Serbia's relative position within it. In other words, whether individuals regard neutrality as a sensible policy does not depend on whether they perceive Serbia as strong or weak, small or middle-sized. This finding challenges the assumption, often implicit in official discourse, that Serbia's neutrality represents either prudent restraint by a small state seeking to avoid entanglement or, on the other hand, a posture of its spite and defiant independence aimed at “punching above its weight.” Today, it appears that the Serbian public appears to evaluate neutrality less as an act of reactive self-preservation or geopolitical resistance, as it may have been initially, and more as a question of strategic logic or principled positioning.

A second cluster of beliefs influencing public attitudes toward military neutrality relates to Serbia's perceived geopolitical positioning. The belief that Serbia belongs to Europe emerges as the strongest predictor of support for neutrality (coefficient = 0.25935, $p = 6.64\text{e-}12$), while it is negatively associated with the inclination to abandon neutrality (coefficient = -0.20123, $p = 2.1\text{e-}07$), challenging the common assumption that neutrality reflects anti-Western sentiment or even rejection of Euro-Atlantic integration. Less consequential, yet significant, for public support is the belief that Serbia is positioned “between East and West” (coefficient = 0.24150, $p = 2.95\text{e-}11$). Serbia's imagined position between East and West thus seems to generate support for balancing rather than aligning, reinforcing neutrality as both a pragmatic and identity-consistent

choice. Interestingly, although relatively few people believe that Serbia belongs to the Western security community, those who do are more likely to support neutrality (coefficient = 0.13286, $p = 0.000269$). By contrast, there is no statistically significant relationship between support for neutrality and the belief that Serbia belongs to the East. If anything, correlation analysis suggests a slight tendency for those who identify Serbia with the East to support abandoning neutrality (coefficient = 0.04093, $p = 0.06349$), though this does not hold in the regression model. Taken together, these findings tentatively suggest that military neutrality may be more challenged by East-oriented than West-oriented segments of the public.

In contrast to pragmatically grounded or strategically framed beliefs, those based on moral considerations lack statistical significance and seem to function as secondary justifications, reinforcing a stance primarily anchored in pragmatic reasoning and symbolic ambiguity. For instance, the belief that European countries fail to appreciate Serbia's past contributions, while highly resonant among the public (mean = 4.07), shows no meaningful correlation with either support for or opposition to military neutrality. This is particularly striking given how often elite discourse frames neutrality as a response to historical grievances or to the international misrecognition of Serbia's contribution to European peace and security. Similarly, strongly endorsed normative statements such as "Serbia has always been on the right side of history" (mean = 3.82) and "ideals are worth fighting for at any cost" (mean = 4.03) also show no significant association with attitudes toward neutrality. These findings suggest that the Serbian public does not necessarily interpret military neutrality through a moral lens or as a principled ethical stance, despite officials' cues that often invite such readings. Instead, while it might have been different back in 2007, military neutrality today appears to be viewed less as an ethical imperative or a reaction to perceived injustice, and more as an "amoral" strategic instrument for navigating the international order. While normative beliefs may shape broader worldviews or resonate at an abstract level, they do not appear to be directly mobilised when assessing the appropriateness of neutrality as a specific foreign policy choice for Serbia. The structure of Serbian citizens' emotional attachment to military neutrality, based on the 2023 survey, further supports this: while a dominant share (39.7%) expresses positive affective attachment, a significant portion (37.8%) remains neutral (Chart 1).

Chart 1. *Affective Structure Underlying Public Attitudes Toward Serbia's Policy of Military Neutrality*



Taken together, these insights point to a case of *divergent connect* between Serbian policymakers and the public regarding military neutrality. At the preference level, there is a robust and consistent alignment between elite decisions and public support, with more than half of the population endorsing the policy since 2007. Yet although outright opposition remains marginal, a significant portion of the public is ambivalent – an attitude that becomes more intelligible when underlying belief structures are examined. Public beliefs indeed broadly overlap with the layered justifications elites have advanced for Serbia's foreign and security policy, but the statistical analyses show that citizens neither rely on all of them nor prioritize them in the same way when evaluating Serbia's neutrality. Whereas elites have predominantly framed this course in normatively charged and identity-laden terms, often invoking Serbia's historical grievances or civilizational distinctiveness, the public tends to view it more as a rational, interest-based choice, at least in the contemporary moment. Moreover, while elite rhetoric has frequently portrayed neutrality in anti-Western terms, public support for the policy appears positively associated with the belief, held by a majority, that Serbia belongs to Europe, or even to the West rather than the East. The findings, therefore, tell a more complex story of the public–elite consensus on military neutrality in Serbia than is commonly acknowledged in either scholarly or policy circles.

Conclusion

While underscoring the value of both preference-level and belief-level approaches in FPA literature on elite–public nexus, this paper did not seek to give a final theoretical answer to when, how and why public and elites (dis)agree on foreign policy, but to offer a more nuanced analytical framework that moves beyond the dominant binary view of their (dis)connect. Importantly, although this framework sheds light on which configurations may produce more or less stable foreign policy outcomes, it does not presuppose which one is normatively ideal: although full alignment between public and elite preferences may indicate democratic accountability, and complete disconnection might suggest a legitimacy crisis or systemic malfunction, neither should be assumed without careful consideration of the underlying factors. Each component of the proposed matrix, therefore, offers significant potential for theoretical innovation, whether in examining the composition of belief structures, the processes through which beliefs are translated into preferences, or the mechanisms by which disconnections emerge. Methodological innovations, particularly those that enable bottom-up exploration of public beliefs independent of elite cues, would also significantly enhance our understanding of the convergences and divergences that unfold at each level, capturing both the persistence of the status quo and the conditions under which gradual or abrupt foreign policy changes may occur.

Although further empirical research is needed to explore other aspects of Serbia's foreign and security policy and to fully capture the analytical potential of the proposed matrix, the case of military neutrality provides a particularly revealing example of divergent (dis)connect. While neutrality has often been treated as a "sacred cow" in public discourse, the data suggest that both preference-level and belief-level consensus between policymakers and citizens in Serbia should be approached with caution, as each leaves room for dissent. The observed divergence does not necessarily undermine the consolidation of military neutrality in Serbia, but the ambiguity of the country's belief structure appears to limit stronger endorsement: even at the preference level, and even for Serbia's most popular foreign policy, a significant share of the public remains ambivalent. In this sense, public opinion on foreign policy is not merely a constraint on, or a dependent variable of, policymakers' choices, but constitutes a site of ongoing contestation and negotiation, where competing preferences and belief systems circulate and collide, shaping the boundaries of what is immediately sensible and what remains politically unacceptable in a given society at a given time. In Serbia, such studies are long overdue, especially

considering that, beyond binary attitudes toward a few major policies, little is known about the structure of public knowledge and beliefs in foreign affairs. This is particularly important given that foreign policy continues to hold considerable salience for the Serbian public – to the extent that some scholars argue it has been a determining factor in the rise and fall of nearly every Serbian government since 1990 (Novaković 2013, 11). Understanding this interplay is therefore essential not only to account for apparent anomalies in elite–public alignment on foreign policy, but also to inform the design of more legitimate and sustainable foreign policies.

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**RASVETLJAVANJE (NE)SKLADA IZMEĐU ELITA I JAVNOSTI
U SPOLJNOJ POLITICI: „LJUBOMORNO ČUVANJE“ VOJNE NEUTRALNOSTI
U SRBIJI, ALI IZ RAZLIČITIH RAZLOGA?**

Sažetak: Javno mnjenje o spoljnoj politici decenijama je bilo zanemarivano u studijama međunarodnih odnosa i spoljne politike, najčešće pod pretpostavkom da ono umnogome samo odražava preferencije elita. Kasnija istraživanja, međutim, osporila su ovu pretpostavku dokumentujući brojne primere „spoljnopolitičkih nesklada“, pokazujući da se stavovi javnosti i elita razilaze češće i upornije nego što se ranije smatralo, uz značajne posledice po procese spoljnopolitičkog odlučivanja. Praveći razliku između (ne)usklađenosti na nivou preferencija, shvaćenih kao podrška ili protivljenje određenoj politici, i (ne)usklađenosti na nivou uverenja, koja obuhvata razloge iza tih stavova, ovaj rad nastoji da rasvetli pomenute (ne)sklade i omogući nijansiranije razumevanje odnosa elita i javnosti u spoljnoj politici. Na toj osnovi uvodi se nova matrica (ne)sklada u spoljnoj politici, koja obuhvata četiri idealna tipa: potpuni sklad, divergentni sklad, konvergentni nesklad i potpuni nesklad. Ovaj okvir primenjuje se na slučaj vojne neutralnosti Srbije, koja se često tumači kao stabilan konsenzus između donosilaca odluka i javnosti u kontekstu multivektorske spoljne i bezbednosne politike Srbije. Na osnovu analize strateškog diskursa od 2007. godine i originalnih podataka iz ankete sprovedene 2023, rad pokazuje da, iako i elite i javnost izražavaju podršku vojnoj neutralnosti, njihova uverenja se razlikuju tako da stavovi javnosti deluju manje normativno i idealistički nego što to sugerišu narativi elita. Kao primer divergentnog sklada, slučaj ukazuje da prividna usklađenost na nivou preferencija može prikriti tenzije na nivou uverenja, pri čemu ovakva nepodudaranja mogu i ograničiti, ali i otvoriti prostor za promenu politike.

Ključne reči: spoljna politika, odnos elita i javnosti; javno mnjenje, vojna neutralnost, Srbija, analiza diskursa.