



POLICY PAPER

For the Foundation for Liberal Public Policy (FLPP)

LIBERAL VALUES AND THE REFORM POTENTIAL OF SERBIA

Citizens' attitudes, social divisions and space for
institutional reform

StratEdgist Research & Advisory
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Grounded in evidence

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** All terms used in this report in the masculine grammatical gender apply equally to persons of the male and female gender, wherever applicable.*

1. Summary

The public opinion survey conducted on a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adult citizens of Serbia (20–31 August 2026) *shows a divided, but not necessarily irreconcilable, society*. Citizens are almost equally split over the direction in which the country is heading and over whether it needs stability or change, with the latter question almost entirely conditioned by the former and most strongly predicted by respondents' age (65% of young people aged 18–29 want change, compared with 29% of those over 60).

Although a majority (58.7%) believe in principle that democracy is always better than other forms of government, close to a third of citizens do not share this unconditional commitment. Nevertheless, there is a firm, broad consensus on rejecting an overt concentration of power, and strong support for economic solidarity that is independent of party affiliation.

The Constitution of Serbia remains poorly known (only 29% know this act well) and is predominantly perceived as a document that does not sufficiently protect citizens' interests, which opens space both for reform and for better communication of the existing (constitutional) guarantees. Although 71% of citizens support some form of constitutional change, this support is sharply polarised along political lines. Thus, only 4.8% of those in favour of changing the constitution were recorded in the core of the ruling majority, while in the student segment as many as 53.7% of respondents support changing the Constitution.

When looking at which specific areas citizens would change, a clear and narrow ground of real, statistically confirmed consensus emerges: *the fight against corruption and judicial reform are the only two issues ranked equally highly across all political options*, while the electoral system, restrictions on office-holders and the protection of human rights are highly polarising issues, closely tied to respondents' political position.

Citizens' liberal values do not form a single, unified ideological whole. Support for political freedoms, individualism, the market economy and redistribution represents four related but distinct dimensions. Citizens can simultaneously support a market economy, stronger social protection and certain illiberal institutional positions. Democratic-pluralist orientation *represents the clearest value-based line of political division*. It is more pronounced among citizens who believe that Serbia is heading in the wrong direction, want political change and support the Student List or the pro-European opposition. Lower values were recorded among voters and the potential electorates of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). Attitude towards redistribution *represents the broadest field of agreement*. Support for state measures to reduce income differences is present among citizens of different political persuasions. No significant differences were found either between SNS and Student List voters or between the potential electorates of different political options. Market

orientation does not follow a simple division between government and opposition, nor between left and right. A relatively pronounced market orientation is shown by the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition, the NPS coalition and the Student List, but also by the potential electorate of SPS. At the same time, market orientation does not necessarily imply opposition to the social role of the state.

The potential electorates of political parties are not closed and mutually exclusive voting blocs. More than a third of citizens, or 34.7%, belong to the potential electorate of at least two political options. Among citizens who belong to at least one potential electorate, 41.4% are open to supporting several options. *Citizens with a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation are more critical of the existing Constitution and more open to its more extensive changes.* However, support for constitutional reform is not the expression of a single liberal profile: individualism, market orientation and attitude towards redistribution are not associated in the same way with the desired scope of constitutional change. *Citizens are not equally divided on all values and policies.* Political preferences follow real differences in attitudes towards democracy, pluralism and the separation of powers, but the differences are smaller in the area of economic attitudes, especially redistribution. Political polarisation is therefore, in some areas, more pronounced than the value distance between citizens.

Institutional reform can cross the government–opposition divide, but not as an abstract ideological project or the programme of a single political bloc. The greatest potential lies in a reform approach that is gradual, politically inclusive and focused on concrete benefits: equality before the law, protection of rights, independence of institutions, curbing corruption and economic security. *The basis for a broader reform consensus lies in linking democratic institutions with social responsibility.* The results indicate that a market economy, institutional limits on power and the reduction of economic inequalities need not be opposing goals in citizens' attitudes.

This policy paper proposes three options for discussion: from the first, which should change the Constitution within the existing framework and with topics on which there is consensus, through limited constitutional reform (with an inclusive process), to a comprehensive and coherent change of the entire constitutional framework.

Based on the results, the following conditions can be identified under which institutional reform could gain support beyond the existing political blocs:

1. *Reform should be presented through concrete protection of citizens.* The separation of powers, the independence of the courts and the accountability of institutions should be linked to *everyday problems*: equality before the law, protection of rights, curbing corruption and limiting political arbitrariness.

2. *Changes should be gradual, clearly defined and comprehensibly explained.* There is broader support for changing the Constitution, but it is greatest for minor amendments. This speaks in favour of *precise reform proposals with visible consequences, rather than a vague demand for a complete overhaul of the system.*
3. *Institutional and economic reforms should not be set against social security.* Broad support for redistribution shows that a reform programme relying exclusively on deregulation and reducing the role of the state would have limited reach. *Market reforms can gain broader support if they are linked to protection from economic risks and the reduction of inequality.*
4. *Reform should not be presented as the property of a single political bloc.* When institutional changes are identified with a particular party or opposition identity, citizens may judge them by their attitude towards the political actor rather than by their content. *Broader support requires the inclusion of different social and political groups in defining the goals of reform.*
5. *The reform process must be participatory and informative.* Limited knowledge of the Constitution increases *the importance of public explanation of proposals, available information, public debates and the opportunity for citizens to understand* how the proposed changes would affect their position.
6. *A distinction should be made between areas of possible consensus and questions of genuine value conflict.* Social security, reducing inequality and concrete protection of rights provide a broader basis for convergence. By contrast, attitudes towards the separation of powers and political pluralism remain an important line of division and require longer-term work on building a democratic political culture.

Institutional reform can therefore cross the government-opposition divide, but above all as a set of concrete and gradual changes that citizens recognise as protecting their rights and interests. It is less likely to gain broader support if it is presented as an abstract liberal project, a demand for a complete break with the existing order or the programme of a single political camp. The potential for a reform consensus lies precisely in linking democratic institutions with social security, practical protection of citizens and a politically inclusive process of change.

2. Foreword

Dear readers,

It is our pleasure to present to you the policy paper that we have prepared in cooperation with the Stratedgist team.

The Serbian public scene is undoubtedly flooded by a tide of self-proclaimed political analysts who mostly confuse citizens with numerous arbitrary presentations, which are rarely grounded in scientifically processed data and are primarily intended to promote a particular partisan political agenda.

At the same time, we are witnessing an unprecedented polarisation of public opinion for and against a political regime that is entering its fifteenth year in power, displaying a strong will to last even longer.

At the beginning of autumn 2026, society is divided into two equal halves: 44% of citizens believe that the country is heading in the right direction, while at the same time 44% of citizens believe the opposite: that it is moving in the wrong direction, with 12% remaining undecided. Such a lack of agreement in public opinion is rarely encountered in the comparative practice of applied research.

We considered that such important social phenomena deserve a deeper analysis, one that reflects not only citizens' current political attitudes but also their deeper, core beliefs and thus their very values, and we do not hesitate to venture from the empirical field deeper into the fields of law, anthropology, social psychology and political philosophy in an effort to thoughtfully interpret the data-based contemporary socio-political reality lived by the citizens of Serbia.

It is well known that the accession of candidate countries to membership of the European Union takes considerably longer than the mandate of two or more governments (electoral cycles), and therefore requires political actors – who in democratic systems are, by the nature of things, competitors – to cooperate and agree on the common goal of a comprehensive social transformation (implementation of the European agenda). This becomes even more significant if we recall that this transformation takes place through the reception of the Union's legal acquis into the domestic legal order, through which social relations are qualitatively transformed across a wide spectrum (from consumer protection

through the management of institutions for the enforcement of criminal sanctions to veterinary matters and animal welfare – all of this merely by way of example; there are 35 chapters, i.e. thematic groupings of regulations).

In the case of Serbia, there is a noticeable deep conservatism, primarily among the older cohorts of the population, which is reflected in a striving for “stability and continuity”, i.e. in resistance to change and reform. This core belief, present in more than half of the population (found among 53% of respondents), is conducive neither to the alternation of power nor to the reform processes that could lead society and the state towards integration into the wider European mosaic.

Serbia thus remains a lonely island surrounded by the blue of the European Union and the NATO alliance, and all too often acts as a geopolitical platform for advancing the interests of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the European continent. It is therefore not surprising that there is almost general agreement that Serbia should not impose sanctions on the Russian Federation over its armed aggression against Ukraine, even though all other European countries have done so, and despite the fact that Russia joined the UN sanctions against the FRY (Serbia and Montenegro) in 1992.

A possible interpretation of this, at first glance irrational, attitude of the citizens of Serbia probably requires applying the tools of analytical psychology and considering the phenomenon of the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Namely, almost every generation born on the territory of Serbia, as well as of the surrounding countries, has at some point in its life experienced the horrors of war, international sanctions, hunger, ethnic cleansing and even genocide. Hence the fear and anxiety that “evil may come again to claim its own”. For the same reason, citizens seek security under the wing of the great powers and of their own charismatic (populist-minded) “leaders”, along with a traditional attachment to the army and the Serbian Orthodox Church (which numerous other empirical studies have addressed).

In a highly politically polarised society, there are nevertheless issues that connect the two seemingly irreconcilable blocs of supporters of the regime (led by the Serbian Progressive Party) and of the opposition (dominated by the Student List). Above all, this concerns the focus on shortcomings in the social distribution of economic wealth and the desire to reduce disparities. It is therefore striking that almost no one in the political field deals with tax policy, even though this issue is highly potent if brought closer to voters in the right way, especially bearing in mind that the current tax system has not been substantially changed for more than two decades and primarily benefits the owners of capital.

As regards the constitutional order established by the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic on 8 November 2006, after Montenegro left the state union with Serbia, it has turned out that this highest legal act, which is the foundation of the legal order, has failed to “constrain power” and to enable mutual control mechanisms through the separation of powers.

The adoption of the new Constitution was preceded by a two-day (unusual) referendum on 28 and 29 October 2006, when the citizens of Serbia voted by a narrow majority for the adoption of the new highest legal act. Turnout was 54.91% of the total number of registered voters (3,645,517 citizens voted), while the majority that voted “FOR” the new Constitution amounted to 53.04% of the total number of registered voters, thereby meeting the conditions of the revision procedure of the previous 1990 Constitution, which had previously been adopted by a one-party parliament. Namely, that Constitution, which was the legal basis for the current Constitution, was adopted on 28 September 1990 by the old, one-party Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia. That convocation of parliament was made up exclusively of delegates elected within the socialist order, under the control of the then League of Communists of Serbia (which in July of that year transformed itself into the Socialist Party of Serbia). This brings to mind the saying that “what is born crooked, time will not straighten”, since from 2012/13 Serbia has been governed from a single centre of power in a quasi-monist political order in which elections serve as a so-called façade democracy. The political system generates a significant degree of entropy of the rule of law and regressively pulls the state back towards the time before the first pluralist elections. Indeed, we venture to state that the current Constitution has enabled (instead of preventing) an increasingly autocratic form of government. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the current Constitution was adopted without broader social consultation, exclusively as a mutually agreed, octroyed act of the three largest political groupings represented in the Serbian parliament (DS, DSS and SRS), in great haste and with the aim of providing arguments, both internally and externally, that Kosovo is an inalienable part of Serbia.

It should be noted that, after the break-up of the SFRY and subsequently of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the state union), the political elites in Serbia did not attempt to devise the essence of the new state and its identity and to reach into the soul of the people, and thus **the Constitution, too, remained an act emptied of content, which citizens believe does not protect their rights and interests**, which is one of the more significant findings of our research. It is therefore not surprising that **a significant number of citizens do not know the Constitution of their own state**, while the insignia, i.e. the state symbols, are confusing in the sense that, for example, the anthem sings of a Serbian king and the state flag bears a crown, while Serbia remains organised as a republic.

Despite all of the above, there is a readiness among citizens for constitutional change that is significant, held by a majority and spans both poles of public opinion, specifically on the issues of preventing and fighting corruption, as well as of judicial reform. In this regard, we should not forget that the Constitution of Serbia was amended on 9 February 2022 in the part relating to the organisation of the judiciary. Only 30.65% of registered voters turned out for the referendum on confirming these constitutional changes, which is an extremely low share of the overall citizenry. Let us recall here Democritus’ words from Pericles’ Funeral Oration:

“A citizen of Athens does not neglect public affairs when attending to his private property... We regard a man who takes no interest in the state not as harmless, but as useless, and although only a few may shape policy, we are all able to judge it. We do not look upon discussion as a stumbling block in the way of political action, but as an indispensable preparation for acting wisely... We believe that happiness is the fruit of freedom, and freedom the fruit of courage, and therefore we do not shrink from the dangers of war...” This quotation merely illustrates the absence of a tradition and of a collective awareness of the importance of participating in matters of public interest, while the people forever search for a “messiah” – an all-knowing and omnipotent leader who will sort things out and bring lasting prosperity. In other words, a lack of will to take responsibility for one’s own fate and that of the collective to which one belongs. This is the trait that Karl Popper, in his famous work “The Open Society”, described as the distinction between tribal and civic consciousness, i.e. between collectivism and individualism.

As liberals and free citizens, we are convinced that democracy requires a continuous struggle and the participation of citizens in the affairs of the Republic, which is a public and common good and not the property of a privileged, irremovable group of usurpers alienated from the people.

The return of freedom and democracy to Serbia, i.e. the restoration of the principle of the Republic, requires a new Constitution. Hence this policy paper, which offers recommendations on how to move towards a new social consensus on the future of Serbia and the restoration of democracy through constitutional reform.

Danijel Pantić, MA, Chair of the Board of Directors of FLPP

3. Introduction and contextual notes

The policy paper “Citizens’ Attitudes, Social Divisions and Space for Institutional Reform” is based on a public opinion survey conducted for the Foundation for Liberal Public Policy (FLPP) by the company Stratedgist Research & Advisory (*Stratedgist*) on a sample of 1,000 respondents from Serbia, excluding Kosovo and Metohija.

The aim of the survey is to identify the distribution of liberal values among the adult population in Serbia, as well as their attitudes towards possible constitutional reforms. The policy paper takes into account the main findings of the survey (see the chapter on the discussion of findings), bases on them some of the possible avenues for constitutional reform, and provides recommendations for all the main actors, decision-makers and stakeholders.

The survey was conducted before the start of the campaign for the parliamentary elections scheduled for 25 October 2026, in an atmosphere full of tension, low trust in institutions, a breakdown in communication between the main political actors and pronounced social polarisation. This environment is reflected in the main findings (the direction in which the country is moving, the choice between stability and change) and consequently affects citizens’ attitudes towards important constitutional issues. Attitudes towards liberal values are more stable and should be viewed as such, and not (only) as a consequence of the moment in which the survey was carried out.

4. Why talk about liberal values (again)?

4.1. About the public opinion survey

The survey on the basis of which the data before you were obtained was conducted from 20 to 31 August 2026, on a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adult citizens of Serbia, excluding Kosovo and Metohija.

A sample designed in this way carries a standard statistical margin of error of approximately ± 3.1 percentage points, at a 95% confidence level, for results close to 50%. The margin of error is larger for results relating to subgroups within the sample and increases as the size of the observed subgroup decreases. The findings were weighted according to demographic (census) data, as well as the results of the last parliamentary elections in 2023.

On this occasion, we used a telephone survey as the research technique, combining landline and mobile phone numbers of potential respondents in the sample.

In this phase of the research, we focused on questions whose answers should give us better insight into how citizens see their lives and the society in which they live, and whether they want stability or change, with particular attention devoted to the Constitution and possible changes to the highest legal act.

4.2. Conceptual framework of the policy paper – how did we measure citizens' liberal orientations?

As regards citizens' liberal orientations, a battery of eight statements was originally designed to cover two broader areas of liberal attitudes: political and economic liberalism. Political liberalism covered attitudes towards the interests of the individual, freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers, while economic liberalism related to the regulation of private companies, private property, state intervention in the economy and the reduction of income differences. Responses were collected on a five-point Likert-type scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", with a separate response option "cannot assess".

Before forming composite indicators, we checked whether the data actually support the expected division into two scales. This is important because the thematic similarity of questions is not in itself a sufficient reason to add them up: for questions to be used as a single scale, they need to show satisfactory mutual association and empirically measure the same underlying dimension. We first checked this through factor analysis, which did not confirm the expected division into political and economic liberalism, but instead pointed to a more complex and less

stable structure of attitudes.¹ A reliability check of the scales further showed that the questions do not form two sufficiently homogeneous scales.²

However, these results do not diminish the analytical value of the individual questions; rather, they indicate that the questions capture several different aspects of liberal attitudes, which are more justifiably viewed as narrower dimensions than combined into two single scales. In other words, they show that citizens' attitudes are not organised along *only one* political and *one* economic axis. Respondents may, for example, simultaneously support private property and state measures aimed at reducing economic inequalities. Similarly, support for freedom of speech and political pluralism need not necessarily imply giving priority to the interests of the individual over the interests of the family, the local community or the state.

The selected analytical approach

Because of these findings, the questions were not mechanically combined into two pre-assumed scales. Instead, they will be examined through four narrower and substantively clearer analytical dimensions:

1. **Individualism-collectivism:** attitude towards the primacy of the interests of the community or of the individual;

¹ Exploratory factor analysis of all eight items did not confirm a simple structure of political and economic liberalism. When the number of factors was not limited in advance, the statistical criterion extracted four factors. However, this solution was not stable enough to be accepted directly: the extraction did not converge within the specified number of iterations, and some factors were defined by only one or two items. Because of the initial theoretical assumption, a solution with two predetermined factors was also tested. It, too, did not provide satisfactory confirmation of the expected scales. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure was 0.524, indicating poor suitability of the set of items for a common factor analysis. Bartlett's test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(28) = 792.920$; $p < 0.001$), confirming that correlations between certain questions exist, but not that they form two clear and reliable dimensions. The two forced factors explained approximately 25.9% of the total variance, while several items had very low communalities and weak factor loadings. The distribution of items also did not correspond to the expected division. The statements on the multi-party system, freedom of speech and the concentration of control over the state and the courts were relatively related. By contrast, the statement on the primacy of the interests of the community over the interests of the individual did not fit clearly into the same dimension. On the economic side, support for private property and for less state intervention showed some association, while attitudes towards reducing income differences behaved as a separate aspect of economic attitudes.

² The original political liberalism scale, consisting of four items, had low internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.473$). The statement on the primacy of the interests of the community over the interests of the individual showed a very low correlation with the total scale score, and when it was removed, the reliability of the remaining three items rose to $\alpha = 0.561$. This indicates that the questions on freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers form a more coherent, though still only moderately reliable, whole. The reliability of the original economic liberalism scale was even lower ($\alpha = 0.272$). The statement on state measures to reduce income differences was negatively associated with some of the other economic items, and when it was removed, the reliability of the remaining three items rose to approximately $\alpha = 0.426$, which is still insufficient for forming a reliable single scale.

2. **Democratic-pluralist orientation:** attitude towards freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers;
3. **Market orientation:** attitude towards the regulation of private companies, private property and state intervention in the economy;
4. **Attitude towards redistribution:** support for or opposition to measures to reduce income differences.

The individualism–collectivism dimension will be represented by a single indicator measured through the statement “The interests of the community (state, company, family, city, etc.) must always be more important than the interests of individuals”. The second dimension will be represented by a composite indicator of democratic-pluralist orientation, which includes the statements “Complete freedom of speech today leads to the disorganisation of society”, “The multi-party system only brings disunity among the people” and “It would be best if the state and the courts were controlled by the same group of people”, with the caveat that the reliability of this indicator is modest.³

The third dimension will be used as a composite indicator of market orientation, which includes the statements “The government should not try to control, regulate or in any way interfere in the work of private companies”, “Social progress will always rest on private property” and “The less the government intervenes in the economy, the better for Serbia”.⁴ Finally, attitude towards redistribution will be measured by a single indicator through the statement “The government should take measures to reduce income differences”.

It is important to emphasise that this approach makes it possible to preserve the analytical value of all the questions asked, while at the same time not obscuring the complexity of citizens’ attitudes. The key finding is not only methodological but also substantive, namely that *liberalism among the public is not one single axis. Political freedoms, individualism, market orientation and attitudes towards economic equality represent related but distinct elements of value orientations*. Examining them separately therefore provides a more precise and realistic picture of public attitudes than reducing all responses to one or two composite scores.

³ The items relating to freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of control over the state and the courts show moderate mutual association (correlations from 0.285 to 0.322). Their internal consistency is modest (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.561$), which is why the composite indicator of democratic-pluralist orientation is used with appropriate caution. A higher value of the indicator denotes a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation.

⁴ The items relating to the regulation of private companies (P7), private property (P8) and state intervention in the economy (P9) show positive but relatively weak mutual correlations (from 0.174 to 0.248) and low internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha \approx 0.426$). Their average is therefore used as a theoretically defined composite indicator of different elements of market orientation, rather than as a psychometrically confirmed single scale. A higher value of the indicator denotes a more pronounced market orientation.

This understanding of liberal values also determines the way in which reform potential is assessed in this policy paper. The analysis does not start from the assumption that there is a clearly distinct and value-consistent liberal group among the public, but examines *the extent to which certain liberal principles are present among citizens of different social and political persuasions*. Particular attention is therefore paid to *points of intersection*: values and concrete reforms that can gain support even beyond the circle of citizens who identify politically or ideologically as liberals.

The key question of the policy paper:

To what extent is there a value and social basis for liberal institutional reforms in Serbia, and under what conditions is it possible to build a broader reform consensus?

The answer to this question is sought at three levels: by establishing the prevalence of the different dimensions of liberal attitudes among the public; by examining their association with citizens' social characteristics and political preferences; and by identifying values and reform topics that have the potential to connect voters of different political options. In this way, reform potential is not reduced to the size of a single predetermined political group, but is assessed according to the breadth of support for concrete values, institutional principles and possible directions of reform.

5. Discussion of research findings

5.1. How do citizens see their lives and the society in which they live?

The survey shows a divided picture of Serbian society as regards the direction in which Serbia is heading: 43.5% of citizens believe that the country is heading in the right direction, while 44.2% believe the opposite. This balance, however, conceals a considerably sharper division when one looks at attitudes towards the very concept of democracy and the organisation of society.

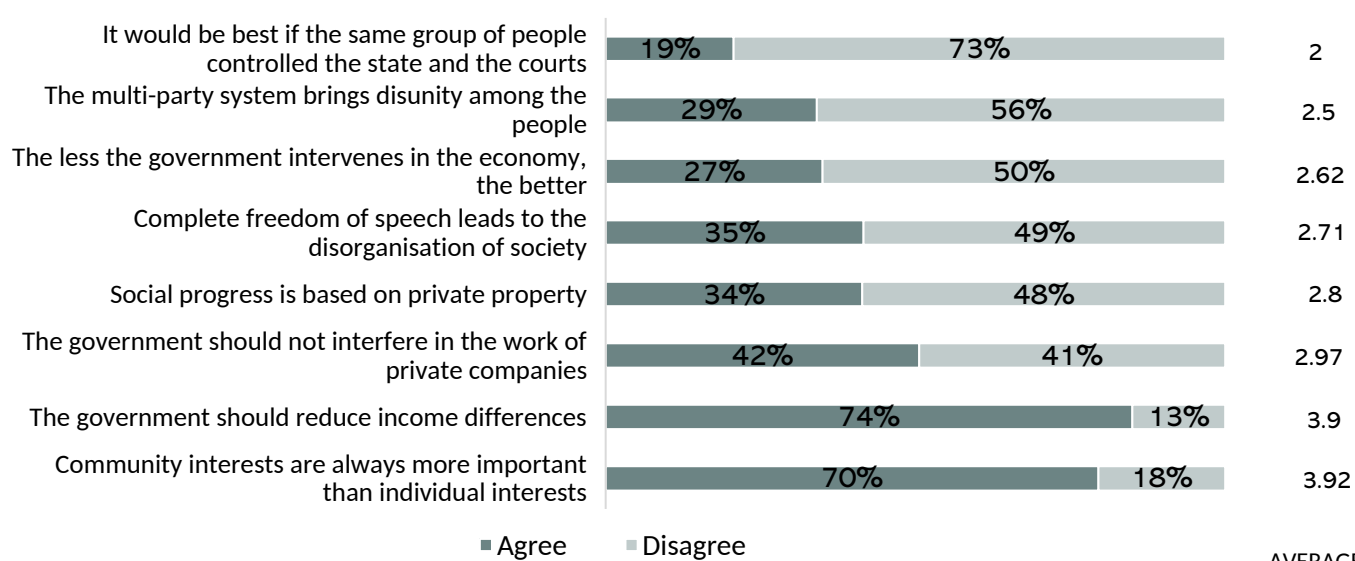
As regards democracy, the majority of citizens (58.7%) still believe that democracy is always better than all other forms of government. A significant minority, made up of almost one fifth of citizens (17.2%), believe that a non-democratic government can sometimes be a better option, while a further 16.3% make no distinction between democratic and non-democratic regimes.

Overall, one third of the citizens of Serbia do not express unconditional commitment to the democratic model of government.

This is a finding that deserves the attention of policymakers, as it shows that support for democratic institutions, although still held by a majority, is neither universal nor unquestioned within Serbian society, which can also be interpreted as a consequence of the absence of an established democratic tradition.

The battery of attitudes on the basic values of society sheds further light on the state of society (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Attitudes towards the basic values of society (full sample)



The citizens of Serbia strongly support collectivist and egalitarian values: 70% agree that the interests of the community must always be more important than the interests of the individual, and as many as 74% believe that the state should reduce income differences. These findings are a clear signal that the need for economic justice and solidarity is deeply rooted in citizens' consciousness, regardless of their party affiliation.

Attitudes towards private property and the role of the state in the economy are more divided and closer to the middle of the scale, with no clear majority in either direction. By contrast, attitudes on freedom of speech and pluralism show that *open advocacy of the concentration of power remains a marginal position*: only 19% of respondents agree that the state and the courts should be controlled by the same group of people, while a convincing majority (73%) reject this. Similarly, 49% reject the statement that freedom of speech leads to the disorganisation of society, compared with 35% who agree.

These findings suggest that, despite being divided over the country's current direction, the citizens of Serbia share a broad consensus on rejecting an overt concentration of power and support economic solidarity as a value, while their commitment to liberal, pluralist norms is somewhat weaker and more sensitive to the political context.

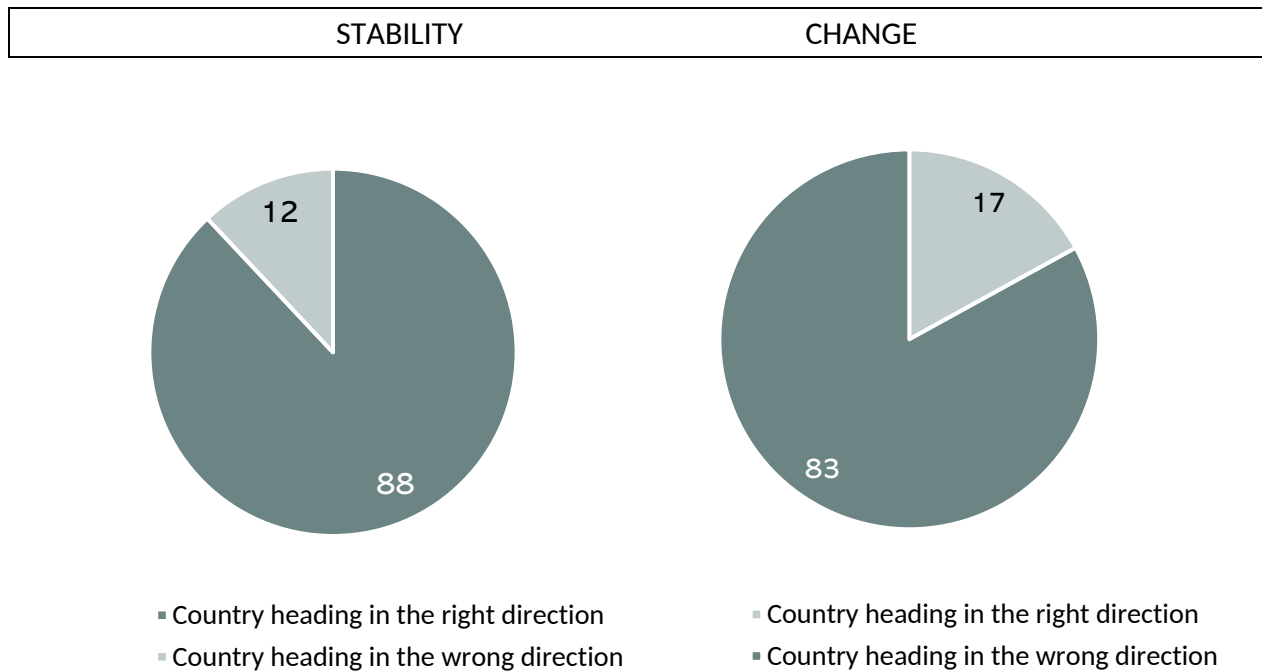
5.2. Security or change?

The question of whether Serbia needs stability and continuity or change is one of the clearest lines of division in this survey. At the level of the whole sample, slightly more than half of citizens (51.8%) choose stability and continuity, while the number of those who choose change (45.3%) is only 6 percentage points lower.

This seemingly balanced picture, however, conceals an exceptionally strong correlation with the perception of the direction in which the country is heading (Chart 2). Among citizens who believe that Serbia is heading in the right direction, as many as 88.2% choose stability, while this ratio is almost completely reversed among those who believe that the country is heading in the wrong direction, of whom 82% choose change.

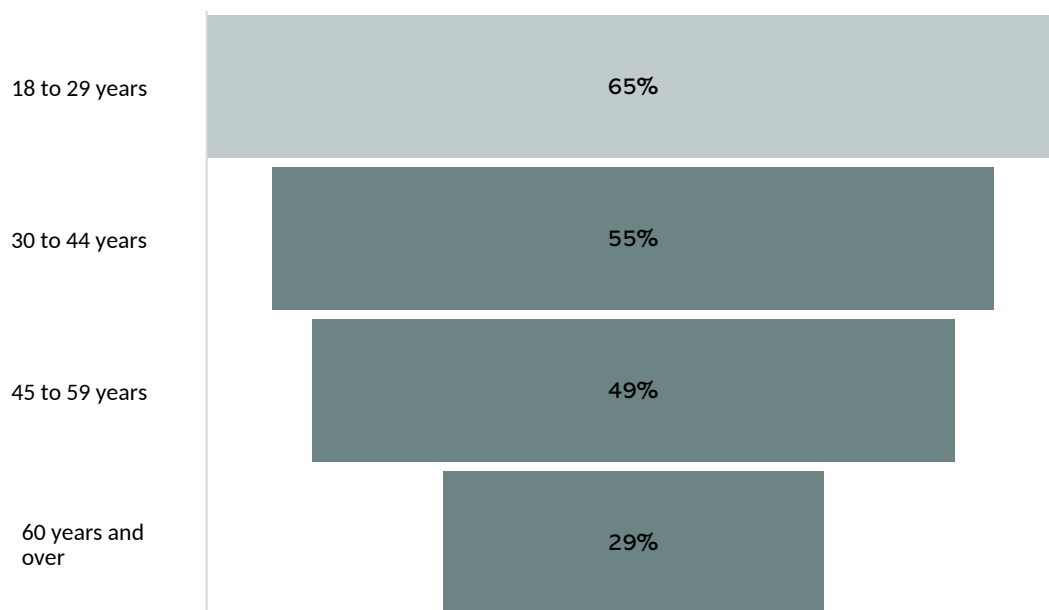
The strength of this association shows that the question of "stability or change" in Serbian society largely follows the assessment of the current situation, rather than functioning as an independent value dimension.

Chart 2. Stability or change, by perception of the country's direction



It could be said that it is an expected finding that the age of respondents is a strong factor influencing the propensity for change (Chart 3).

Chart 3. Share of those who choose change, by age group



Younger citizens are considerably more inclined towards change (65% in the 18 to 29 age group) than older ones (29% in the 60 and over age group), *which points to a clear generational gap within a society that is growing ever older, so that the potential for change should also be expected to decline in the future.* This generational gap is one of the most pronounced in the survey, as it also indicates that any political offer relying exclusively on stability risks losing touch with younger generations of voters.

When this division is viewed through the prism of the broader political segments identified by further analysis of the survey, the difference becomes even sharper: *the segment closest to the ruling majority almost unanimously chooses stability (95%), while the segment gathered around the student movement is almost unanimously (96%) oriented towards change. The remaining segments, without clear and firm party loyalty, show a more moderate, but still change-oriented, picture.*

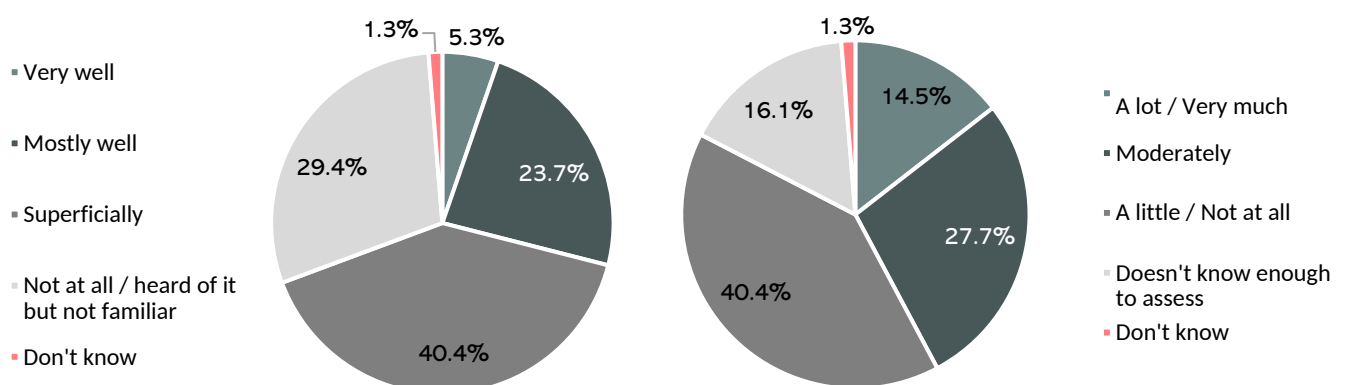
5.3. What does the Constitution mean to citizens?

Knowledge of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia is limited: only 5.3% of respondents say they know it very well, while a further 23.7% believe they know it mostly well. The largest part of the population (40.4%) admits to knowing the Constitution only superficially, while the remaining 29.4% have either never heard of its content to an extent that would allow them to assess it, or know practically nothing about it.

In other words, for most citizens the Constitution is more an abstract symbol of statehood than a document whose content they can realistically assess.

This limited familiarity is accompanied by a divided, but predominantly critical, assessment of how much the Constitution protects citizens' interests. Only 14.5% of respondents believe that the Constitution protects citizens' interests a lot or very much, while almost twice as many (40.4%) believe that it protects them a little or not at all. The remaining 27.7% take a middle position, while 16.1% do not feel they know enough about the Constitution to assess this question at all.

Chart 4. Familiarity with the Constitution and assessment of the protection of citizens' interests



The combination of low familiarity and a predominantly critical assessment points to an important communication challenge.

Citizens do not reject the Constitution on the basis of a thorough knowledge of its content, but from a general impression that the existing constitutional framework does not work well enough in their favour.

5.4. Does Serbia need constitutional change?

The majority of the citizens of Serbia support some form of constitutional change: 44% believe that minor amendments are needed, 21.3% that significant amendments are needed, and 5.7% that Serbia needs a completely new constitution.

In total, 71% of the citizens of Serbia support amending the Constitution to some extent.

On the other hand, 15.8% believe that the Constitution largely meets Serbia's needs and should not be changed, while 13.2% have no clear position. The level of support for changing the Constitution differs strongly between the political categories of respondents identified in this survey (Chart 5).

The political categories of respondents were obtained through an analysis of the standardised values of three groups of variables: *a battery of eight statements on democracy, freedom of speech and the role of the state; propensity to vote for the five leading parties/coalitions; and ratings of the performance of eight leading political figures.*

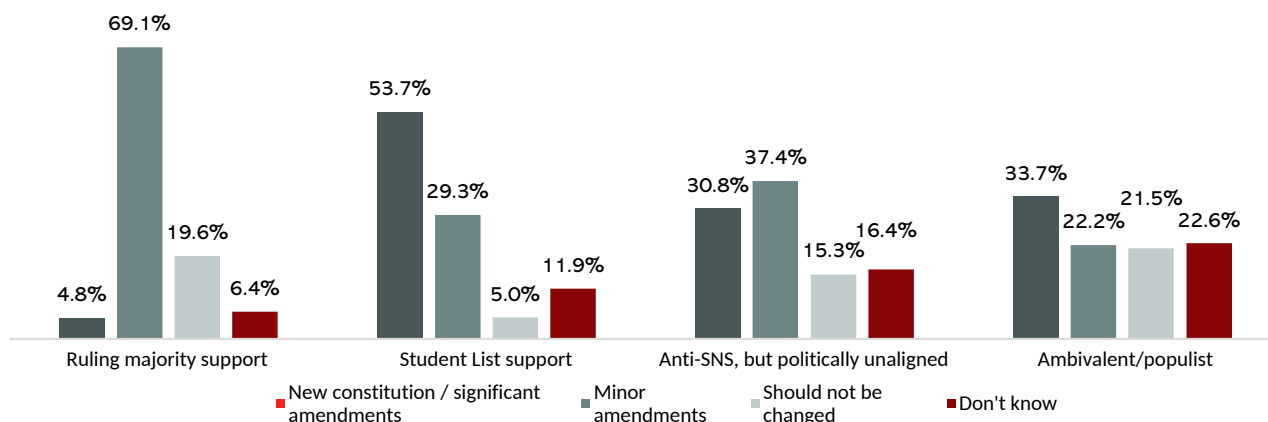
The segment closest to the ruling majority is the only one in which moderation prevails on the question of the Constitution. More than two thirds of this category (69%) support only minor amendments, and a further 19.6% believe that the Constitution should not be changed at all. Only 4.8% of this group advocate significant amendments or a completely new constitution.

By contrast, in the category of respondents gathered around the student movement, as many as 53.7% support significant amendments or a completely new constitution, and only 5% believe that the Constitution should not be changed.

The remaining two categories lie between these two positions, with the segment without clear party loyalty also having the largest share of undecided respondents (22.6%). This is in line with the broader pattern of a less pronounced and less firm political orientation of this group.

This finding suggests that the question of constitutional reform, *although supported in principle by a majority of citizens, is highly polarised along political lines.*

Chart 5. Need for constitutional change, by political category



5.5. What do citizens want to keep in the Constitution, and what would they change?

When asked which specific areas of the Constitution they would change (choosing up to two areas), the citizens of Serbia show a very clear hierarchy of priorities.

The fight against corruption (47%) and the judiciary (36.3%) convincingly dominate as the areas that the largest number of citizens want to see changed, while no other area exceeds 17%.

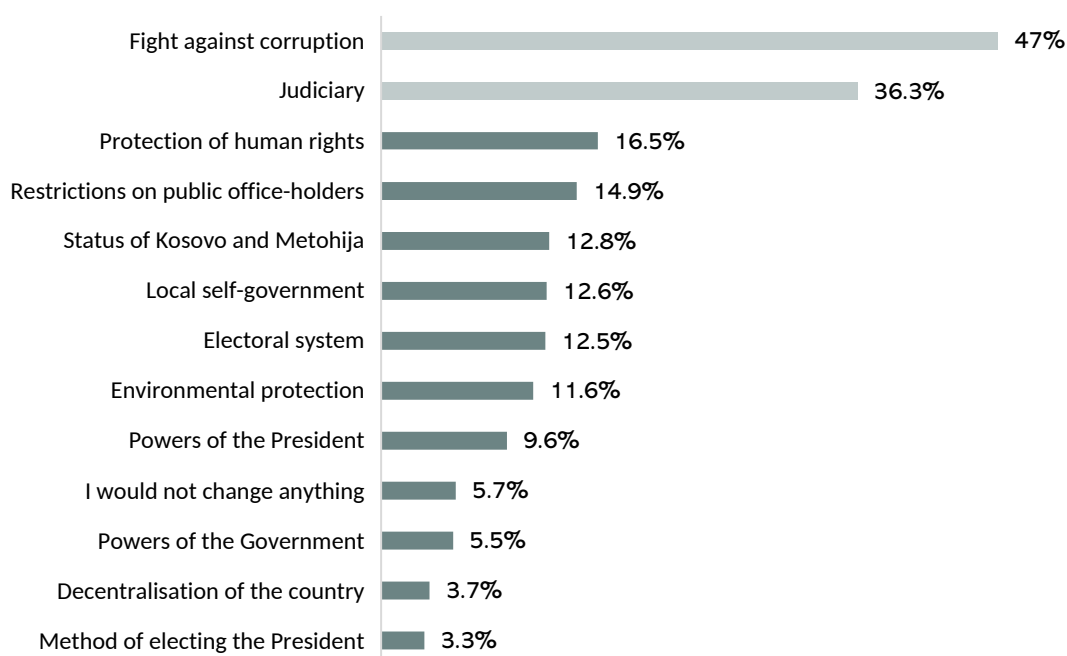
Third and fourth place are taken by the protection of human rights (16.5%) and restrictions on public office-holders (14.9%), while the status of Kosovo and Metohija (12.8%), local self-government (12.6%), the electoral system (12.5%) and environmental protection (11.6%) are grouped in the middle range.

At the opposite end of the list are areas that citizens rarely recognise as a priority for change: *the method of electing the President (3.3%), decentralisation of the country (3.7%) and the powers of the Government (5.5%)*. This does not necessarily mean that citizens actively want these areas to remain unchanged in some deeper, value-based sense. The findings on topics rather indicate that certain topics are simply not part of their primary set of priorities when they think about the Constitution.

Explicit satisfaction with the existing constitutional situation is expressed by a relatively small number of citizens: only 5.7% choose the option “I would not change anything”.

The practical implication for policymakers is that there is a clear, narrow and well-defined set of priorities (corruption, the judiciary) around which by far the largest part of the public gathers, while most of the remaining constitutional topics, including those that often dominate political debate, such as the powers of the President or the method of electing the President, are secondary in the eyes of the wider public or do not attract sufficient interest.

Chart 6. Areas of the Constitution that citizens would change (two answers possible)



5.6. Map of potential constitutional consensus

Comparing the priorities for constitutional change across the four political categories of respondents identified in this survey makes it possible to separate topics on which there is genuine consensus from topics that are essentially polarised and tied to respondents' political position.

The difference between the segments for each area was tested with a chi-square test of independence; an area was classified as polarised if the difference in the share of respondents choosing it was statistically reliable ($p < 0.05$), i.e. unlikely to be the product of chance at this sample size.

For areas where the difference is not statistically reliable ($p \geq 0.05$), a further distinction was made as to whether the topic is ranked equally highly by all segments (consensus) or equally low (neutral, outside the broader focus of the public in all camps), which was determined on the basis of the average support at the level of the whole sample.

The result shows that the fight against corruption and judicial reform are the only two areas that are simultaneously highly ranked and statistically evenly supported across all four segments.

Table 1. Support for areas of constitutional change by political segment, with a test of statistical significance

Area	Ruling majority	Student List	Politically unaligned	Populists	*Average	*p-value	Category
Electoral system	5.4%	21.1%	16.5%	9.7%	12.5%	0.0003	Polarised
Decentralisation of the country	1.7%	7.3%	5.4%	0.3%	3.7%	0.0004	Polarised
I would not change anything	10.9%	1.7%	3.8%	3.5%	5.7%	0.0013	Polarised
Method of electing the President	2.0%	3.4%	4.5%	3.4%	3.3%	0.0297	Polarised
Powers of the President	6.2%	10.1%	12.2%	10.9%	9.6%	0.0308	Polarised
Restrictions on office-holders	15.8%	19.4%	15.2%	7.1%	14.9%	0.0460	Polarised
Protection of human rights	12.2%	14.6%	16.1%	27.8%	16.5%	0.0461	Polarised
Environmental protection	5.4%	12.7%	16.3%	14.5%	11.6%	0.0755	Neutral
Local self-government	15.6%	9.2%	12.7%	10.6%	12.6%	0.1086	Neutral
Powers of the Government	3.5%	5.3%	8.5%	4.6%	5.5%	0.2181	Neutral
Status of Kosovo and Metohija	10.5%	15.8%	13.3%	12.7%	12.8%	0.3267	Neutral
Judiciary	38.8%	40.8%	34.9%	28.6%	36.3%	0.1649	Consensus
Fight against corruption	44.3%	52.6%	49.2%	41.9%	47.0%	0.2040	Consensus

Explanation of the findings presented in Table 1.

* **P-value:** Whether the categories of respondents differ from one another (whether the difference is random or real);

* **Average value:** Indicates how important the area is to people at all, regardless of the category of respondents

In none of the political options, including the core of the ruling majority, are the judiciary and the fight against corruption marginal topics. According to the findings obtained, these are the only two areas of constitutional reform for which this survey provides a basis to realistically gather support beyond narrow political lines.

By contrast, seven areas show a statistically reliable polarised pattern of support, closely tied to the political segment. The electoral system is the most pronounced example, as changing it is supported by only 5.4% of the core of the ruling majority, but by as many as 21.1% of the segment gathered around the student movement.

The option “I would not change anything” is also reliably polarised and, as expected, concentrated almost exclusively in the core of the ruling majority (10.9%, compared with 1.7%–3.8% in the other segments).

The status of Kosovo and Metohija, the powers of the Government, local self-government and environmental protection are not statistically reliably polarised, but they differ from topics that can be considered unifying in that they are generally chosen by a small part of the public in each segment (11%–13%). These are topics that are outside the broader focus of the public at this moment, rather than topics on which there is pronounced, active agreement.

For policymakers seeking a realistic basis for a broader constitutional dialogue, the finding is unambiguous: the fight against corruption and judicial reform represent ground on which a proposal for change would probably meet with support regardless of citizens' political affiliation. Proposals related to the electoral system, restrictions on office-holders or the protection of human rights, however substantively important, would probably be "read" through a partisan prism and meet resistance in some parts of the public, especially those close to the current authorities.

5.7. Dimensions of citizens' liberal attitudes

Citizens' liberal attitudes are not organised along a single unified axis. Instead of a consistently liberal or illiberal orientation in all areas, different positions can be observed with regard to political freedoms, the interests of the individual and of the community, the role of the market and economic redistribution.

The most pronounced is the democratic-pluralist orientation, whose average value is 3.60 on a scale from 1 to 5 (see **Table 2**). This indicates relatively strong support for freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers. By contrast, the average score on the individualism–collectivism dimension is 2.08, which indicates a more pronounced tendency to give priority to the interests of the community over the interests of the individual.

Table 2. Average values on the dimensions of liberal attitudes

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Basic interpretation</i>
<i>Democratic-pluralist orientation</i>	Freedom of speech, multi-party system and separation of powers	3.60	1.08	More pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation
<i>Market orientation</i>	Regulation of private companies, private property and state intervention	2.80	0.96	Slight tendency towards a greater role for the state in the economy

<i>Individualism–collectivism</i>	Primacy of the interests of the community or the individual	2.08	1.33	More pronounced collectivist orientation
<i>Attitude towards redistribution</i>	State measures to reduce income differences	2.10	1.12	More pronounced support for redistributive measures

* All indicators range from 1 to 5 and are oriented so that a higher value denotes the more liberal pole of the dimension in question. For individualism–collectivism, a higher score denotes more pronounced individualism, while for attitude towards redistribution it denotes stronger opposition to state measures to reduce income differences. The results shown are based on weighted data.

Market orientation lies somewhat below the middle of the scale (2.80), which indicates *a slight tendency towards a greater role for the state in the economy*. At the same time, the low score on the dimension of attitude towards redistribution (2.10) shows *relatively pronounced support for state measures to reduce income differences*.

The findings describe a value pattern that combines support for political pluralism and democratic freedoms with collectivist and economically interventionist attitudes.

In other words, support for political freedoms does not necessarily imply pronounced individualism or acceptance of a minimal role for the state in the economy. Precisely for this reason, liberalism among the public should be viewed as a set of related but distinct dimensions, rather than as a single unified value axis.

5.8. Liberal values and general political orientation

The assessment of the direction in which Serbia is heading is associated primarily with democratic-pluralist and, to a somewhat lesser extent, market attitudes. Citizens who believe that the country is heading in the wrong direction achieve higher scores on all the dimensions examined, but the differences vary in intensity and are not statistically reliable everywhere.

Table 3. Dimensions of liberal attitudes by assessment of the direction in which Serbia is heading

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Serbia is heading in the right direction</i>	<i>Serbia is heading in the wrong direction</i>	<i>Difference</i>
<i>Democratic-pluralist orientation</i>	3.33	3.92	0.59***
<i>Market orientation</i>	2.56	3.00	0.43***
<i>Individualism–collectivism</i>	1.95	2.18	0.23**
<i>Attitude towards redistribution</i>	2.00	2.17	0.17

*Note: Weighted average values on a scale from 1 to 5 are shown. A higher value denotes the more liberal pole of the dimension: more pronounced democratic pluralism, market orientation and individualism, or stronger opposition to state measures to reduce income differences. The category "don't know/cannot assess" is not shown. Significance tests were conducted on unweighted data. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The most pronounced difference relates to democratic-pluralist orientation. The average value among citizens who believe that Serbia is heading in the wrong direction is 3.92, compared with 3.33 among those who assess the country's direction positively. This shows that *critics of the country's current direction are considerably more inclined to support freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers.* Although the average value is lower among citizens who believe that the country is heading in the right direction, their score also remains above the middle of the scale. The difference therefore cannot be reduced to a simple division between a democratic and a non-democratic group, but rather points to different degrees of commitment to democratic-pluralist principles.

The difference is also visible in market orientation. Citizens who assess the country's direction negatively are on average in the middle of the scale, while those who believe that the country is heading in the right direction are somewhat more inclined towards a greater role for the state in the economy.

By contrast, *the basic collectivist and redistributive pattern is largely present in both groups.* Citizens who believe that Serbia is heading in the wrong direction show a somewhat higher degree of individualism, but both groups remain clearly below the middle of the scale and predominantly give priority to the interests of the community. No statistically reliable difference was found in attitude towards redistribution: both citizens who assess the country's direction positively and its critics largely support state measures aimed at reducing income differences.

The assessment of the country's current direction is strongly refracted through attitudes towards political pluralism and institutional limits on power, but it does not produce an equally deep division over all liberal values. Support for collectivist and redistributive principles crosses the line between citizens who assess the state of the country differently, which indicates the existence of shared value foundations despite political disagreement.⁵

5.9. Stability and change as a value divide

Differences in liberal attitudes are also clearly visible between citizens who give priority to stability and continuity and those who believe that Serbia needs change. *Citizens*

⁵ Differences were tested with an independent samples t-test. Statistically significant differences were found for democratic-pluralist orientation, $t(856) = -9.546$, $p < 0.001$; market orientation, $t(854) = -6.149$, $p < 0.001$; and individualism-collectivism, $t(851.644) = -2.702$, $p = 0.007$. For attitude towards redistribution, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(846) = -1.203$, $p = 0.229$. Due to unequal variances, the result of the test that does not assume equal variances was applied for individualism-collectivism.

in favour of change show a more pronounced democratic-pluralist, market and individualist orientation. Attitude towards redistribution, however, again does not represent a significant line of division between these two groups.

Table 4. Dimensions of liberal attitudes by choice between stability and change

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Stability and continuity</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Difference</i>
<i>Democratic-pluralist orientation</i>	3.37	3.85	0.48***
<i>Market orientation</i>	2.58	3.06	0.48***
<i>Individualism–collectivism</i>	1.87	2.33	0.46***
<i>Attitude towards redistribution</i>	2.01	2.20	0.20

* Note: Weighted average values on a scale from 1 to 5 are shown. A higher value denotes the more liberal pole of the dimension in question: more pronounced democratic pluralism, market orientation and individualism, or stronger opposition to state measures to reduce income differences. The category “don’t know/cannot assess” is not shown. Significance tests were conducted on unweighted data. ** $p < 0.001$.

The most pronounced differences are observed in democratic-pluralist and market orientation. Citizens who want change achieve an average value of 3.85 on the democratic-pluralist dimension, compared with 3.37 among citizens who choose stability. A similar difference exists in market orientation: citizens in favour of change are somewhat above the middle of the scale (3.06), while supporters of stability are more inclined towards a greater role for the state in the economy (2.58).

The difference is also visible on the individualism–collectivism dimension. Citizens who want change show a higher degree of individualism than those who give priority to stability. Nevertheless, the average values of both groups remain below the middle of the scale, which means that collectivist orientation is not confined to supporters of stability, but remains present among citizens who want change as well.

Attitude towards redistribution again does not separate these two groups in a statistically reliable way. Both supporters of stability and supporters of change largely support state measures to reduce income differences. *Economic solidarity thus proves to be a value that to a significant extent crosses one of the most important current political divisions.* These results should be considered together with the previously established strong link between the choice of stability or change and the assessment of the direction in which Serbia is heading.

Being in favour of change is not exclusively an abstract value position, but is to a large extent associated with attitudes towards the current situation in the country.

Nevertheless, the findings show that behind this choice there is also a recognisable value profile: stronger support for political pluralism and the separation of powers, greater openness to market solutions and somewhat more pronounced individualism.⁶

5.10. Attitudes towards democracy in principle and liberal values

Commitment to democracy in principle is clearly associated with democratic-pluralist orientation, but not with all other dimensions of liberal attitudes. *Citizens who believe that democracy is better than all other forms of government show stronger support for freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers than citizens who consider democratic and non-democratic regimes equal or accept the possibility that a non-democratic government may be better in certain circumstances.*

Table 5. Dimensions of liberal attitudes by attitude towards democracy in principle

Dimension	Democracy is better than other forms of government	Democratic and non-democratic regimes are the same	A non-democratic government can sometimes be better
Democratic-pluralist orientation	3.77	3.41	3.30
Market orientation	2.71	2.86	2.98
Individualism–collectivism	2.05	2.12	2.14
Attitude towards redistribution	2.08	2.11	2.18

*Note: Weighted average values on a scale from 1 to 5 are shown. A higher value denotes the more liberal pole of the dimension in question. The category “don’t know/cannot assess” is not shown.

The largest difference appears on the democratic-pluralist dimension. Citizens who consider democracy the best form of government achieve an average value of 3.77, while

⁶ Differences were tested with an independent samples t-test. Statistically significant differences were found for democratic-pluralist orientation, $t(948) = -8.780$, $p < 0.001$; market orientation, $t(944) = -7.033$, $p < 0.001$; and individualism–collectivism, $t(874.129) = -4.142$, $p < 0.001$. For attitude towards redistribution, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(938) = -1.072$, $p = 0.284$. Due to unequal variances, the result of the test that does not assume equal variances was applied for individualism–collectivism.

the score among citizens who consider democratic and non-democratic regimes equal is 3.41, and among those who allow for the possibility that a non-democratic government may be better, 3.30. Post-hoc comparisons show that the first group differs statistically reliably from both remaining groups, while there is no reliable difference between the two groups without an unambiguous democratic orientation.⁷

A different pattern appears in market orientation. The highest average value is found among citizens who believe that a non-democratic government can sometimes be better (2.98), and the lowest among unconditional supporters of democracy (2.71). A statistically reliable difference was found precisely between these two groups. This result shows that *support for market solutions is not necessarily associated with a stronger commitment to democracy and political pluralism*.

By contrast, the groups do not differ statistically reliably on the dimensions of individualism–collectivism and attitude towards redistribution. All three groups are below the middle of both scales, which indicates *the broader presence of a collectivist orientation and of support for state measures to reduce income differences, regardless of attitude towards democracy in principle*.

The findings confirm that *liberalism among the public does not function as a single value package*. Unambiguous support for democracy is associated with stronger acceptance of political pluralism and institutional limits on power, but not with more pronounced individualism or market orientation. At the same time, collectivist and redistributive values are present both among citizens with a firm democratic orientation and among those whose attitude towards democracy is ambivalent.

5.11. Liberal values and political preferences

The association between liberal values and political preferences was first examined by comparing the two largest groups of currently decided voters – citizens who would vote for SNS and those who would vote for the Student List. Together, these two options cover 86.2% of respondents who named a specific electoral option at the time of the survey, but the results do not represent the entire electorate: undecided voters, abstainers and voters of other parties are excluded from the comparison.⁸

⁷ Due to unequal variances and different group sizes, Welch's test and Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons were used. Overall differences were statistically significant for democratic-pluralist orientation, Welch $F(2, 378.566) = 20.201$, $p < 0.001$, and market orientation, Welch $F(2, 377.536) = 7.646$, $p < 0.001$. For democratic-pluralist orientation, the group that considers democracy the best form of government differed from both remaining groups ($p < 0.001$), while those two groups did not differ from each other ($p = 0.530$). For market orientation, a statistically reliable difference was found between unconditional supporters of democracy and citizens who accept the possibility of a non-democratic government ($p < 0.001$). The differences were not statistically significant for individualism–collectivism ($p = 0.639$) or for attitude towards redistribution ($p = 0.589$).

⁸ Voting intention was analysed on the basis of the answers of respondents who named a specific party or list. Due to the small number of answers for the other individual political options, their value profiles were not compared on the basis of direct voting intention, but will be analysed using broader indicators of coalition potential.

Value profiles of SNS and Student List voters

The largest difference between the two groups of voters relates to democratic-pluralist orientation. Student List voters achieve an average value of 4.05, while the average among SNS voters is 3.16. A difference of almost one point on a five-point scale shows that attitudes towards freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers represent a pronounced line of separation between these two political groups.

Table 6. Dimensions of liberal attitudes of SNS and Student List voters

Dimension	SNS	Student List	Difference
<i>Democratic-pluralist orientation</i>	3.16	4.05	0.89***
<i>Market orientation</i>	2.65	2.89	0.24***
<i>Individualism–collectivism</i>	1.95	2.37	0.42***
<i>Attitude towards redistribution</i>	2.01	2.29	0.28

* Note: Weighted average values on a scale from 1 to 5 are shown. A higher value denotes the more liberal pole of the dimension in question. Tests of differences were conducted on unweighted data. ** $p < 0.001$. The difference in attitude towards redistribution is not statistically significant.

Student List voters also show a higher degree of individualism, but both groups remain clearly below the middle of the scale. This means that giving priority to the interests of the community is not characteristic only of SNS voters, but is also present among Student List voters, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent.

The difference in market orientation is statistically reliable, but substantively considerably smaller than the difference in democratic-pluralist attitudes. Both groups of voters remain on average below the middle of the scale, with *Student List voters being somewhat more open to private property and to less state interference in the economy.*

Attitude towards redistribution does not represent a reliable line of division. Both SNS voters and Student List voters show support for state measures to reduce income differences. Although the weighted average among Student List voters is somewhat higher, the test did not confirm that this is a statistically reliable difference.

The findings indicate that the division between the two largest groups of currently decided voters is much sharper as regards political pluralism and institutional limits on power than as regards economic and collectivist values. In other words, *SNS and Student List voters differ strongly in the political dimension of liberalism, but at the same time share*

significant elements of a collectivist and redistributive orientation. This is a first indication that citizens are more divided over political actors and questions of power than over certain economic and social values.

Value profiles of the potential electorates of political options

Comparing potential electorates provides a broader picture of political preferences than voting intention alone, as it also includes citizens who would not necessarily choose a particular political option at the moment, but who express a certain degree of openness to supporting it. The results show once again that *the potential electorates of political options differ primarily in democratic-pluralist and, to a somewhat lesser extent, market orientation, while the differences in attitudes towards economic redistribution are considerably smaller.*

Table 7. Average values of the dimensions of liberal attitudes within potential electorates

Potential electorate	Individualism	Opposition to redistribution	Democratic-pluralist orientation	Market orientation
SNS	1.92*	2.03	3.18*	2.67*
Student List	2.24*	2.21	3.92*	2.94*
SPS	2.02	2.03	3.04*	2.96
Pro-European opposition	2.43	2.11	4.08*	3.06*
NPS coalition	2.33	2.18	3.74	3.05*
Population average	2.08	2.10	3.60	2.80

* Note: Weighted average values are shown. All dimensions range from 1 to 5. A higher value denotes more pronounced individualism, stronger opposition to redistribution, a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation and a more pronounced market orientation. An asterisk denotes a statistically significant difference between the potential electorate and the opponents of the respective option (t-test on unweighted data, $p < 0.05$). The groups of potential electorates partially overlap and do not represent mutually exclusive voter segments.⁹

⁹ The indicators of potential electorates do not represent mutually exclusive groups of voters, but include all citizens who express a shallower or deeper willingness to support a particular political option. Therefore, the same respondent may belong to the potential electorate of several options. In the data, 49.1% of respondents belong to the potential electorate of only one option, while 34.7% belong to the potential electorate of at least two options. Among respondents who belong to at least one potential electorate,

The clearest value difference relates to democratic-pluralist orientation. The highest average values are recorded among the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition (4.08) and the Student List (3.92), while the lowest values are recorded among the potential electorates of SPS (3.04) and SNS (3.18). The potential electorate of SNS is significantly less democratic-pluralist in orientation than the opponents of that option, while the potential electorate of the Student List is significantly more oriented towards democratic freedoms, political pluralism and the separation of powers than its opponents. A similar, positive difference was also found for the potential electorate of the pro-European opposition. For SPS, the direction is reversed: its potential electorate shows a lower democratic-pluralist orientation than the opponents of this option. No statistically significant difference on this dimension was found for the potential electorate of the NPS coalition.

Differences in individualism are present, but less consistent. *The potential electorate of the Student List is significantly more individualistic in orientation than its opponents, while the potential electorate of SNS is closer to the collectivist pole than the opponents of SNS.* Although the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition and the NPS coalition have relatively high average values of individualism, their differences relative to the opponents of those options are not statistically significant. No significant difference was found for SPS either.

Market orientation is most pronounced among the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition (3.06) and the NPS coalition (3.05), followed by the potential electorates of SPS (2.96) and the Student List (2.94). The potential electorates of the Student List, the pro-European opposition and the NPS coalition are significantly more market-oriented than the opponents of those options. By contrast, the potential electorate of SNS shows a lower market orientation than its opponents. For SPS, despite the relatively high average of its potential electorate, the difference relative to its opponents is not statistically significant.

Attitude towards redistribution shows a completely different picture. The average values of all potential electorates range within a narrow band from 2.03 to 2.21, and no statistically significant difference between the potential electorate and the opponents was found for any political option. This shows that support for state measures aimed at reducing income differences crosses the boundaries of political preferences. *Even the potential electorates that show a more pronounced market orientation do not necessarily reject the redistributive role of the state.*

The findings therefore point to *unequal value polarisation*. Political divisions most clearly follow attitudes towards democratic institutions and pluralism, and partly also attitudes towards the market and individualism. By contrast, redistribution represents a considerably broader point of agreement. Citizens are therefore not equally divided over all liberal values: party and

41.4% are in the potential electorate of more than one political option. The results should therefore be interpreted as a comparison of partially overlapping spaces of possible support, rather than as a comparison of strictly separated voting blocs.

coalition preferences are associated with certain value differences, but do not form two fully rounded and mutually opposed ideological blocs.

5.12. Liberal values and attitudes towards constitutional reform

In addition to the relationship between liberal values and political preferences, for assessing reform potential it is particularly important to establish how these values are associated with citizens' attitudes towards the Constitution. While the previous chapter shows how well citizens know the Constitution, how they assess its protective function and to what extent they want it changed, the analysis below examines which value orientations lie behind these attitudes and whether certain areas of constitutional reform can bring together citizens of different political and value profiles.

Table 8. Liberal values by assessment of the protective role of the Constitution

Assessment of protection of citizens' interests	Individualism	Opposition to redistribution	Democratic-pluralist orientation	Market orientation
Weak protection	2.12	2.15	3.85	3.02
Moderate protection	1.92	1.91	3.59	2.65
Strong protection	2.13	2.33	3.14	2.63

* Note: Weighted average values on scales from 1 to 5 are shown. A higher value denotes more pronounced individualism, stronger opposition to redistribution, a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation and a more pronounced market orientation. Respondents who could not assess the protective role of the Constitution or who stated that they did not know it well enough are not included¹⁰.

The assessment of the extent to which the current Constitution protects citizens' interests is associated with the dimensions of liberal attitudes, but the patterns are not equally clear in all areas. *The most consistent association is observed for democratic-pluralist orientation.* Citizens who believe that the Constitution *strongly protects their interests have a lower average score on this dimension* (3.14) than those who assess its protection as moderate (3.59) or weak (3.85). Statistical comparisons

¹⁰ Welch's tests showed statistically significant differences between the groups in individualism (Welch = 8.309; $p < 0.001$), attitude towards redistribution (Welch = 7.639; $p = 0.001$), democratic-pluralist orientation (Welch = 8.776; $p < 0.001$) and market orientation (Welch = 7.821; $p < 0.001$). Games-Howell comparisons showed that for democratic-pluralist orientation, the group that assesses protection as strong differs from the groups that assess it as weak ($p < 0.001$) and moderate ($p = 0.045$). For market orientation, only the difference between weak and moderate protection was confirmed ($p < 0.001$). For individualism and attitude towards redistribution, the middle category differs from both extreme categories, while the difference between the extreme categories is not statistically significant.

confirm the difference between the group that assesses protection as strong and the other two groups, while the difference between weak and moderate protection is not sufficiently pronounced.

Citizens who *assess the protective role of the Constitution as weak also show a more pronounced market orientation (3.02) than those who assess it as moderate (2.65)*. However, the difference relative to the group that believes the Constitution provides strong protection was not statistically confirmed. For individualism and attitude towards redistribution, statistically significant but non-linear differences appear: the middle category of assessment of protection differs from both extreme categories, while the groups that assess protection as weak and as strong do not differ from each other. For this reason, *it is not justified to interpret these results as a simple progression from a less to a more liberal orientation*.

Overall, the findings indicate that *citizens with a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation are more critical of the ability of the existing Constitution to protect their interests*. However, the size of the differences found is relatively small, so attitudes towards the Constitution cannot be reduced solely to liberal value orientations.

The desired scope of constitutional change is also associated with certain dimensions of liberal attitudes, but not with all of them. The clearest association exists for democratic-pluralist orientation, while market orientation does not distinguish between supporters of different scopes of constitutional reform.

Table 9. Liberal values by attitude towards changing the Constitution

Attitude towards changing the Constitution	Individualism	Opposition to redistribution	Democratic-pluralist orientation	Market orientation
Completely new Constitution	2.84	2.91	3.97	2.84
Significant amendments	2.27	2.19	3.78	2.90
Minor amendments	1.82	1.97	3.64	2.68
Constitution should not be changed	2.20	2.29	3.28	2.87

* Note: Weighted average values on scales from 1 to 5 are shown. A higher value denotes more pronounced individualism, stronger opposition to redistribution, a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation and a more pronounced market orientation. Respondents who could not assess the need to change the Constitution are not included.

Democratic-pluralist orientation is most pronounced among citizens who believe that Serbia needs a completely new Constitution (3.97) or significant amendments to it (3.78), and lowest

among those who believe that the existing Constitution should not be changed (3.28). Statistical comparisons confirm that *supporters of significant amendments are more democratic-pluralist in orientation than supporters of minor amendments and citizens who do not want the Constitution to be changed*. Citizens who want a completely new Constitution also have a higher score than those who believe that the Constitution should not be changed.¹¹ The finding indicates that *openness to more comprehensive constitutional reform is associated with stronger support for freedom of speech, political pluralism and the separation of powers*.

In terms of individualism, the group that supports minor constitutional amendments stands out. It is less individualistic in orientation than supporters of a completely new Constitution, of significant amendments and of keeping the existing Constitution. However, no significant differences were confirmed between the remaining three groups, so individualism does not increase evenly with support for more comprehensive changes.

A complex pattern also exists for redistribution. *Citizens who want a completely new Constitution show the strongest opposition to state measures to reduce income differences*, while supporters of minor amendments show the greatest support for such measures. Supporters of significant amendments and citizens who do not want the Constitution to be changed do not differ from each other. This result should be interpreted *with caution*, as the group advocating a completely new Constitution is considerably smaller than the others and may bring together citizens with different motives for a fundamental constitutional change.

By contrast, *no statistically significant differences were found in market orientation*. Support for a smaller role for the state in the economy and for private property is therefore not systematically associated with the desired scope of constitutional change.

Overall, readiness for more comprehensive constitutional reform is most clearly associated with democratic-pluralist values. The other dimensions do not form a simple pattern, which shows that *support for changing the Constitution is not the expression of a single liberal ideological profile*.

¹¹ Welch's tests showed statistically significant differences in individualism (Welch = 12.057; $p < 0.001$), attitude towards redistribution (Welch = 10.335; $p < 0.001$) and democratic-pluralist orientation (Welch = 8.943; $p < 0.001$), while the differences in market orientation were not statistically significant (Welch = 1.971; $p = 0.120$). Games-Howell comparisons showed that the group supporting minor amendments is less individualistic in orientation than all three remaining groups. For attitude towards redistribution, the group that wants a completely new Constitution differs from all other groups, while supporters of minor amendments show greater support for redistribution than supporters of significant amendments and citizens who do not want the Constitution to be changed. For democratic-pluralist orientation, there are significant differences between supporters of significant and of minor amendments ($p = 0.009$), between supporters of significant amendments and opponents of change ($p < 0.001$), and between supporters of a completely new Constitution and opponents of change ($p = 0.005$).

6. FROM PUBLIC OPINION TO REFORM: THREE POSSIBLE APPROACHES

The key question posed for this policy paper is *to what extent there is a value and social basis for liberal institutional reforms in Serbia, and under what conditions it is possible to build a broader or broad reform consensus?* Specifically, *the policy paper seeks a framework for how institutional reform (which constitutional reform is) can cross the government-opposition divide and bring together citizens of different political identities around the constitutional direction of the state?* The approaches used take into account the findings of the survey, while in its conclusions and recommendations this policy paper follows the orientations of liberal political actors, i.e. it is intended for actors who advocate stronger advocacy and promotion of liberal values.

The policy paper will offer three options for discussion: the first, which covers reforms within the existing framework and which seems the most optimal *in the short term* in the context of the public opinion findings obtained; the second, a limited change of the constitutional framework; and the third, a far-reaching participatory constitutional reform that would include the adoption of a new Constitution of Serbia.

* All options are based on the research assessment that in the short and medium term Serbia will not be a society with the capacity for broad consensus and, in the short term, in all post-election scenarios, not a society without pronounced polarisation either.

6.1. Option 1: Incremental institutional reform

This option considers reforms within the existing constitutional framework, focused on areas in which there is broad social support. *This option rests on the research premise that the segment closest to the ruling majority is the only segment in which moderation prevails on the question of the Constitution.* This segment is large and, across various variables, distant from the other segments, above all from the one that supports the Student List. Together with mistrust and a lack of communication, this means that the space for social compromise is also narrowed. The first option therefore offers the most sustainable model in the short term (which is its main advantage), but at the same time limits the reach of these changes, as they will not be comprehensive (which is its greatest shortcoming).

The fight against corruption (47%) and the judiciary (36.3%) convincingly dominate as the areas that the largest number of citizens want to see changed. The implication for decision-makers is that there is a clear, narrow and well-defined set of priorities (in this case corruption and the judiciary) around which by far the largest part of the public gathers (from both large segments), while most of the remaining constitutional topics, including those that often dominate political debate, are

secondary in the eyes of the wider public or do not attract sufficient interest at this moment. In other words, this is the zone of the most realistic and most sustainable consensus, with limited consequences for political life and with the dissatisfaction of the segment that is a more pronounced representative of the democratic-pluralist orientation. For that segment, changes to the Constitution and the depth of those changes are more important than for the segment of the ruling majority, so this option can be advocated as one in a series of steps that could be taken, or as a plea for substantial constitutional reform.

6.2. Option 2: Targeted constitutional reform

The second option considered by this policy paper is a limited change of the constitutional framework in areas where there are sufficiently strong social and expert reasons for intervention. There are three differences compared with the first option. First, this option goes beyond the existing constitutional and legal framework (unlike the first option). Second, it covers more substantive and far-reaching changes, as well as a larger number of areas to be reformed. Finally, and very importantly, this process would have to be preceded by a certain participatory process of evaluating the application of the existing Constitution to date, its merits and its shortcomings. This evaluation would have to provide answers *to the question of which areas present social and expert reasons for intervention.*

This policy paper will offer part of the answer on the basis of insights from the survey, without pleading for the arguments that a strong social and expert debate preceding these changes might offer. *Taking into account the existence of a large gap between the two segments (the ruling majority and the Student List), this option proposes that topics that deeply polarise the public be approached more cautiously and inclusively.* These are: the electoral system, decentralisation of the country, the method of electing the President, the powers of the President, restrictions on office-holders and the protection of human rights. This means that these topics (because of their importance) should not be excluded from public discussion, but that the approach must aim at broadening possible consensus.

This option, too, in line with the research data, should cover reforms of the anti-corruption framework and of the judiciary, but it should also cover the topics that fall within the neutral range, i.e. those that do not polarise the two large political segments. These are: environmental protection, local self-government, the powers of the Government and the status of Kosovo and Metohija. These topics, therefore, are not statistically reliably polarised, but they differ from topics that can be considered unifying in that they are generally chosen by a small part of the public in each segment (11%–13%). These are topics that are outside the broader focus of the public at this moment, rather than topics on which there is pronounced, active agreement. However, other indicators and secondary research make it clear that these four topics are very important for the entire public (such as the status of

Kosovo and Metohija) or for significant parts of the population in the case of the remaining three topics, but that the current polarised context has pushed them into the background.

6.3. Option 3: A new constitutional and reform consensus

The third option proposed is a longer-term participatory process that would open a broader debate on the institutional organisation of Serbia and involve citizens, the expert community, political actors and civil society. This proposal has been left as the last option because several important preconditions have not been met at this stage. First and most importantly, the public is deeply polarised and it is impossible to expect the broadest consensus in the short term. These circumstances will not change even after the early elections on 25 October, but the outcome of those elections may open different perspectives and/or possible new electoral processes. The precondition for opening a large participatory process of constitutional reform is either the existence of an orderly and institutionalised public space or a social change that makes such a process possible. This policy paper proposes that the third option be considered only if there is a social context that can guarantee full participation and inclusiveness.

Since the current Constitution of Serbia was adopted in a referendum burdened with controversy and, even more importantly, in a non-inclusive process, the first step in this option is to ensure a broad, inclusive platform for constitutional reform. This process must be accompanied by the opening of all areas, not just some, and by taking into account the views not only of citizens but also of all other stakeholders. If this option is considered, it must be comprehensive and planned for the long term.

7. HOW TO EXPAND THE SPACE FOR LIBERAL REFORMS?

The survey results show that there is space for liberal reforms in Serbia, but that it cannot be built on the assumption that there is a single liberal voting or value bloc. Liberal values are not combined into a single ideological package, while political polarisation is not equally pronounced in all areas. The reform approach should therefore be built gradually: starting from issues on which broader agreement already exists, while at the same time creating conditions for an open and informed debate on issues on which the differences among citizens are considerably greater.

7.1. Recommendations for institutions and decision-makers

Here we present possible concrete steps for strengthening institutions, transparency, accountability and the participatory nature of reform processes.

- o *Start from areas in which there is already a social basis for reform.* The fight against corruption and the improvement of the judiciary stand out as the strongest points of agreement among citizens of different political persuasions. They represent the most suitable starting point for reforms that can cross the existing government–opposition divide.
- o *Link institutional reforms to their concrete effects on citizens' lives.* The independence of institutions, the rule of law and the separation of powers should be operationalised through equality before the law, protection of rights, predictability of state action, transparent use of public funds and accountability of public office-holders.
- o *Gradually broaden the reform framework.* After the issues on which there is more pronounced agreement, it is possible to open areas in which political differences are not dominant, but which are currently not among citizens' priorities. In this way, the reform agenda can be broadened without simultaneously opening all of the most politically sensitive issues.
- o *Targeted constitutional changes should be preceded by an evaluation of the existing constitutional framework.* Before defining concrete solutions, it is necessary to identify problems in the application of the Constitution and to involve the expert community, civil society and citizens in assessing the areas in which there are justified reasons for change.
- o *Link comprehensive constitutional reform to appropriate social and institutional preconditions.* A new constitutional consensus is difficult to build under conditions of deep political polarisation. If such a process is opened, it must be long-term, transparent and sufficiently inclusive so that its results are not perceived as the project of only one political bloc.

7.2. Recommendations for political actors

Here we present possibilities for building a reform consensus that transcends existing party divisions.

- o *Separate reform issues from the government-opposition logic wherever possible.* The survey shows that political polarisation does not imply equal value distance in all areas. A reform consensus should therefore be built issue by issue, rather than by expecting prior agreement on the overall political or ideological direction.
- o *Give priority to topics that enable cross-bloc cooperation.* The fight against corruption and the judiciary represent the clearest space for such an approach. Success in these areas could create an experience of cooperation that would make it easier to open more complex institutional issues.
- o *Open polarising issues through a process, not through ready-made solutions.* The electoral system, decentralisation, the method of electing and the powers of the President, restrictions on office-holders and the protection of human rights require broader political and social deliberation. For such issues, the quality and inclusiveness of the process become particularly important.
- o *Do not treat potential electorates as closed value blocs.* A significant proportion of citizens are open to several political options, which shows that there are spaces of overlap that can be activated around concrete policies.
- o *Separate institutional rules from short-term political interest.* The deeper the proposed changes, the more important it is that a wider circle of political and social actors participate in defining them and that the continuity of reforms is ensured regardless of changes in the balance of political forces.

7.3. Recommendations for civil society, think tanks and liberal foundations

Here we present recommendations aimed at a shift from promoting abstract ideological concepts to concrete values and policies for which there is social potential.

- o *Promote concrete values and policies, rather than expecting liberalism to be accepted as a single ideological package.* Citizens can simultaneously support a market economy, a strong social role for the state and certain views that are not democratic-pluralist. Reform strategies should be adapted to this value complexity.
- o *Identify topics around which broader value coalitions can be built.* The fight against corruption, equality before the law and an efficient judiciary represent an immediate space for such coalitions. There is also potential in linking institutional accountability with economic security and social responsibility.
- o *Work also with citizens who do not identify as liberal.* The target group of liberal organisations should not be limited to already convinced supporters of liberal values. The survey shows that individual liberal policies have potential even among groups that, on other issues, belong to different value profiles.
- o *Link liberal reforms to the everyday interests of citizens.* The rule of law means equal application of the law; independent institutions mean protection from arbitrariness; market competition means more choice and fewer privileges; transparency means the possibility of controlling the spending of public money. Such links should be made a central part of advocacy activities.
- o *Invest in research on the language used to talk about reforms.* It is necessary to systematically test how different segments of citizens understand the concepts of freedom, the market, the state, democracy, institutions and constitutional change. The goal is not only to find a more “appealing” formulation, but to determine which language most clearly links a particular reform to the values and interests of different groups.
- o *Build infrastructure for a future constitutional debate.* Think tanks and foundations can contribute to the evaluation of the existing constitutional system, comparative analyses, expert forums, citizen consultations and other participatory formats before a formal process of constitutional change is opened.

7.4. Recommendations for communicating reforms

Here we present how to talk to different value segments of citizens about freedom, institutions, the market, the responsibility of the state and constitutional change without unnecessary ideological polarisation.

- o *Move from ideological labels to concrete benefits.* Reforms should not primarily be presented as “liberal”, “pro-European” or as part of a broader ideological project, but through the problems they solve and the rights and benefits they provide to citizens.

- o *Communicate freedom also as protection.* For citizens who place greater value on individual autonomy, the emphasis can be on freedom of choice and on limiting state intervention. For other segments, the same principle may be more understandable through the protection of citizens from arbitrariness, abuse of power and unequal application of rules.
- o *Bring institutions closer to everyday experience.* The separation of powers, the independence of institutions and the rule of law should not remain constitutional and legal concepts. Their communication should answer a simple question: what does a citizen gain from the existence of institutions that can limit the power of any government?
- o *Do not set the market against social security.* The findings do not confirm a simple division into citizens who want the market and those who want a strong state. The communication of economic reforms can therefore link competition, entrepreneurship and economic initiative with social security and the reduction of large inequalities.
- o *Translate constitutional reform from the level of the document to the level of rules.* Instead of the question “should the Constitution be changed”, the public debate should be structured around which rules work, which do not and what a specific change would mean for the relationship between citizens and the state.

Adapt communication to the type of reform topic. Topics can be viewed through three communication zones:

- o Consensus topics – emphasis on concrete action and results, especially for the fight against corruption and the judiciary;
- o Topics of possible consensus – emphasis on information, arguments and the gradual involvement of citizens;
- o Polarisation topics – emphasis on the legitimacy of the process, plurality of views and creating space for deliberation before deciding on concrete solutions.

The central communication message of liberal reforms therefore need not be a demand that citizens accept a particular ideological label. A more sustainable approach is to show that freedom, accountable institutions, market initiative and social security can be mutually compatible elements of an order that gives citizens more security, predictability and control over the decisions that affect their lives.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. Liberalism without a label

Serbia's liberal reform potential should not be measured only by the number of citizens who identify as liberals or accept liberalism as a rounded ideological system.

The more relevant question is how many citizens – including those who do not consider themselves liberals politically or ideologically – support concrete principles such as the rule of law, institutional limits on power, individual freedoms, political pluralism, market competition, entrepreneurship and institutional accountability.

It is precisely at the intersection of these attitudes that the potential for creating broader social coalitions for institutional and democratic reforms should be sought.

8.2. Values beyond party lines

The results show that political divisions in Serbia have a value basis, but that citizens are not distributed into two fully rounded and mutually opposed ideological blocs. The association between political preferences and liberal values depends on which dimension is observed. The most pronounced differences exist in attitudes towards democratic institutions and pluralism, while the divisions are considerably smaller when it comes to economic redistribution. Individualism and market orientation lie between these two poles: they are associated with certain political preferences, but do not consistently follow the boundaries between government and opposition, nor the traditional division into left and right.

Table 10. Political divisions and space for value convergence

Dimension	Extent of political differences	Main finding
<i>Democratic-pluralist orientation</i>	High	Most clearly distinguishes attitudes towards the state of the country, change, political options and constitutional reform
<i>Individualism–collectivism</i>	Moderate	Differences exist, but are not consistent across all political and institutional comparisons
<i>Market orientation</i>	Moderate	Crosses party and traditional ideological boundaries; present in various opposition potential electorates, but also in the potential electorate of SPS
<i>Attitude towards redistribution</i>	Low	Support for reducing economic inequalities is widely present across different political groups

Democratic-pluralist orientation represents the clearest value line of political division. Citizens who believe that Serbia is heading in the wrong direction, advocate change and support the Student List or the pro-European opposition show more pronounced support for freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers. By contrast, lower values of this dimension were recorded among the voters and the potential electorate of SNS and SPS. Democratic-pluralist values are also associated with attitudes towards the Constitution: citizens who assess its ability to protect their interests more critically and those who support more comprehensive constitutional amendments are on average more democratic-pluralist in orientation. Political divisions, therefore, relate not only to political actors, but also to attitudes towards institutions and the manner in which power is exercised.

Individualism represents a weaker and less consistent line of division. Citizens who want political change, as well as Student List voters, are on average more individualistic in orientation, while citizens inclined towards stability and the potential electorate of SNS are closer to the collectivist pole. However, individualism does not consistently distinguish all potential electorates and has no simple association with the assessment of the protective role of the Constitution. Attitudes towards the primacy of the individual or the community therefore cannot be reduced to party affiliation.

Market orientation also crosses the usual political and ideological boundaries. Higher values were recorded among citizens who want change and believe that the country is heading in the wrong direction, as well as among Student List voters. At the same time, a relatively pronounced market orientation is shown by the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition, the NPS coalition and the Student List, but also by the potential electorate of SPS. Market orientation is not associated with the desired scope of constitutional change. This distribution shows that attitudes towards the market are not sufficient to clearly separate political blocs.

The broadest space for value convergence exists in attitudes towards redistribution. No significant differences in support for state measures to reduce income differences were found either in the division between support for the current direction and the desire for change, or between SNS and Student List voters, or between the potential electorates of different political options. Even citizens and potential electorates with a more pronounced market orientation do not necessarily reject the redistributive role of the state. A market economy and the demand for economic security therefore do not appear as mutually exclusive values in citizens' attitudes.

The absence of closed political and value blocs is also indicated by the overlap of potential electorates. More than a third of all respondents, or 34.7%, belong to the potential electorate of at least two political options. Among citizens who fall within at least one potential electorate, 41.4% are open to several political options. This shows that the space of possible political support cannot be viewed as a set of fully separate voter groups.

The question of whether citizens are more divided over political actors than over concrete values therefore cannot be given an unequivocal answer. Only in the area of democratic institutions do political preferences follow real value differences. However, on issues of redistribution, and partly also of market orientation and individualism, the boundaries between political groups are much more permeable. Political polarisation is thus broader and sharper than value polarisation in some areas, but it is not completely detached from values.

These findings point to the existence of a basis for a broader reform consensus, but not around a single package that would be labelled “liberal”. Broader support is more likely to be built by linking institutional reforms with social security, the reduction of inequality and the concrete protection of citizens’ interests. Democratic institutions, a market economy and social responsibility need not be opposing goals in citizens’ attitudes. It is precisely linking them that can form the basis for a reform coalition that crosses existing party boundaries.

8.3. Conditions for a broader reform consensus

The key question posed is whether institutional reform can cross the government-opposition divide and bring together citizens of different political identities?

The survey results show that such a possibility exists, but that support for institutional reforms will not arise automatically, nor will it be based on the acceptance of a single liberal ideological programme. Citizens of different political persuasions share certain values and reform priorities, but at the same time differ significantly in their attitudes towards democracy, political pluralism and the separation of powers. *Institutional reform can therefore cross the government-opposition divide only if it is built around the concrete interests and problems of citizens, while avoiding identifying the reform with one political side.*

Political preferences are most clearly associated with democratic-pluralist orientation. Citizens who want political change and support the Student List or the pro-European opposition support freedom of speech, the multi-party system and the separation of powers to a greater extent. Lower values of this dimension were recorded among the voters and the potential electorate of SNS and SPS. This means that reform issues that directly concern the manner in which power is exercised, the control of institutions and the limitation of political power already carry a strong political meaning. Presenting them as an opposition project or as a settling of scores with the voters of the government would further reduce the possibility of broader support.

Nevertheless, political groups are neither value-homogeneous nor completely closed off from one another. Individualism and market orientation do not consistently follow the boundary between government and opposition, while support for reducing economic inequalities crosses almost all political boundaries. In addition, more than a third of citizens belong to the potential electorate of at least two political

options. There is, therefore, a significant space of citizens whose political identity is not firmly tied to only one bloc and who can be addressed through concrete reform content.

The findings on attitudes towards the Constitution confirm the existence of a reform basis, but also point to its limits. The majority of citizens support some form of constitutional change, but most opt for minor rather than radical amendments. Citizens with a more pronounced democratic-pluralist orientation are more critical of the protective role of the existing Constitution and more open to more comprehensive changes. At the same time, citizens' limited familiarity with the content of the Constitution means that support for reform cannot be built solely on expert and abstract arguments.

9. Annex: Exploratory map of citizens' value profiles

In order to check whether citizens can be classified into several recognisable value groups, an additional cluster analysis was conducted on the basis of the four previously identified dimensions: individualism–collectivism, democratic-pluralist orientation, market orientation and attitude towards redistribution.

The results *do not confirm the existence of two approximately equal and clearly separated value poles*, between which a small group of “hybrid” oriented citizens would be located. The automatic statistical procedure did not identify several naturally separated groups, while the subsequently tested solutions with two, three and four clusters showed relatively weak separation. For this reason, *the groups presented should be understood as exploratory value profiles, rather than as firmly formed social types.*

In the descriptive solution with three profiles, *a large, value-mixed majority* stands out, covering 79.2% of citizens with valid data. This profile is characterised by *a collectivist orientation and support for the redistributive role of the state, with a moderate democratic-pluralist and market orientation.* It is therefore not justified to label it as simply conservative or illiberal.

The second profile covers 14.7% of citizens and *combines pronounced individualism, a democratic-pluralist orientation and opposition to redistribution* with a relatively low market orientation. *The third and smallest profile*, to which 6.0% of citizens belong, combines *a very pronounced market and democratic-pluralist orientation with a collectivist attitude towards the interests of the individual and the community.*

These combinations further confirm that liberal values among the public are not organised along a single unified axis.

Chart 7. Exploratory map of citizens' value profiles and political potential electorates¹²

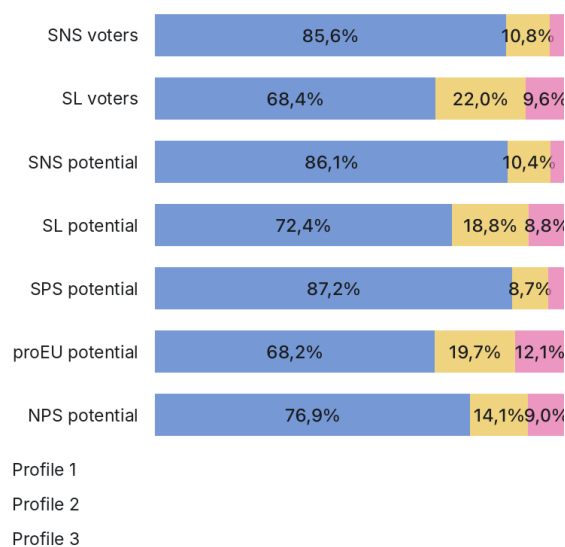
Value profiles of citizens and political potential electorates

Profile map



- Social-collectivist majority · 79,2%
- Individualist democratic pluralists · 14,7%
- Market democratic collectivists · 6,0%

Composition of voters and potential electorates



Circle size indicates the weighted share of each profile. The profiles are exploratory: the automatic procedure did not identify clearly separated clusters, and the forced three-cluster solution has weak separation.

* The chart is AI-generated content.

Political groups differ in the representation of these profiles, but none of them represents a completely separate value bloc. The broad social-collectivist profile covers 85.6% of SNS voters and 68.4% of Student List voters. The two smaller, more pronounced democratic-pluralist profiles together cover 14.4% of SNS voters and 31.6% of Student List voters.

¹² Methodological note: The profiles were obtained through an exploratory TwoStep cluster analysis of the standardised values of the four dimensions, without weighting when forming the clusters. Weighting was applied subsequently in order to estimate their representation in the population. The automatic BIC criterion extracted a one-cluster solution, while the forced solutions with more clusters showed weak separation. For this reason, the three-cluster solution is used exclusively as an illustrative and descriptive map, rather than as a confirmed typology of the population.

A similar pattern exists for potential electorates. The broad majority profile accounts for 86.1% of the potential electorate of SNS, 87.2% of the potential electorate of SPS, 72.4% of the potential electorate of the Student List, 68.2% of the potential electorate of the pro-European opposition and 76.9% of the potential electorate of the NPS coalition. The two smaller profiles are most represented within the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition and the Student List, but they also exist among the potential supporters of the other options.

The results, therefore, do not point to the existence of a “horseshoe” with two approximately equal value poles. Instead, they show a large, shared and internally heterogeneous base, with smaller groups that combine liberal values in different ways. Hybridity therefore does not appear only as a characteristic of a small number of citizens between the two poles, but as a broader characteristic of value orientations in Serbia.

10. Executive summary

The *public opinion survey*, conducted on a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adult citizens of Serbia between 20 and 31 August 2026, *reveals a society that is divided, but not necessarily irreconcilably so*. Citizens are almost evenly split both over the direction in which the country is heading and over whether Serbia needs stability or change. The latter is closely associated with the former, while age emerges as its strongest predictor: 65% of young people aged 18–29 favour change, compared with 29% of those 60 and above.

Although a majority (58.7%) agree in principle that democracy is always preferable to other forms of government, nearly one-third of citizens do not share this unconditional commitment. At the same time, there is a strong and broad consensus against an overt concentration of power, alongside substantial support for economic solidarity that cuts across party lines.

The Constitution of Serbia remains poorly understood - only 29% of citizens report being familiar with it - and is predominantly perceived as a document that does not sufficiently protect citizens' interests. This creates space both for reform and for more effective communication of the safeguards already embedded in the existing constitutional framework. Although 71% of citizens support some form of constitutional change, the extent of that support is sharply polarised along political lines. Only 4.8% of the core constituency of the governing majority support constitutional change, compared with as many as 53.7% among respondents aligned with the student segment.

When examining the specific areas that citizens would change, a clear but relatively narrow area of genuine, statistically confirmed consensus emerges: *the fight against corruption and judicial reform are the only two issues ranked equally highly across all political constituencies*. By contrast, the electoral system, restrictions on public office-holders, and the protection of human rights are highly polarising issues and closely associated with respondents' political positioning.

Citizens' liberal values do not form a single, coherent ideological construct. Support for political freedoms, individualism, the market economy, and redistribution represents four related but distinct dimensions. Citizens may simultaneously support a market economy, stronger social protection, and certain institutionally illiberal positions.

A democratic-pluralist orientation constitutes the clearest value-based line of political division. It is more pronounced among citizens who believe that Serbia is moving in the wrong direction, favour political change, and support the Student List or the pro-European opposition. Lower levels are recorded among voters and potential supporters of SNS and SPS.

Attitudes towards redistribution constitute the broadest area of agreement. Support for government measures aimed at reducing income inequalities is present among citizens with different political preferences. No significant differences were identified either between SNS and Student List voters or among the potential electorates of different political options.

A market-oriented outlook does not follow a simple government-opposition or left-right divide. Relatively strong market orientations are found among the potential electorates of the pro-European opposition, the NPS coalition and the Student List, but also among the potential electorate of SPS. At the same time, a market orientation does not necessarily imply opposition to the social role of the state.

Political constituencies are not closed and mutually exclusive electoral blocs. More than one-third of citizens, or 34.7%, fall within the potential electorate of at least two political options. Among citizens who belong to the potential electorate of at least one political option, 41.4% are open to supporting more than one option.

Citizens with a stronger democratic-pluralist orientation are more critical of the existing Constitution and more open to more extensive constitutional change. However, support for constitutional reform does not reflect a single liberal value profile: individualism, market orientation, and attitudes towards redistribution are not associated with the preferred scope of constitutional change in the same way.

Citizens are not equally divided on all values and policy issues. Political preferences reflect genuine differences in attitudes towards democracy, pluralism, and the separation of powers, while differences are less pronounced in the economic sphere, particularly with regard to redistribution. Political polarisation is therefore, in some areas, more pronounced than the underlying value distance between citizens.

Institutional reform can transcend the government-opposition divide, but not if it is framed as an abstract ideological project or as the programme of a single political bloc. The greatest potential lies in a reform approach that is gradual, politically inclusive, and focused on tangible benefits: equality before the law, protection of rights, institutional independence, the fight against corruption, and economic security.

The basis for a broader reform consensus lies in linking democratic institutions with social responsibility. The findings suggest that a market economy, institutional constraints on political power, and the reduction of economic inequalities need not be competing objectives in citizens' views.

This policy paper proposes three options for discussion: the first focuses on constitutional amendments within the existing framework and on issues around which there is already a degree of consensus; the second envisages limited constitutional reform conducted through an inclusive process; and the third considers a comprehensive and coherent reform of the constitutional framework as a whole.

Based on the findings, the following conditions can be identified under which institutional reform could attract support beyond existing political blocs:

1. *Reform should be framed in terms of tangible protections for citizens.* The separation of powers, judicial independence, and institutional accountability should be linked to everyday concerns: equality before the law, protection of rights, the fight against corruption, and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of political power.
2. *Changes should be gradual, clearly defined, and explained in accessible terms.* While there is broad support for constitutional change, support is strongest for more limited amendments. This points to the value of *precise reform proposals with clear and tangible implications, rather than a vague call for a comprehensive overhaul of the system.*
3. *Institutional and economic reforms should not be presented as being at odds with social security.* Broad support for redistribution suggests that a reform agenda based exclusively on deregulation and a reduced role for the state would have limited reach. *Market-oriented reforms may attract broader support when combined with protection against economic risks and measures aimed at reducing inequality.*
4. *Reform should not be presented as the exclusive project of a single political bloc.* When institutional changes become identified with a particular party or opposition identity, citizens may assess them primarily through their attitudes towards the political actor concerned rather than on the substance of the proposals. *Broader support therefore requires the involvement of diverse social and political groups in defining the objectives of reform.*

5. *The reform process must be participatory and well informed.* Limited public knowledge of the Constitution increases the importance of clearly communicating reform proposals, ensuring access to relevant information, organising meaningful public consultations, and enabling citizens to understand how the proposed changes would affect their rights and position.
6. *Areas of potential consensus should be distinguished from issues involving genuine value-based conflict.* Social security, the reduction of inequality, and tangible protections of citizens' rights provide a broader basis for convergence. By contrast, attitudes towards the separation of powers and political pluralism remain an important line of division and require longer-term efforts to strengthen democratic political culture.

Institutional reform can therefore transcend the government-opposition divide, particularly when conceived as a set of concrete and gradual changes that citizens recognise as strengthening the protection of their rights and interests. It is less likely to attract broad support if presented as an abstract liberal project, a demand for a complete break with the existing order, or the programme of a single political camp. The potential for a broader reform consensus lies precisely in linking democratic institutions with social security, tangible protections for citizens, and a politically inclusive reform process.

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