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Research  
report

# OPINIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA ABOUT THE 1990S ~~WARS~~

OPINIONS  
OF YOUNG  
PEOPLE  
IN SERBIA  
ABOUT  
THE 1990S  
WARS

RESEARCH  
REPORT

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*Until I started writing this book, I never fully realized that I was born only ten years after the end of the Second World War. While I was growing up, the war felt like a distant past that had nothing to do with me. Now, with the experience of this recent war—the one that happened to ME—I know that the memory of that experience, even after twenty years, is as vivid as if it all happened yesterday.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Mira Furlan, *Love me more than anything else in the world (Voli Me Više Od Svega Na Svijetu)* (Belgrade: Booka, 2021), p.23.

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# PREFACE

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights was founded in 2003 in Serbia with the idea of building connections among youth after the wars that followed the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Why youth? Because they are the main actors of the future that are constantly being talked about. YIHR was born out of the need to overcome inherited divisions, hostilities, and the fear of “the other,” while continuously strengthening democracy.

For almost 20 years now, through dialogue, exchange, activism, and confronting facts, YIHR has contributed to creating a region in which peace is the highest value. We believe that knowledge of the past exists to help us jointly create a future with strong guarantees that conflicts will not be repeated. At the same time, we study the past to critically reflect on it and to draw lessons from its most difficult periods – lessons about solidarity, empathy, and the importance of insisting on human rights. Education about past events, paired with honest and open dialogue, has proven to be the best preventive mechanism. YIHR creates a safe space for young people to discuss the most sensitive topics that still largely shape the reality they live in today. Through its programs and monitoring, YIHR has maintained direct contact with youth for many years – with high school students, university students, and young professionals, whose attitudes and perspectives are directly influenced by the socio-political climate of our society.

Through the research “Opinions of Young People in Serbia About The 90s Wars”, we wanted to contribute to a better understanding of the views and opinions young people in Serbia hold about the wars of the 1990s, and to map the foundations of those attitudes. Our goal was to find out how they get informed and how much knowledge they possess about these topics, as well as about the figures and events directly connected to the 1990s wars.

We owe special gratitude to Jovana Kolarić, researcher at the Humanitarian Law Center in Serbia, the SMART agency, and Rodoljub Jovanović for their dedicated work in conducting this research. We are also grateful to the European Union for its support, without which this research would not have been possible.

**SOFIJA  
TODOROVIĆ**

Program Director  
*Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Serbia*

Approximately 25 years<sup>2</sup> after the end of the wars that marked the breakup of Yugoslavia, generations born after the signing of the peace agreements are now growing up in Serbia—a post-conflict society that continues, in various ways, to confront its wartime past. Young people who will be eligible to vote in the upcoming elections were born in 2005. This raises questions about what these (new) young people know about the wars and the war crimes committed during them, how they understand the wars, and how they perceive the social practices of remembering the wars and war crimes. These are precisely some of the central questions that guided the research whose findings are presented in this report.

A study of this kind carries a dual significance at present. Firstly, there has not been a similarly comprehensive study conducted in quite some time that focuses specifically on young people and their knowledge of and opinions about the wars of the 1990s in Serbia. Although some research on youth addresses certain aspects—such as opinions about other ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>, the values of young people<sup>4</sup> or views on Kosovo<sup>5</sup>—these studies do not focus on the wars of the 1990s. The last comparable studies were *News from the Past* by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, conducted in 2010<sup>6</sup>, and *Research on Attitudes Toward War Crimes, the Hague Tribunal, and the National Judiciary*, conducted by IPSOS in 2011.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in recent years we have witnessed a significant rise in the denial and revision of facts about the crimes committed during these wars, across various social practices—such as

media coverage of the 1990s wars<sup>8</sup>, commemorations of war crimes<sup>9</sup>, political campaigns<sup>10</sup>, the political engagement of convicted war criminals<sup>11</sup>, and the broader politics of memory surrounding the wars of the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> In addition, research points to numerous issues in how the wars of the 1990s are taught in history education.<sup>13</sup>

How much young people—most of whom were born during or after the wars—actually know about what happened during that period, what their opinions about war crimes and their perpetrators are, as well as about reconciliation and revisionist practices, were the key questions guiding this research. The report is divided into eight chapters, corresponding to the themes covered in the questionnaire. The first section presents the methodology and demographic characteristics of the sample, while the following seven sections address the following topics: knowledge of the wars of the 1990s; opinions about the Hague Tribunal; opinions about the actors in the wars; opinions about war crimes; the ethos of conflict and moral disengagement; opinions about memory and reconciliation; and views on the Kosovo issue.

<sup>2</sup> Almost 28 years since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement and the Erdut Agreement; 24 years since the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement.

<sup>3</sup> Dragan Popadić, Zoran Pavlović, and Srećko Mihailović, *The Youth in Serbia (Mladi u Srbiji 2018/2019)*, 2019), available at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/15295-20190411.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Marija Radoman, *Value Orientations of High School Students in Serbia – 2019 Research* (n.d.) (*Vrednosne orijentacije srednjoškolaca u Srbiji – Istraživanje 2019.*).

<sup>5</sup> Boban Stojanović, and Aleksandar Ivković, *Alternative Report on The Position and Needs of Youth in the Republic of Serbia – 2022* (Belgrade: National Youth Council of Serbia – KOMS, 2022), available at <https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Alternative-report-2022.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Dubravka Stojanović et al., *News from the Past: Knowledge, Ignorance, Use and Misuse of History (Novosti iz prošlosti: znanje, neznanje upotreba i zloupotreba istorije)*, ed. Vojin Dimitrijević (Belgrade, 2010.).

<sup>7</sup> Ipsos Strategic Marketing, *Attitudes towards War Crimes, the ICTY and the National Judiciary* (Ipsos Strategic Marketing, October 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Katarina Ristić, *Media and Revisionism about the 1990s Wars in Serbia (Mediji i revizionizam o ratovima devedesetih u Srbiji)* (Belgrade: Humanitarian Law Center, March 2023), available at [http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Revizionizam\\_sr%5b46095%5d.pdf](http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Revizionizam_sr%5b46095%5d.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *Report on the Commemorations of War Crimes in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro (Izveštaj o komemoracijama ratnih zločina u Srbiji, Bosni i Hercegovini, Kosovu i Crnoj Gori)* (Belgrade: Youth Initiative for Human Rights, January 2022), available at [https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YIHR-Izveštaj-o-komemoracijama-ratnih-zločina-u-Srbiji-Bosni-i-Hercegovini-Kosovu-i-Crnoj-Gori-2021\\_FHD\\_01.pdf](https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YIHR-Izveštaj-o-komemoracijama-ratnih-zločina-u-Srbiji-Bosni-i-Hercegovini-Kosovu-i-Crnoj-Gori-2021_FHD_01.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *The Opinion about War Crimes in the 2022 Election Campaign (Odnos prema ratnim zločinima u izornoj kampanji 2022. godine)* (Belgrade: Youth Initiative for Human Rights, March 2022), available at <https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Odnos-prema-ratnim-zločinima-u-izornoj-kampanji-2022-1.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *War Criminals in the 2020 Election Campaign (Ratni zločinci u izornoj kampanji 2020. godine)* (Belgrade: Youth Initiative for Human Rights, June 2020), available at <https://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Ratni-zlocinci-u-izornoj-kampanji.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Jelena Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory of the 1990s Wars in Serbia: Historical Revisionism and the Challenges of Memorialization (Politika sećanja na ratove devedesetih u Srbiji: Istorijski revizionizam i izazovi memorijalizacije)* (Belgrade: Humanitarian Law Center, October 2021), available at [https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Politika\\_secanja\\_bhs.pdf](https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Politika_secanja_bhs.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Jelena Đureinović, and Rodoljub Jovanović, *Policy Proposal: The 1990s Wars in History Education (Predlog praktične politike: Ratovi 1990-ih u nastavi istorije)* (Belgrade: Humanitarian Law Center, September 2020), available at <https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Predlog-praktične-politike-Ratovi-1990-ih-u-nastavi-istorije.pdf>.



GENDER

48.68% FEMALE



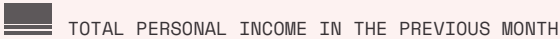
AGE



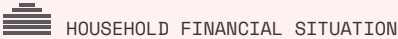
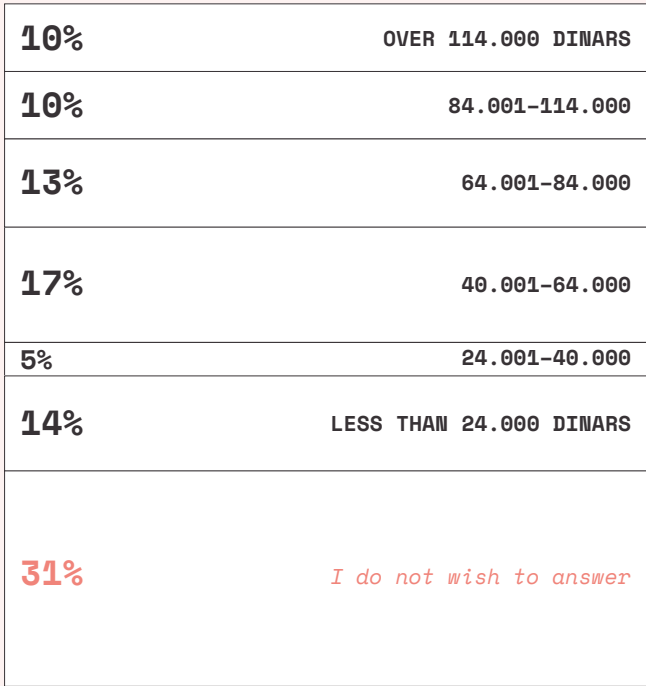
STATUS



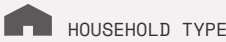
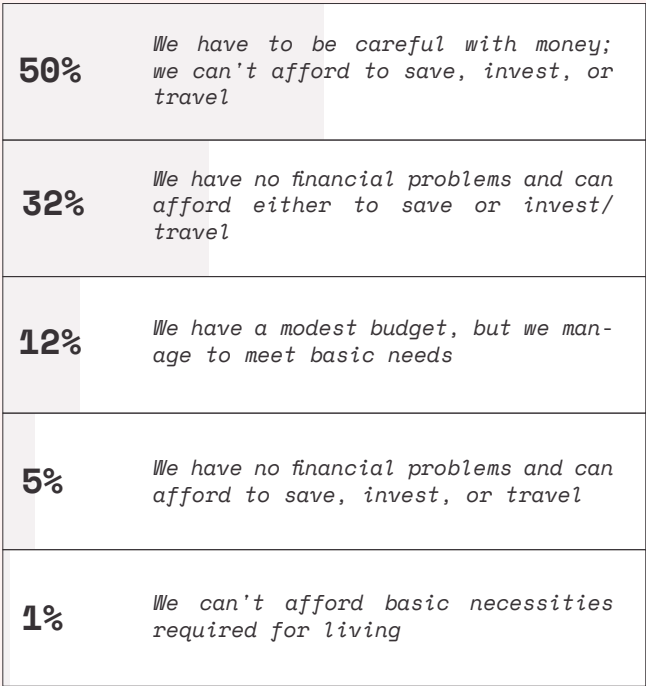
REGION



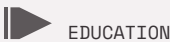
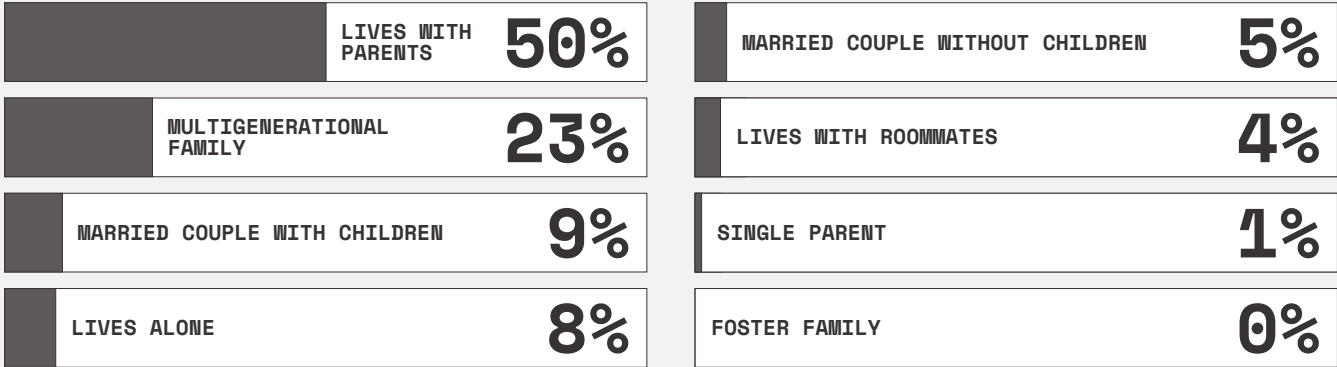
TOTAL PERSONAL INCOME IN THE PREVIOUS MONTH



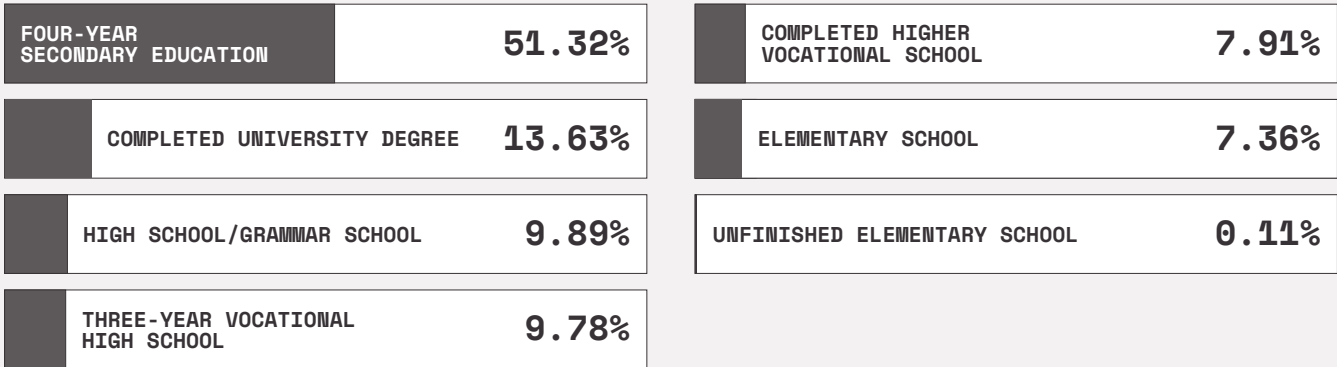
HOUSEHOLD FINANCIAL SITUATION



HOUSEHOLD TYPE



EDUCATION



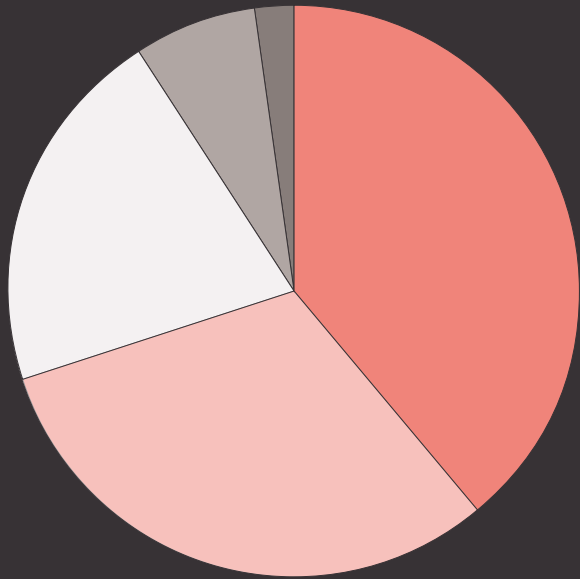
The research presented in this report was conducted in August 2023 in collaboration with the public opinion research agency SmartPlus, using a structured face-to-face interview method. The study was carried out on a sample of 910 young people in Serbia aged between 18 and 30, stratified by gender (49% female respondents), age (18–22 years of age – 35%, 23–26 years of age – 31%, 27–30 years of age – 34%), region (Belgrade – 24%, Southern and Eastern Serbia – 22%, Vojvodina – 27%, Western Serbia and Šumadija – 27%), and type of settlement (67% urban respondents). The average age of respondents was 24.2. Regarding the highest level of education, the largest number of respondents completed a four-year secondary school (51%), followed by university graduates (13%), respondents who completed grammar school (9.8%), respondents

## METHODOLOGY

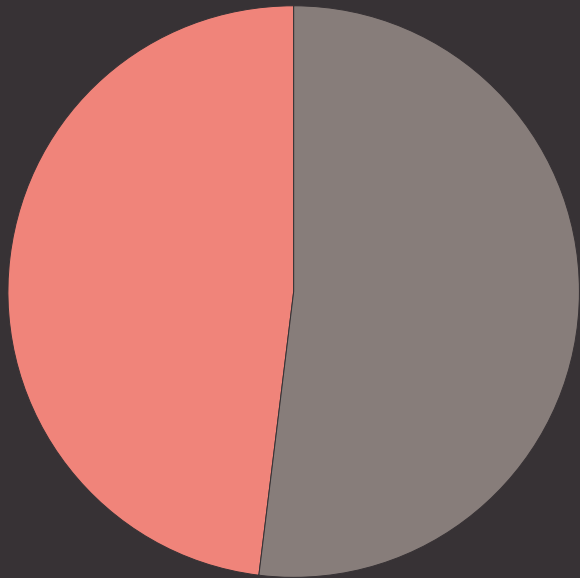
with three-year secondary school education (9.7%), respondents who completed higher vocational school (7.9%), respondents who finished primary school (7.3%), and a negligible number of respondents with incomplete primary education (0.1%). Half of the respondents are employed (51%), one quarter are students (25%), 11% are unemployed, 8% were high school students, and those who both study and work make up only 5% of the sample.

Regarding household type, half of the respondents live with their parents (50%), approximately one fifth (23%) live in multigenerational households, nearly one in ten respondents (9%) is married with children, 8% live alone, 5% are married without children, and 4% live with roommates. A vast majority (94%) identify as members of the Serbian nationality.

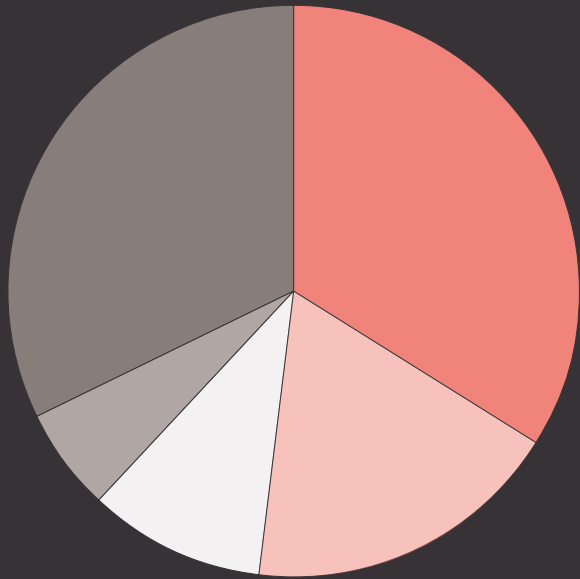
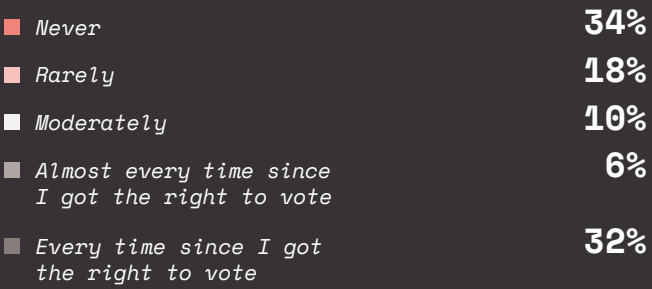
TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FOLLOW POLITICAL EVENTS?



DID YOU VOTE AT THE LAST ELECITOM?



TO THE BEST OF YOUR RECOLLECTION, HOW FREQUENTLY HAVE YOU VOTED IN ELECTIONS?

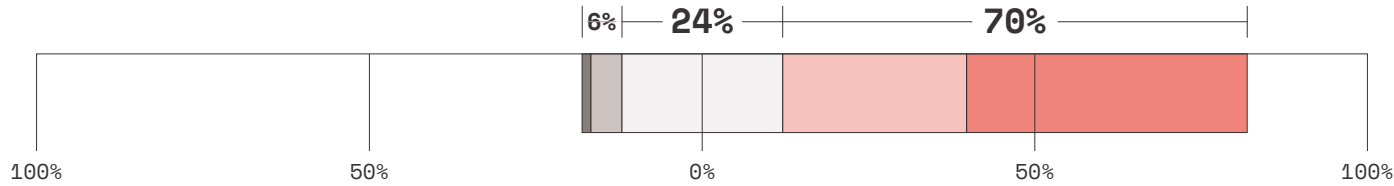


POLITICAL  
BEHAVIOUR

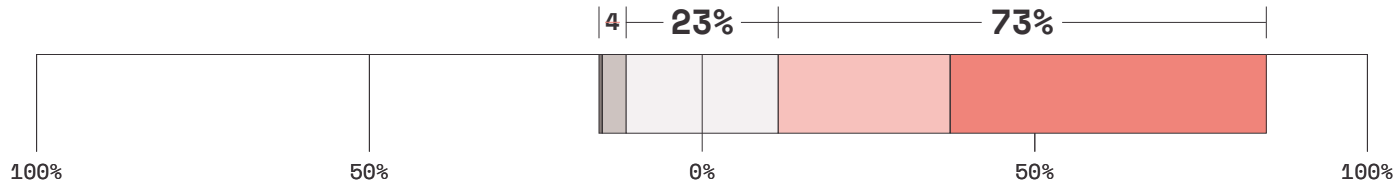
In addition to these demographic characteristics, we were also interested in how closely respondents followed political events, the extent to which they participated in political life, and the degree to which they expressed political cynicism. More than one-third of respondents (39%) do not follow political news at all, one-third (31%) follow it very rarely, and only a small percentage follow political news often (7%) or daily (2%). Despite this, half of the respondents report having voted in the last elections (52%). However, only one-third say they have voted in every election since they became

eligible to vote (32%), while approximately the same proportion (34%) have never voted. Understanding this political behavior among young people can be aided by data on their political cynicism. The average score on the political cynicism scale (1–5) is 4.149, which is significantly higher than the theoretical average of the scale. Interestingly, political cynicism increases with age and is more pronounced among respondents from rural areas compared to those from urban areas, while no difference in political cynicism was observed between male and female respondents.

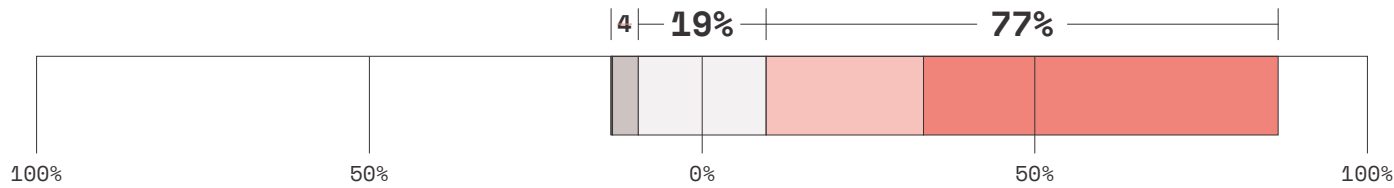
• *Members of Parliament pay too much attention to the interests of a few powerful groups and not enough to the public interest*



• *Political parties are only interested in my vote, not my opinion*



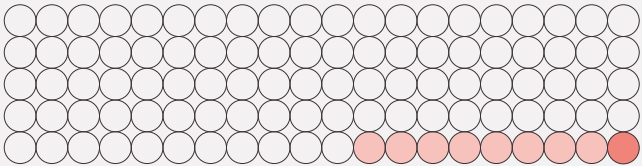
• *The main concern of politicians is how to stay in power as long as possible*



■ Not at all   ■ Very little   ■ Moderately   ■ A lot   ■ Quite a lot

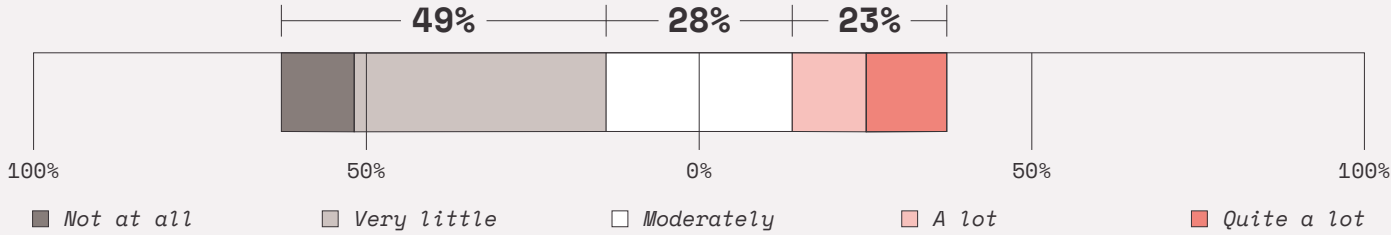


WAS ANY MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY KILLED IN THE WAR?

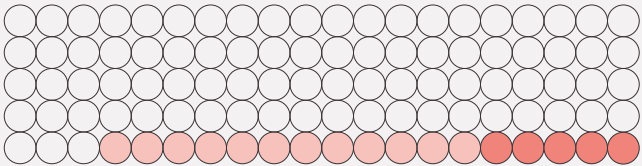


- No 91%
- Yes, a member/members of my extended family 8%
- Yes, a member/members of my nuclear family (parents, brothers, sisters, grandmothers, grandfathers) 1%

→ TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL THIS EXPERIENCE IS PERSONALLY RELEVANT OR CLOSE TO YOU?

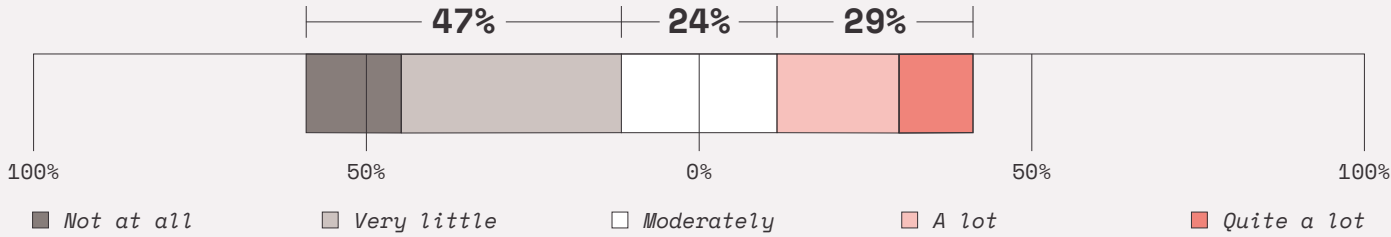


DID ANY MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY HAVE THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A REFUGEE?

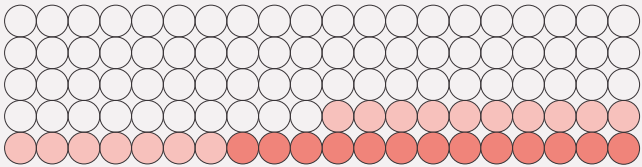


- No 83%
- Yes, a member/members of my extended family 12%
- Yes, a member/members of my nuclear family (parents, brothers, sisters, grandmothers, grandfathers) 5%

→ HOW PERSONALLY RELATABLE IS THAT EXPERIENCE TO YOU?

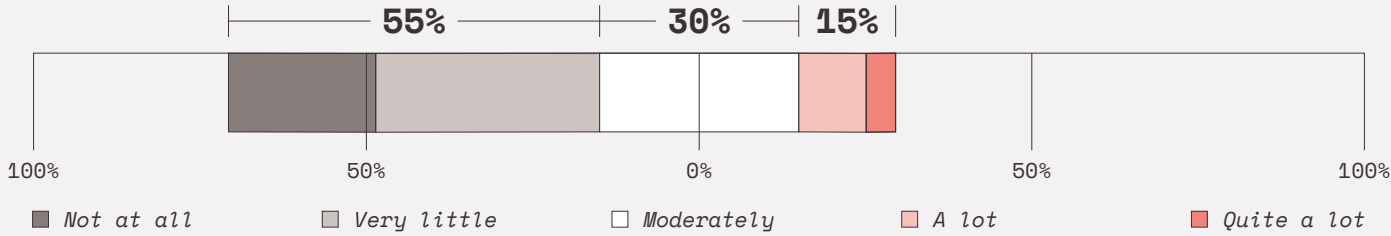


DID ANY MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY PARTICIPATE IN THE WAR?



- No 70%
- Yes, a member/members of my extended family 17%
- Yes, a member/members of my nuclear family (parents, brothers, sisters, grandmothers, grandfathers) 13%

→ HOW PERSONALLY RELATABLE IS THAT EXPERIENCE TO YOU?

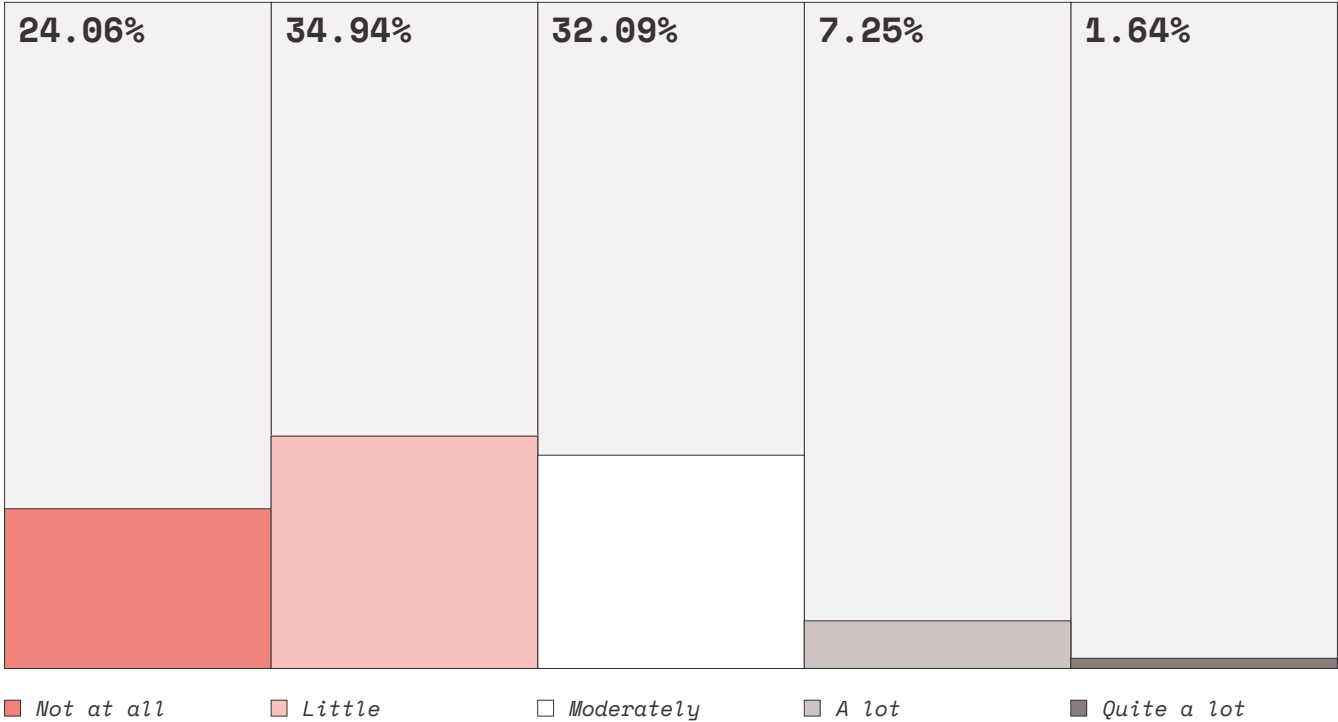


Given the topic of the research, it was important to include at least a certain percentage of respondents with a family experience of war—that is, those who have a close or extended family member who was killed in one of the wars of the 1990s, became a refugee, or participated in the wars. In addition, we asked respondents how close they felt this experience was, in order to better assess its potential impact on their opinions. Young people who had one or more extended family members killed in the war made up 8% of the sample, while 1% lost a close family member (or members) in the war. Slightly more than one in ten respondents (12%) reported that one or more members of their extended family had a refugee experience, while 5% had one or more close family members who were refugees. Finally, nearly one in five respondents (17%) had one or more extended family members who participated in the war, while 13% had one or more close family members who took part in the fighting. In all three cases, the majority of respondents perceive this experience as not particularly close or personally relevant.



Young people’s knowledge of the wars of the 1990s greatly influences their opinions, especially since previous re-searches show that young people know very little about these wars and history in general. Before asking about their knowledge of this period, we asked how interested they were in history overall (*Chart 1*). Only 2% of young people said they were very interested in history, while an additional 7% said they were quite interested. On the other hand, two-thirds of respondents said they were not interested in history at all (24%) or were only slightly interested (35%). The older the respondents were, the more interested they were in history, and on average, male respondents showed more interest in history than female respondents.

CHART 1: HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN HISTORY?



In addition, we were interested in where young people acquired most of their historical knowledge. *Chart 2* shows that a negligible percentage of respondents reported having learned "a great deal", and only a small percentage said they learned "a lot" from any of the available sources of historical knowledge. Nevertheless, when comparing the sources, we see that young people report learning the most from school/teachers, followed

by parents, the internet, the media, friends, and, lastly, social media. This findingsuggests that, despite the common belief that it has lost its relevance, formal education still plays a significant role in how history is learned. Male respondents acquire significantly more historical knowledge through the internet and social media compared to female respondents.

CHART 2: WHAT SOURCE DID YOU LEARN THE MOST ABOUT HISTORY FROM?

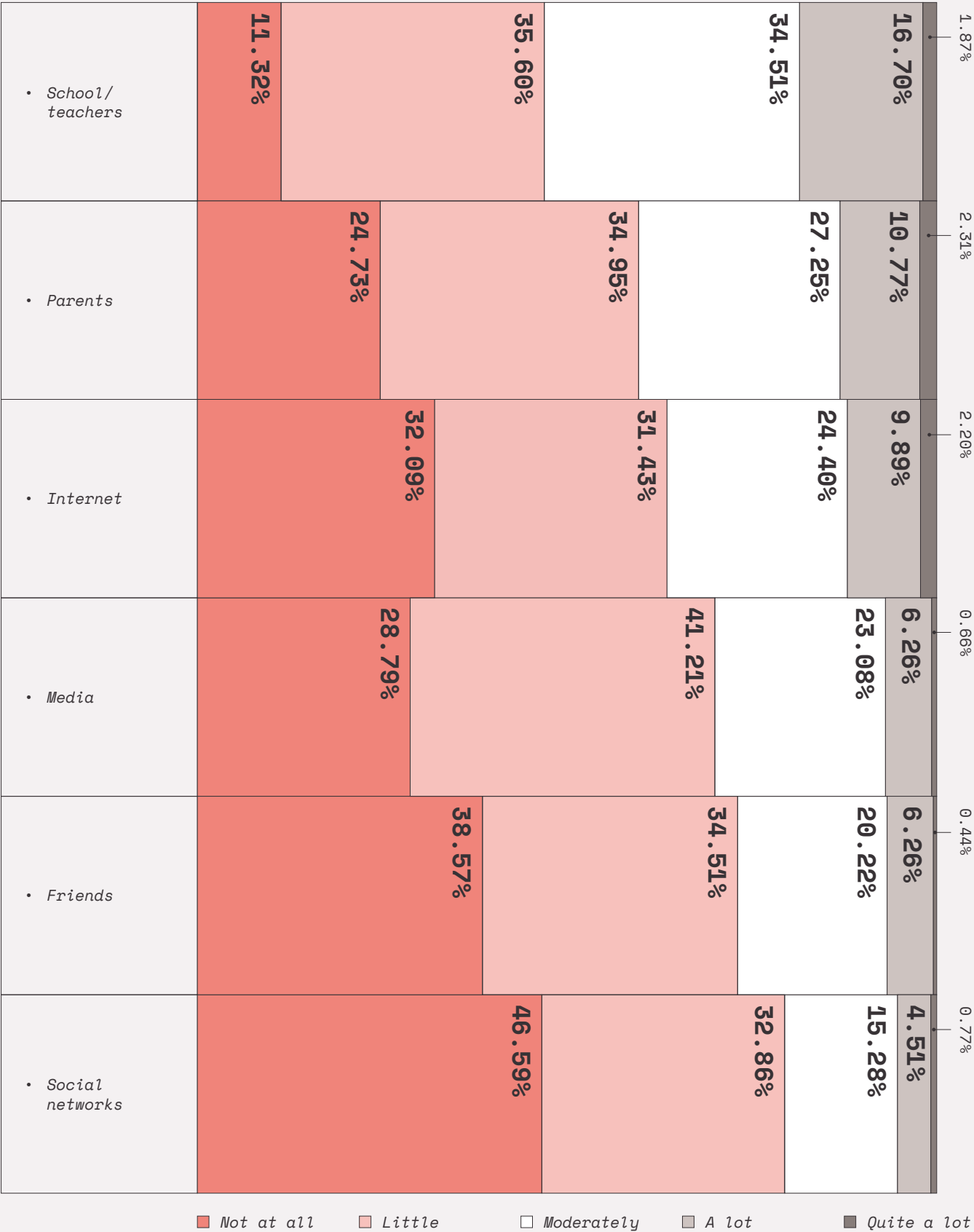
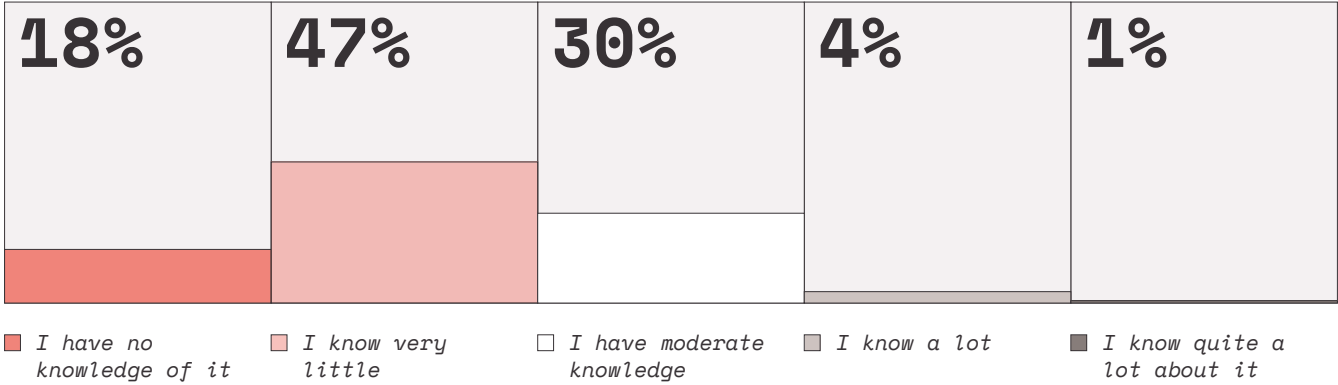


CHART 3: HOW DO YOU ASSESS YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE PHENOMENA AND EVENTS DURING THE WARS OF THE 1990S?



Unlike general historical knowledge, where teachers and schools clearly dominated as sources of information, conversations with parents and/or close family members and teachers/schools are nearly equal as sources of knowledge about the 1990s (when combining the categories "a lot" and "a great deal" parents and close family members hold a slight advantage). Interestingly, the next most common sources of knowledge are the internet and traditional media, followed by individuals with direct war experience. Participation in civil society organizations or educational programs ranks lowest, with more than two-thirds of respondents stating they have learned nothing through these channels (Chart 4).

There are differences in how young people obtain information about the war from family members and individuals who had direct involvement in the war, depending

When it comes to knowledge related to the 1990s, young people generally assess their own knowledge as quite poor. Nearly one-fifth of respondents (18.42%) believe they know nothing about this period, while almost half (47.25%) say they know very little. One-third of respondents consider their knowledge to be moderate (29.34%), but only slightly more than 5% believe they have a lot or a great deal of knowledge about the 1990s (Chart 3). They assess their peers' knowledge on the same topic almost identically to their own.

The same as with the general historical knowledge, the older the respondents are, the greater they tend to rate their knowledge of the 1990s, and male respondents, on average, also assess their knowledge as greater.

on their family's war experience. Specifically, young people who have someone in their close or extended family who was killed in the war tend to learn more through contact with those who had direct war experience. The same applies to young people who have family members who participated in the war. In the case of refugee experience, this difference also exists but is more pronounced between those who have a refugee in their immediate family and those who have a refugee in their extended family. The closer the refugee experience is to the young person, the more knowledge they acquire through conversations with family members and people who directly experienced the war. Similarly to sources of historical knowledge in general, male respondents acquire significantly more historical knowledge via the internet and social media compared to female respondents.

CHART 4: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE YOU ACQUIRED YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE WARS OF THE '90S FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES?

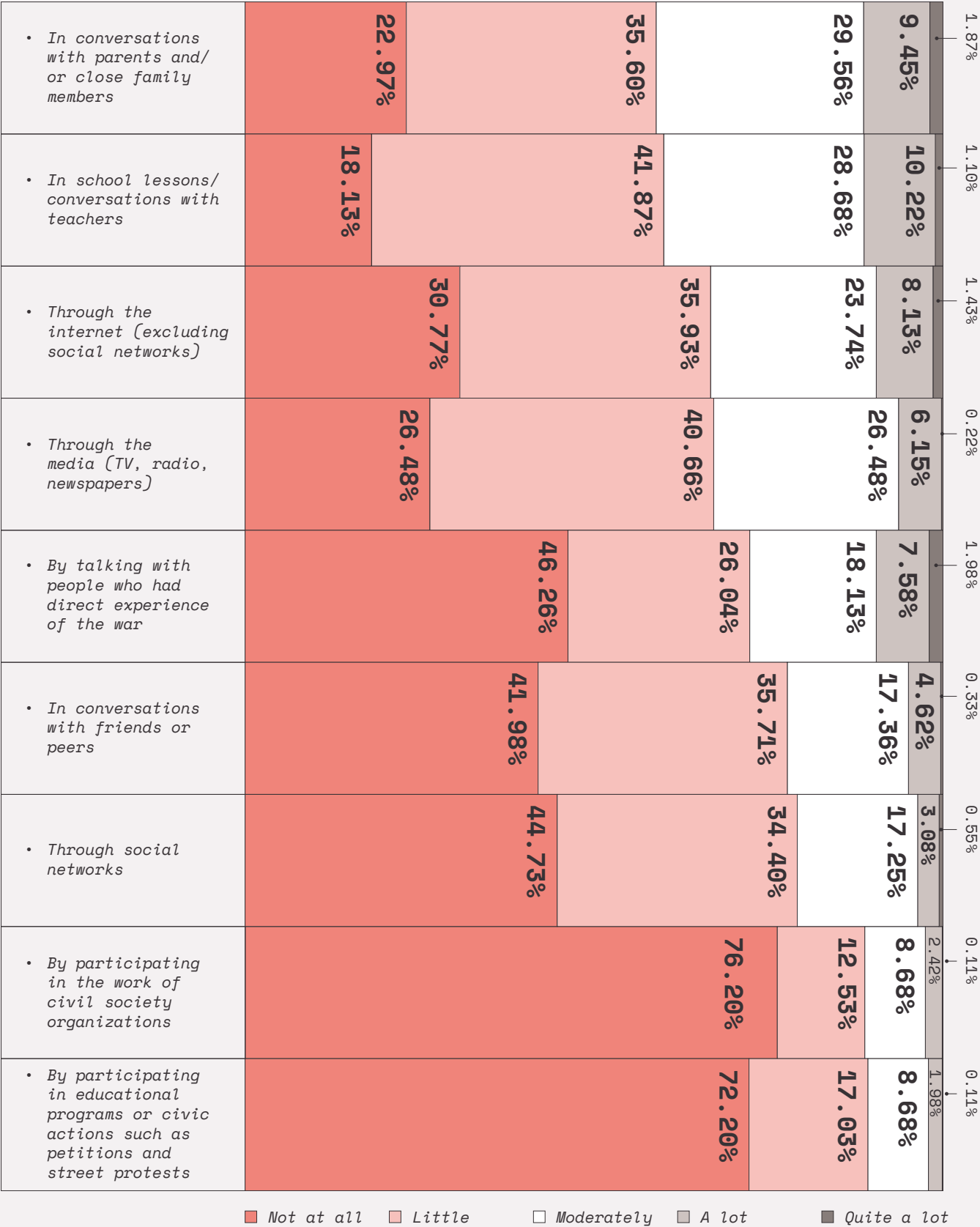


CHART 5: TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE TOPIC OF THE 1990S WARS OF COVERED DURING YOUR HISTORY CLASSES THROUGHOUT YOUR SCHOOLING?

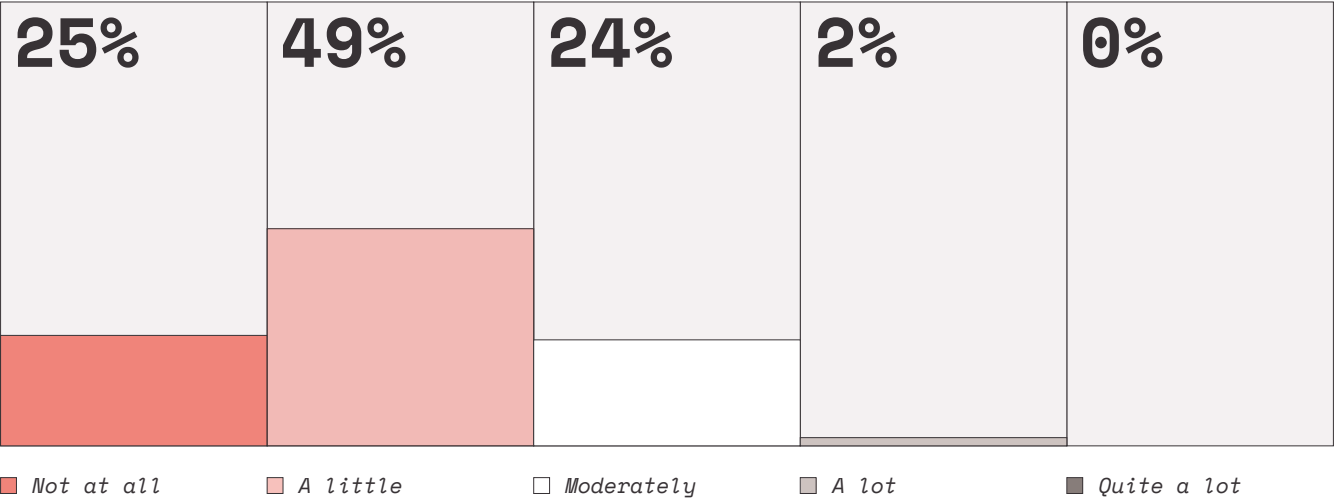
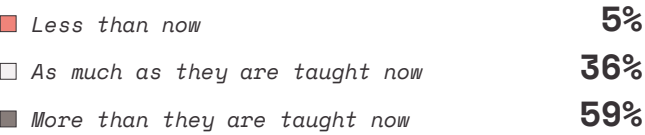


CHART 6: SHOULD THE WARS OF THE '90S BE TAUGHT IN HISTORY CLASSES. . . ?



History education as part of formal schooling is not only an important source of knowledge about the past for young people but also a significant indicator of the current stance of political elites toward the wars of the 1990s. Previous research shows that teachers in Serbia, as well as in other countries in the region, often skip these lessons, even though they are part of the curriculum.<sup>14</sup> The data from this study confirm this finding from the perspective of young people (*Chart 5*). One quarter (25%) of young respondents say that the topic of the wars of

the 1990s was not covered at all in their history classes, while half (49%) believe it was covered only briefly. The perception that the topic of the wars of the 1990s is insufficiently covered in history classes is further supported by the fact that more than half of young people (59%) believe that more should be taught about these wars in history lessons than is currently the case. More than one-third of respondents (36%) think that the wars of the 1990s should be taught to the same extent as they are now, while only 5% believe that less time should be devoted to this topic in history classes (*Chart 6*).

<sup>14</sup> Rodoljub Jovanović and Dea Marić, *Controversy in the Classroom: How History Teachers in the Western Balkans Approach Difficult Topics?*, (*Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 2020), available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1780326>.

CHART 7: HOW MANY PEOPLE DO YOU THINK LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE WARS OF THE 1990S?

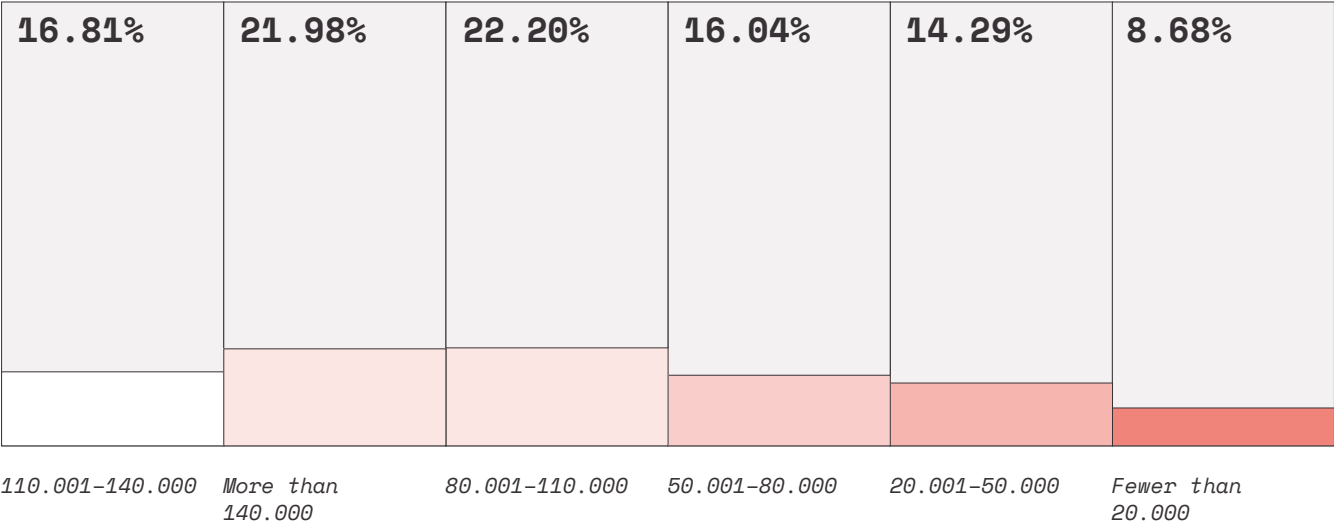
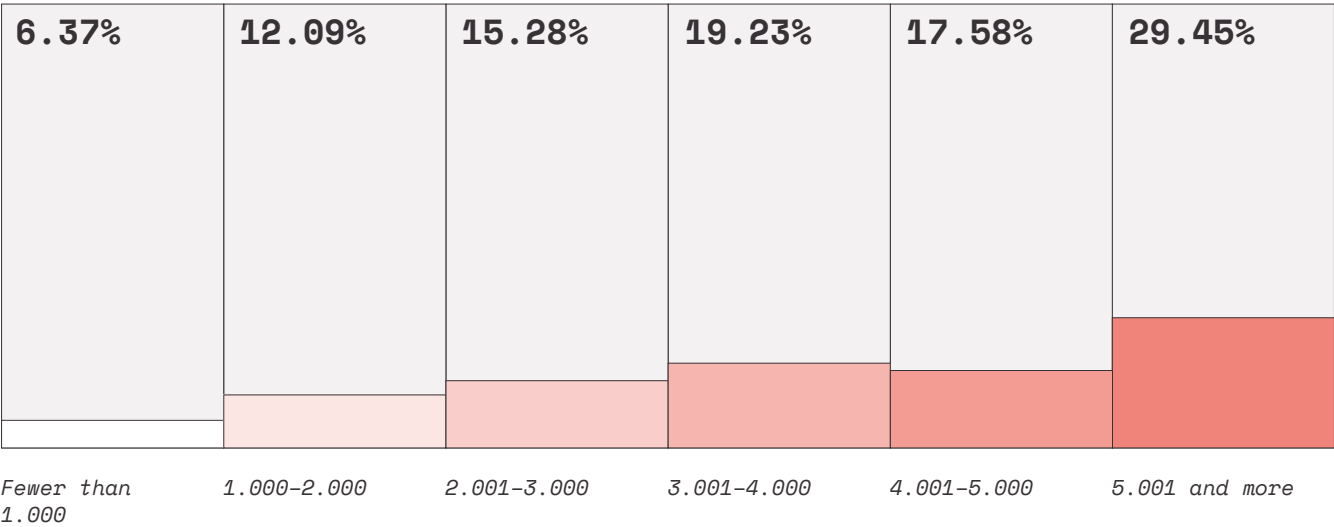


CHART 8: HOW MANY PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE NATO BOMBING?



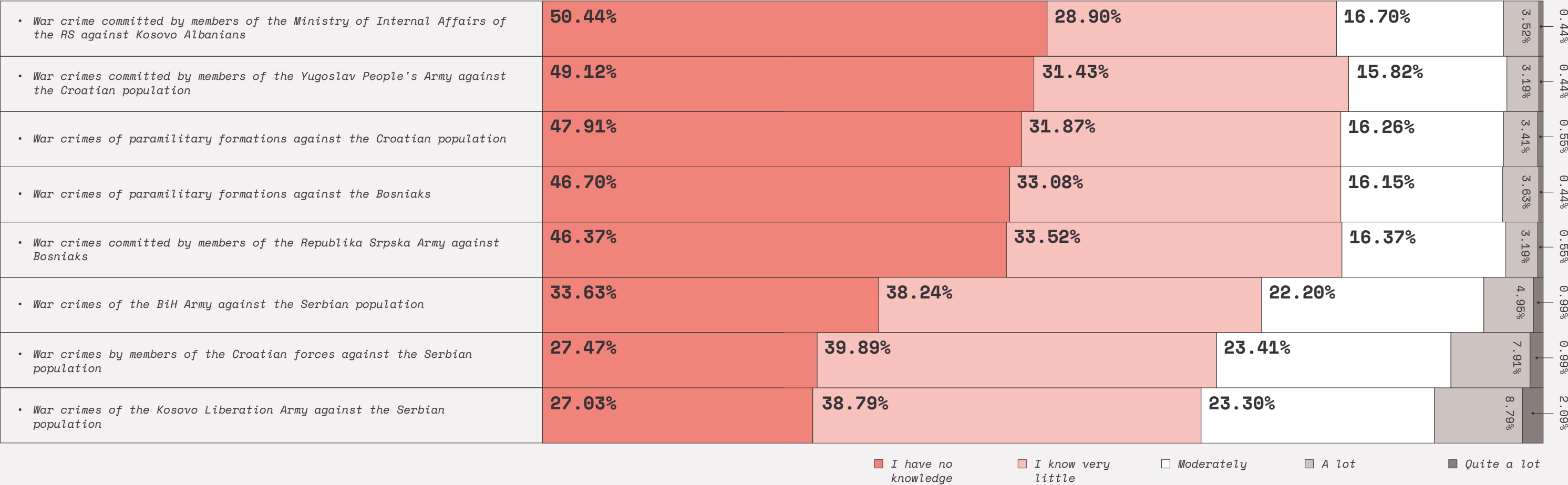
Additionally, we wanted to test respondents' knowledge by asking them questions about basic facts related to the number of victims of the wars of the 1990s and the number of victims of the NATO bombing. According to the War Crimes Victims Map 1991-2001 for the territory of the former SFRJ<sup>15</sup>, approximately 130,000 people lost their lives during these wars. Only 16.8% of respondents gave the correct answer to this question, while the majority (a total of 61.21%) underestimated the number of war victims (*Chart 7*). The number of victims of the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999

remains a contentious point in the narrative surrounding the bombing itself. While the Humanitarian Law Center determined that the number of people directly killed by NATO bombs was 756<sup>16</sup>, much higher figures are circulated publicly year after year. The estimates provided by young people in our research show the same kind of bias. Only 6.37% of respondents gave an estimate below 1,000 people, while the remaining 93.63% overestimated the number of bombing victims. Nearly one-third of respondents (29.45%) estimated that more than 5,000 people were killed in the bombing (*Chart 8*).

<sup>15</sup> *Map of War Crimes Victims 1991-2001 in the Former SFRJ*, (*Mapa Žrtava Ratnih Zločina 1991-2001 Na Području Nekadašnje SFRJ*) accessed September 25, 2023, available at <https://zrtveratovasfrj.info/site/home/sr-Latn-RS>.

<sup>16</sup> *List of Victims of the NATO Bombing*, (*Popis žrtava NATO bombardovanja*), accessed September 20, 2023, available at <https://www.hlc-rdc.org/db/nato/index.html>.

CHART 9: HOW DO YOU ASSESS YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FOLLOWING PHENOMENA AND EVENTS DURING THE WARS OF THE 1990S?



In addition to the general assessment of knowledge about the wars of the 1990s, we were interested in how respondents evaluated their knowledge of war crimes committed during these wars. While the next section deals in more detail with specific crimes, the responses to this question already reveal a general pattern that continues in subsequent answers. Nearly half of young people in Serbia (46.37% - 50.44%) say they know nothing at all about crimes committed against Croats, Bosniaks, or Kosovo Albanians by various forces associated with the Serbian side in the war. However, the situation is different regarding crimes against Serbs, with almost half as many respondents (27.03% – 33.63%) reporting no knowledge at all about crimes committed by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian forces, and the Kosovo Liberation Army (Chart 9).

Older respondents and male respondents rate their knowledge of all the mentioned war crimes as higher. Additionally, respondents whose family members were not affected by the war generally assess their knowledge as lower compared to those whose family members were affected in some way (killed, displaced, or participated in the war).

Additionally, according to young people’s opinions, the most significant events related to the wars of the 1990s are Operation Storm (18.68%), the NATO bombing (13.74%), the killing of civilians (4.40%), the breakup of Yugoslavia (4.29%), and Srebrenica (2.75%) (the rest shown in Chart 10). It is indicative that most respondents identify as the most significant those events in which the victims belonged to their own ethnic group, i.e. Serbs.

CHART 10: WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT RELATED TO THE WARS OF THE 1990S?

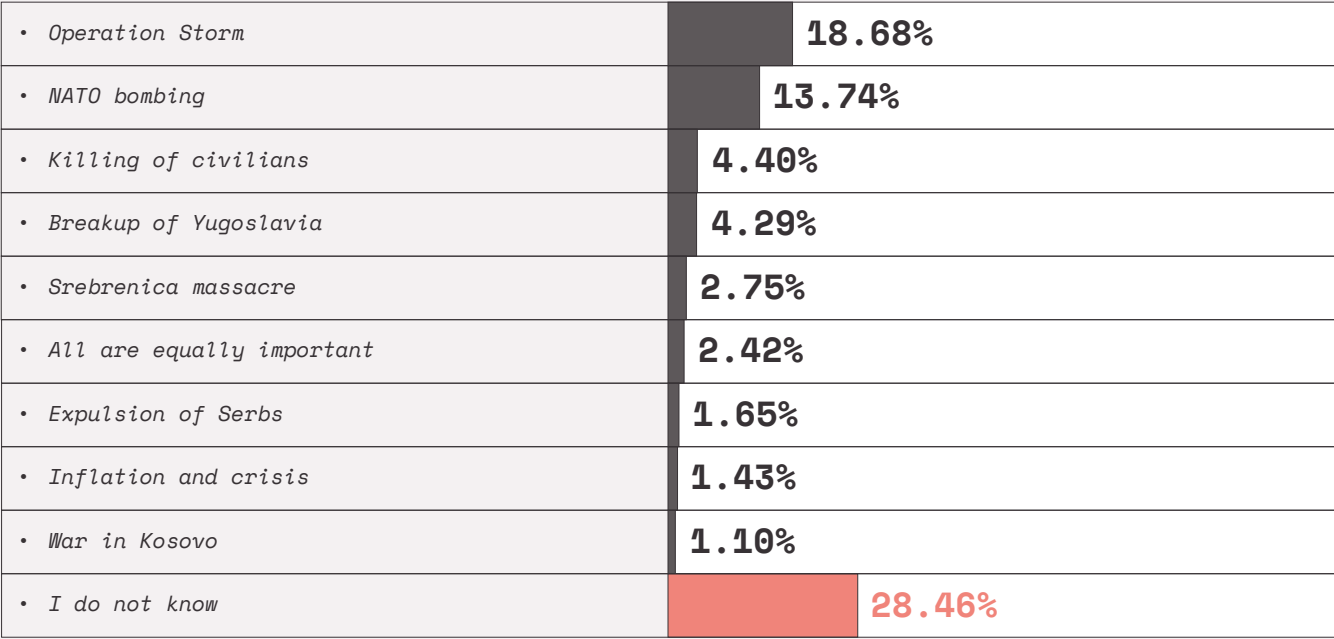


CHART 11: WHO DO YOU THINK IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WARS IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA?

• <i>Politics, politicians</i>		<b>26.15%</b>
• <i>NATO, USA, EU, Western forces</i>		<b>25.49%</b>
• <i>Croats, Croatia</i>		<b>6.81%</b>
• <i>All nations equally</i>		<b>4.51%</b>
• <i>Slobodan Milošević</i>		<b>3.74%</b>
• <i>Tito</i>		<b>1.32%</b>
• <i>Serbs</i>		<b>1.21%</b>
• <i>Governments</i>		<b>1.21%</b>
• <i>Franjo Tuđman</i>		<b>1.21%</b>
• <i>I do not know</i>		<b>15.71%</b>

CHART 12: DO YOU KNOW THAT MASS GRAVES HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED IN SERBIA (IN RELATION TO THE WARS OF THE '90S)?

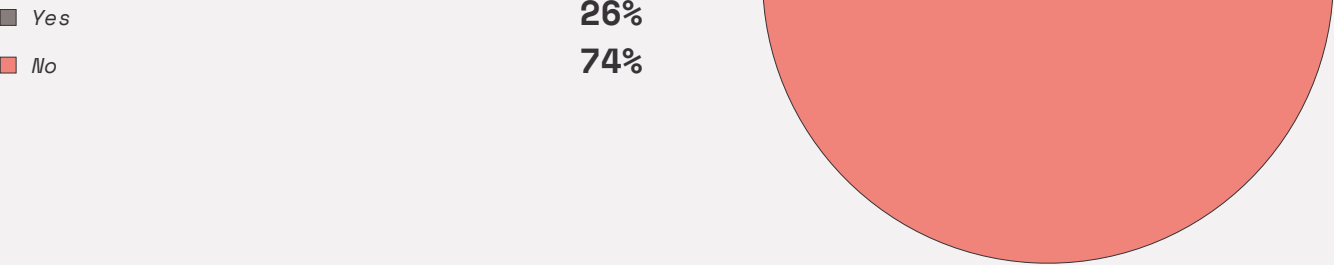


CHART 13: CAN YOU NAME THE PLACES WHERE THEY WERE DISCOVERED?

• <i>Batajnica</i>		<b>8.35%</b>
• <i>Kosovo</i>		<b>1.54%</b>
• <i>Kladovo</i>		<b>0.88%</b>
• <i>I do not know</i>		<b>86.70%</b>

Most respondents see politics and politicians as the main responsible parties for the wars in the former Yugoslavia (26.15%), followed closely by the West and Western powers, including the United States, NATO, and the European Union (25.49%). Just under 7% of respondents believe that the Croats and Croatia bear the greatest responsibility for these wars, while slightly less than 5% think all nations share equal responsibility. About 4% consider Slobodan Milošević the most responsible, and very small percentages of young people attribute responsibility to other actors (such as Tito, the Serbs, the government, or Franjo Tuđman) (*Chart 11*).

When it comes to the wars of the 1990s, one of the greatest taboos is the existence of several mass graves on the territory of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>17</sup> Information about these mass graves is rarely present in the public domain and is not included in history teaching materials. Therefore, it is not surprising that more than two-thirds of respondents (as many as 76%) have never heard of their existence. (*Chart 12*).

Nearly 90% of young people did not know where mass graves had been found in Serbia (86.70%), while 8.3% said they were found in Batajnica, 1.5% in Kosovo, and just under 1% in Kladovo (*Chart 13*).

<sup>17</sup> *Secret Mass Graves in Serbia, War in Serbia, (Tajne masovne grobnice u Srbiji, Rat u Srbiji)* accessed September 25, 2023, available at <https://ratu-srbiji.rs/masovne-grobnice/>.



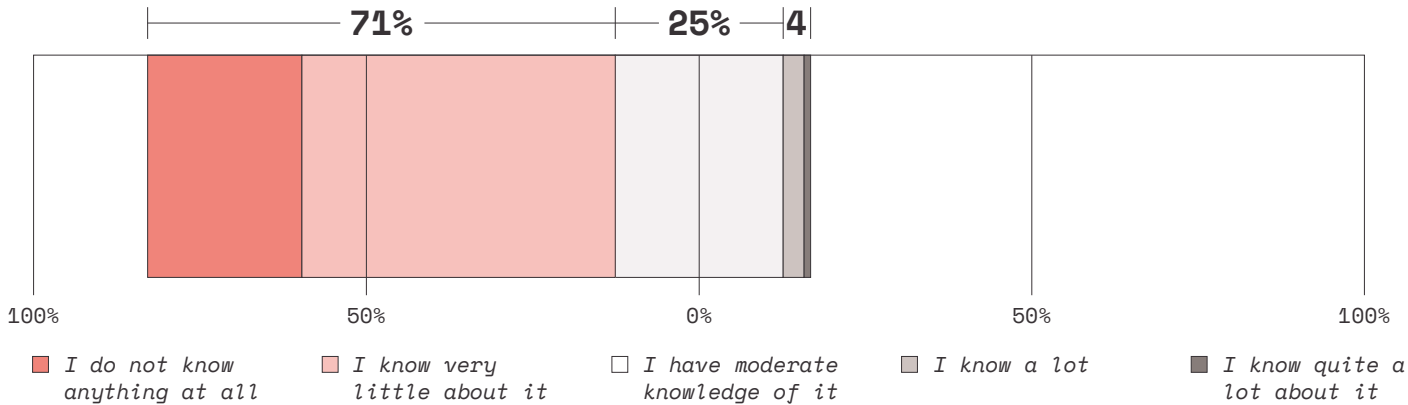
The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), based in The Hague, was established by the United Nations to prosecute war crimes committed during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. It operated from 1993 until 2017, after which its remaining functions were taken over by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.<sup>18</sup> Although the vast majority of young people have heard of the ICTY (91%), only a very small percentage consider themselves to know a great deal (1%) or a lot (3%) about it, while one quarter assess their knowledge as moderate (26%). Nearly half of young people believe they know very little about the ICTY (47%), and almost a quarter say they know nothing at all (23%). (*Chart 14*).

When we asked young people about their views on the Hague Tribunal, more than one-third (36%) said they have no opinion or don't know — which is expected, given that, as previously noted, a large percentage of

young people report knowing very little about the Tribunal. Still, only 2% of respondents have a positive view of the Tribunal (with just one respondent expressing a strongly positive view), while as many as 62% have a negative opinion. Half of that group (32% of the total sample) hold a strongly negative view, while the other half (30%) have a mostly negative view. (*Chart 15*).

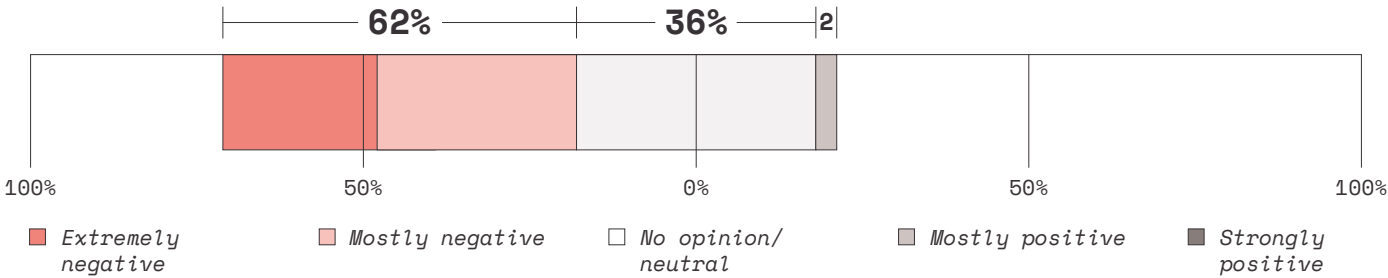
The older the respondents are, the more they assess their knowledge as extensive — but they also tend to have a more negative opinion about the Hague Tribunal. The same applies to male respondents compared to female respondents. Respondents whose family members were not affected by the war generally assess their knowledge as less extensive, but their opinion about the Tribunal as more positive, compared to those whose family members were affected in some way (killed, displaced, or participated in the war).

CHART 14: HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH THE WORK OF THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?



<sup>18</sup> United Nations – International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, accessed September 20, 2023, available at <https://www.icty.org/bcs>.

CHART 15: WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

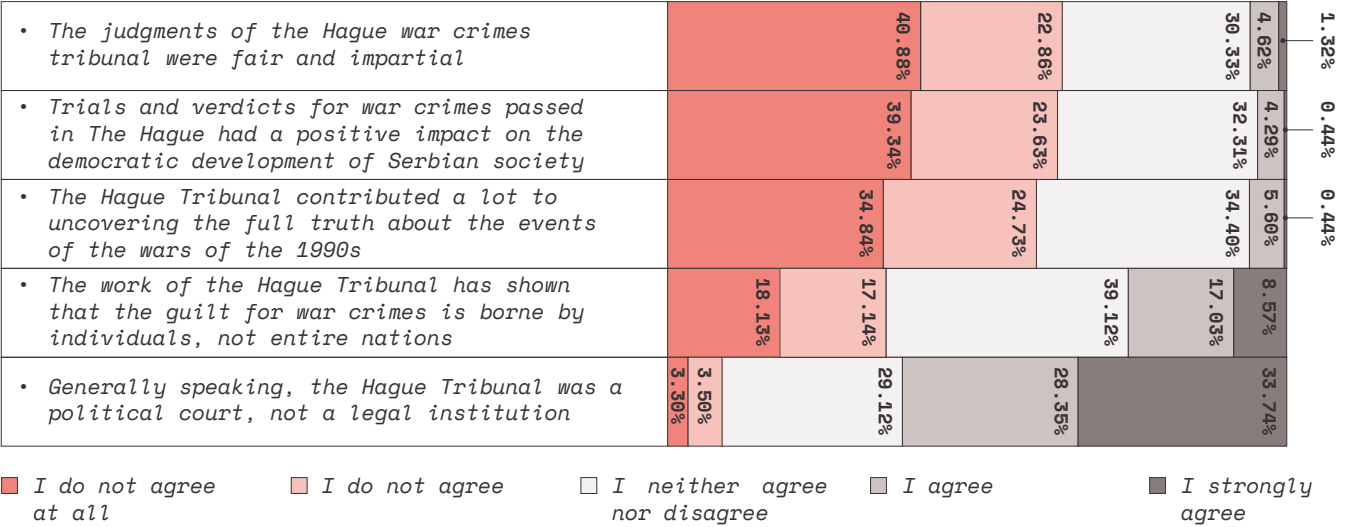


To better understand the nature of these opinions, we tested the extent to which young people agreed with certain statements about the Hague Tribunal that are often found in public discourse. *Chart 16* presents the data on respondents who expressed agreement with these statements. Notably, about one-third of respondents were not ready to take a clear stance—that is, depending on the statement, between 29.12% and 39.12% chose the option “neither agree nor disagree.” However, among those who did express an opinion, patterns of agreement and disagreement revealed a clear pattern. Respondents most strongly agreed with the statement that interprets the Tribunal's work as political: 62% agreed with the statement “Overall, the Hague Tribunal was a political court, not a legal institution.” In contrast, 26% agreed with the statement “The Hague Tribunal's work showed that individuals, not entire nations, bear responsibility for war crimes,” while 35% disagreed—indicating that opinions on this issue are

divided. For all other statements, a majority of young people expressed disagreement. The strongest disagreement is with the claim that the Tribunal's verdicts were fair and impartial: as many as 64% of respondents disagreed. Close behind were other statements presenting the Tribunal in a positive light: nearly two-thirds of young people (63%) disagreed that the Tribunal's trials and verdicts contributed positively to the democratic development of Serbian society, and a similar proportion (60%) disagreed with the view that the Hague Tribunal significantly helped uncover the full truth about the events of the 1990s wars.

Male respondents hold a more negative opinion about the Hague Tribunal, as reflected in their answers to this question. They agreed to a greater extent with the statement that the Hague Tribunal was a political court rather than a legal institution, while they agreed less than female respondents with all other statements.

CHART 16: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?



Aware of the various misconceptions and misinformation about the Hague Tribunal present in public discourse, we asked young people what they believe were the purposes of the trials at the Hague Tribunal, as well as what they consider to be the main purpose of these trials. The findings indicate that young people in Serbia mostly agree with various conspiracy theories related to the Hague Tribunal. When asked about the main purposes of the trials, more than half (with the option to choose more than one answer) responded that it was “to blame the Serbs for war crimes” (50.77%), followed closely by “to fulfill the demands of the International Community” (41.21%). About one-fifth of responses selected “to punish war criminals (to establish individual responsibility)” (21.10%) and “to show that war crimes cannot go unpunished” (20.99%). Only 15.60% of responses referred to the role of the Hague Tribunal in preventing future war crimes, while less than 10% mentioned fostering reconciliation and demonstrating that the countries in the region are capable of confronting war crimes from the past. (Chart 17). The situation is very similar when it comes to what young people see

as the main purpose of the trials before the Hague Tribunal. Just under half of young people (40.98%) believe the main purpose of these trials was to place the blame for war crimes on the Serbs, while nearly a quarter (23.31%) see it as fulfilling the demands of the international community. Less than 10% of respondents consider the other offered options to be the main purpose of the trials, and only 6.48% see preventing future crimes as the primary purpose of the Hague Tribunal trials. (Chart 18). We paid special attention to the role of the Hague Tribunal in uncovering the truth about war crimes committed during the wars of the 1990s, as well as the contribution of the trials to reconciliation in the region. More than two-thirds of young people in Serbia (77%) believe that the trials before the Hague Tribunal contributed very little (36.7% of the total respondents) or not at all (40% of the total respondents) to uncovering the truth about the events in the wars in the former SFRY. Only 3% think they contributed much or very much, while one-fifth (20.44%) believe they contributed moderately to uncovering the truth about these events. (Chart 19).

CHART 17: WHAT DO YOU THINK WERE THE PURPOSES OF THE TRIALS BEFORE THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

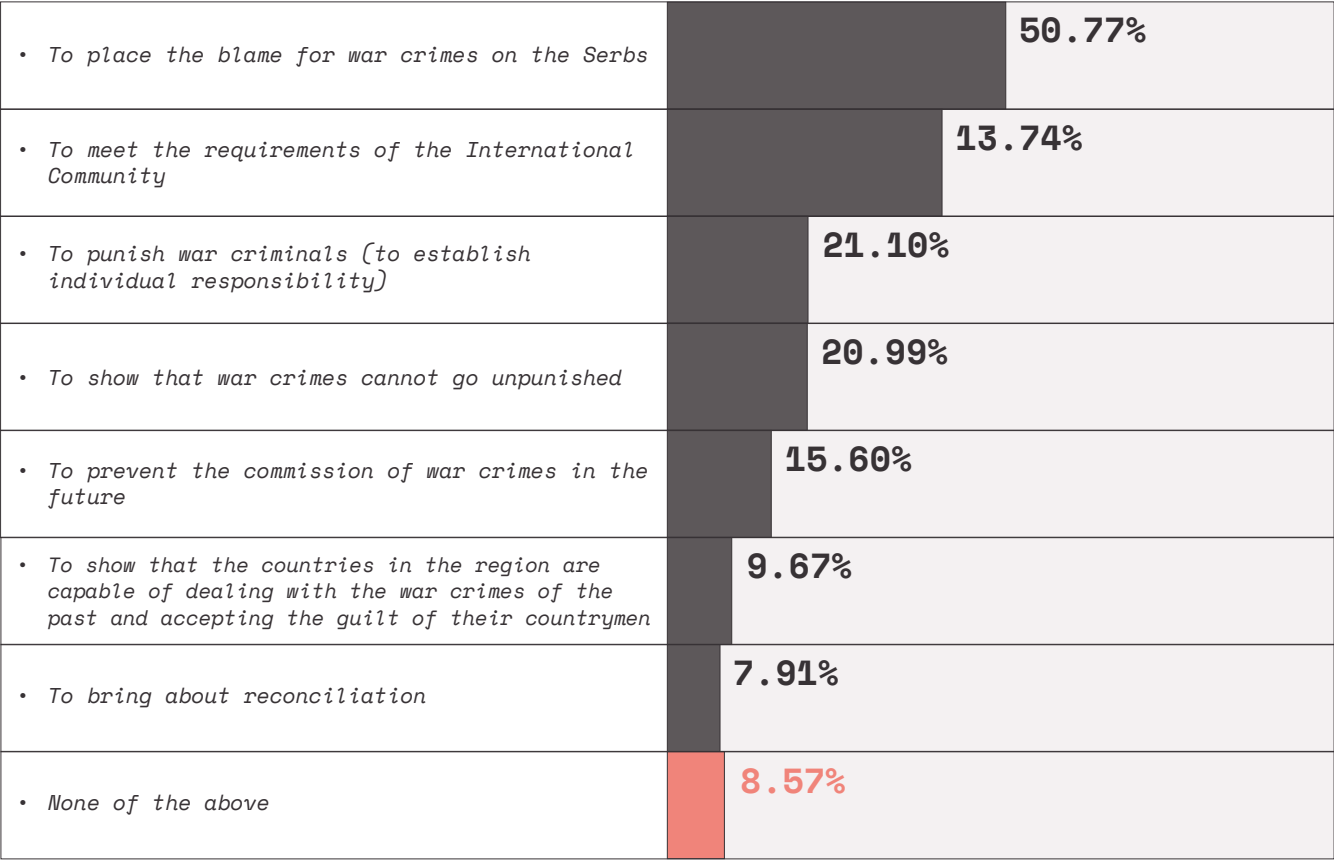


CHART 18: WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, WAS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE TRIAL BEFORE THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

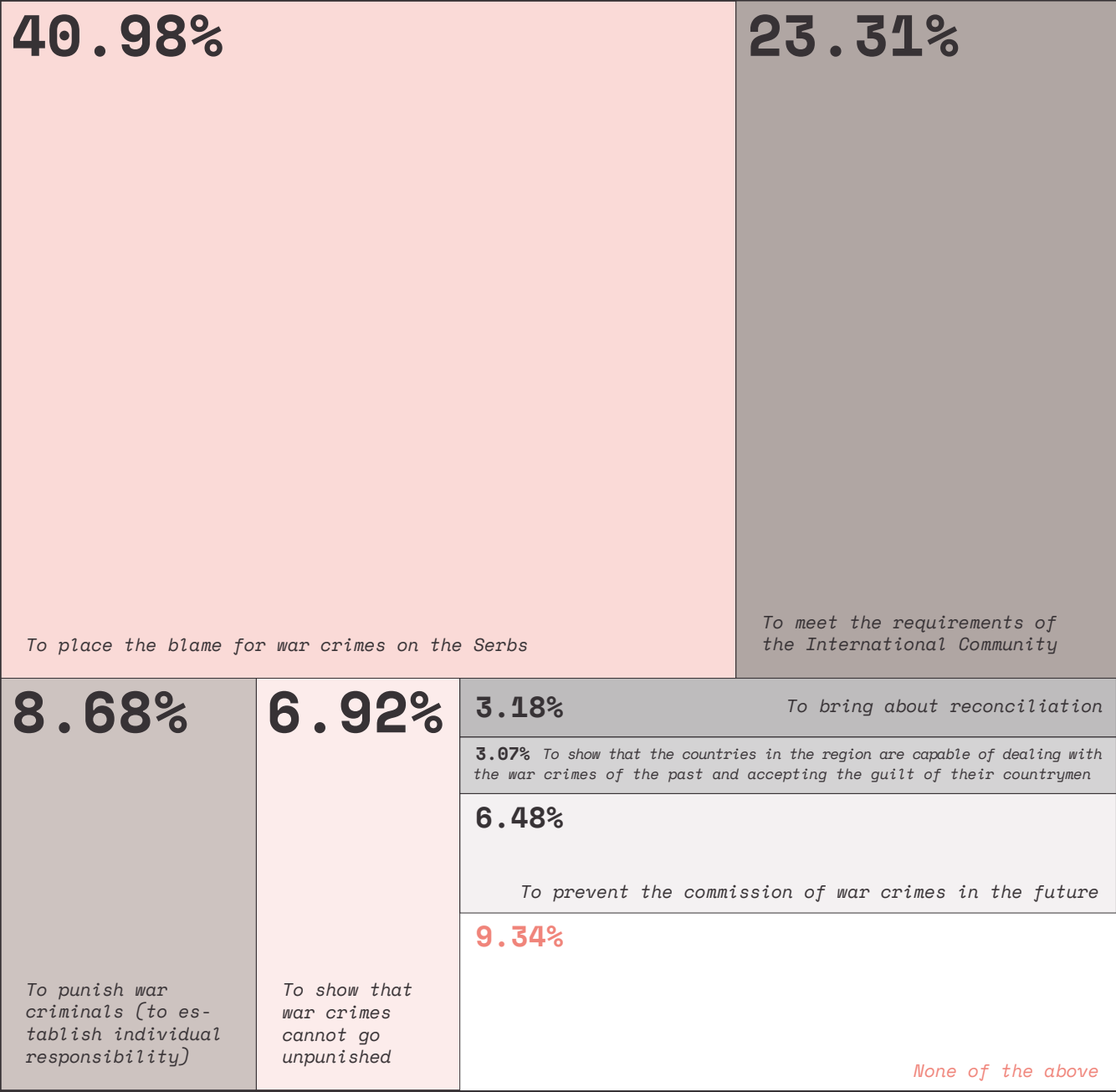




CHART 19: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK THE TRIALS BEFORE THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL CONTRIBUTED TO UNCOVERING THE TRUTH ABOUT THE EVENTS IN THE WARS IN THE FORMER SFRY?

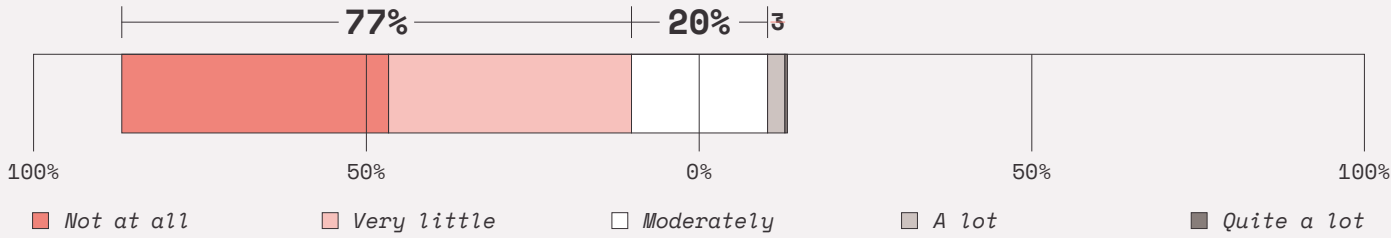


CHART 20: IN YOUR OPINION, TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE TRIALS BEFORE THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL CONTRIBUTE TO THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN THE REGION?

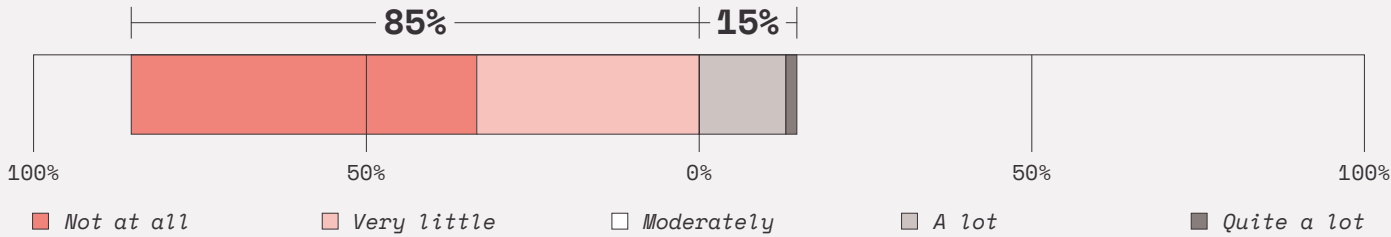


CHART 21: DO YOU THINK WAR CRIMES ARE BEING PROSECUTED IN SERBIA?

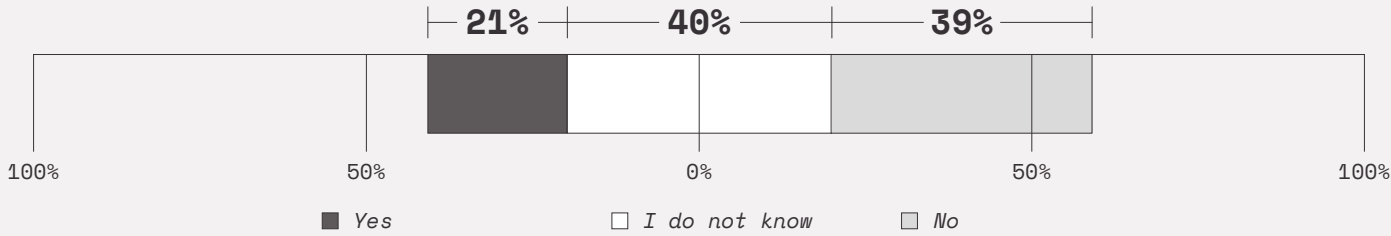
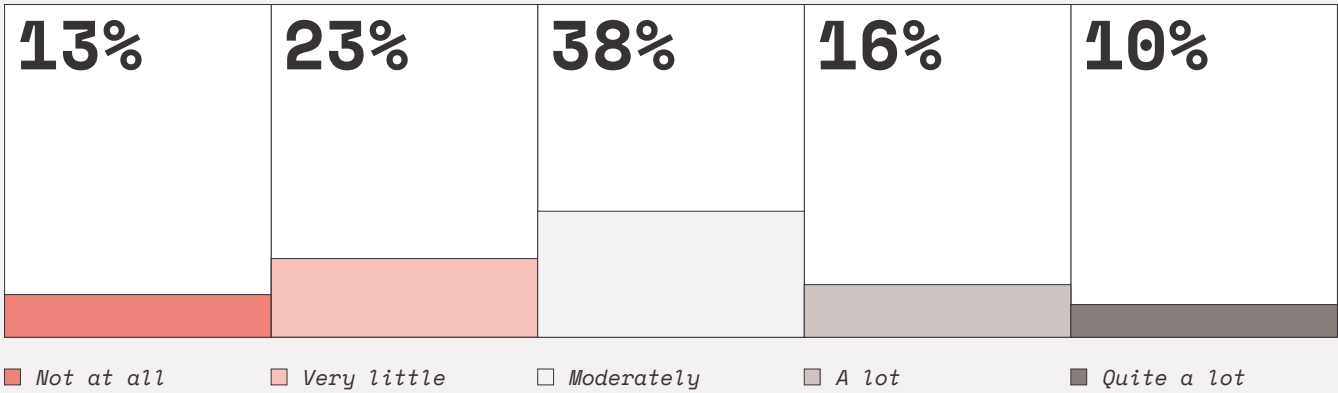


CHART 22: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU SUPPORT WAR CRIMES TRIALS BEING HELD IN COURTS IN SERBIA?

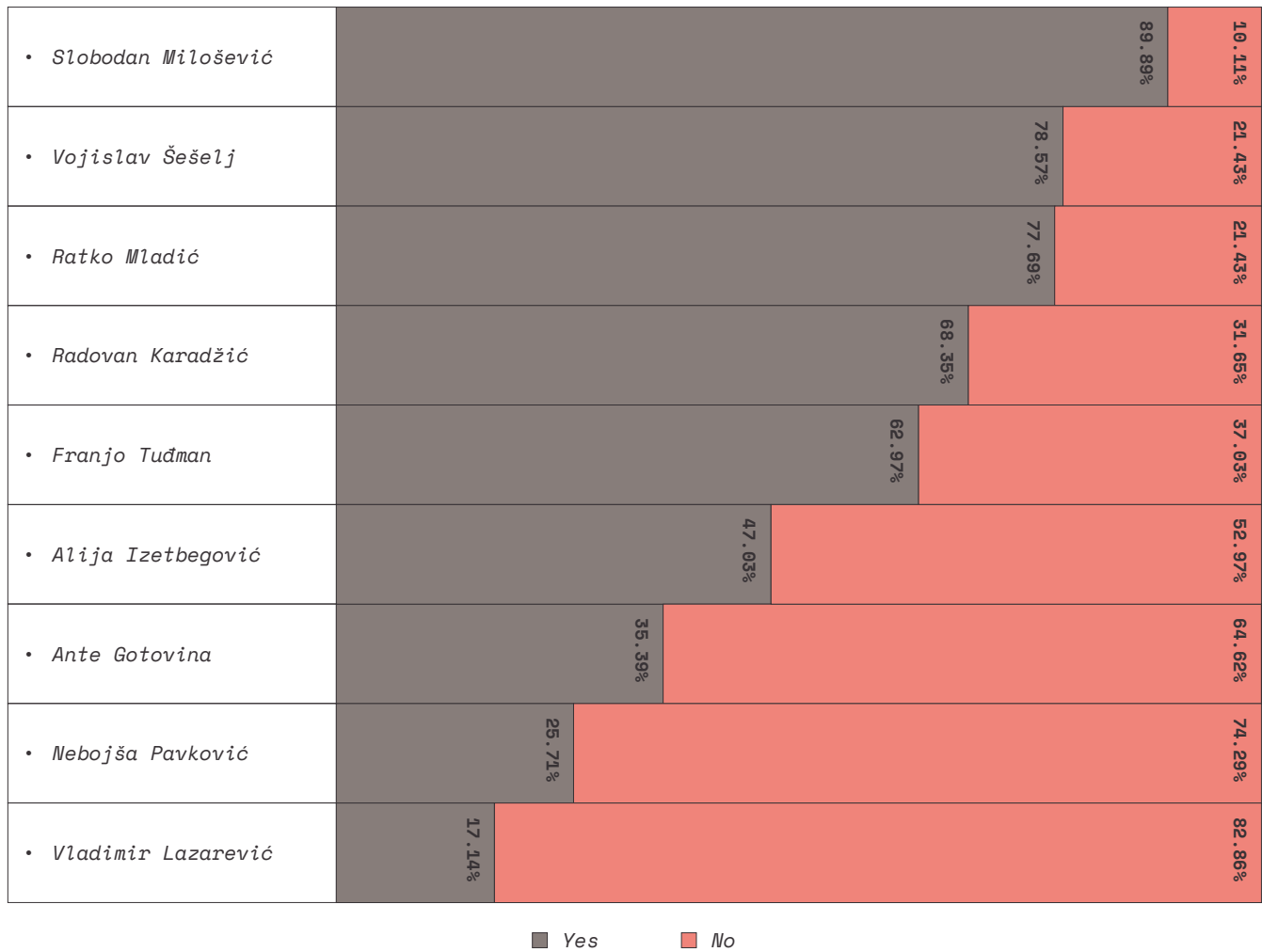


Similarly, a large majority of young people (85%) believe that the trials before the Hague Tribunal contributed very little (33.41% of the total respondents) or not at all (51.98%) to the process of reconciliation in the region. A negligible percentage thinks they contributed a lot (2%), no respondent believes they contributed greatly, and approximately 13% consider that they contributed moderately to the reconciliation process in the region. (Chart 20).

More than one-third of young people do not know that war crimes trials are held in Serbia (39%), one-fifth (21%) know that war crimes trials take place in Serbia, and a large percentage (40%) choose the option "I don't know." One-third of respondents (36%) express little (13%) or very little (23%) support for holding war crimes trials in Serbia, while a smaller number express much (16%) or very much (10%) support. The majority of respondents (38%) express moderate support (Chart 22).

One important component of opinions about the past is the view of various individuals involved in these events. Assuming that young people born between 1993 and 2005 may not necessarily be familiar with many of these figures, respondents were asked whether they had even heard of certain individuals. As expected, the largest percentage of young people (89.89%) have heard of the former president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević. Following him is Vojislav Šešelj, president of the Serbian Radical Party, known by 78.5% of young people, and then Ratko Mladić, former commander of the Army of the Republika Srpska and convicted war criminal, known by 77.69%. Approximately two-thirds have heard of Radovan Karadžić, former president of Republika Srpska and convicted war criminal (68.35%), and Franjo Tuđman, former president of Croatia (62.97%),

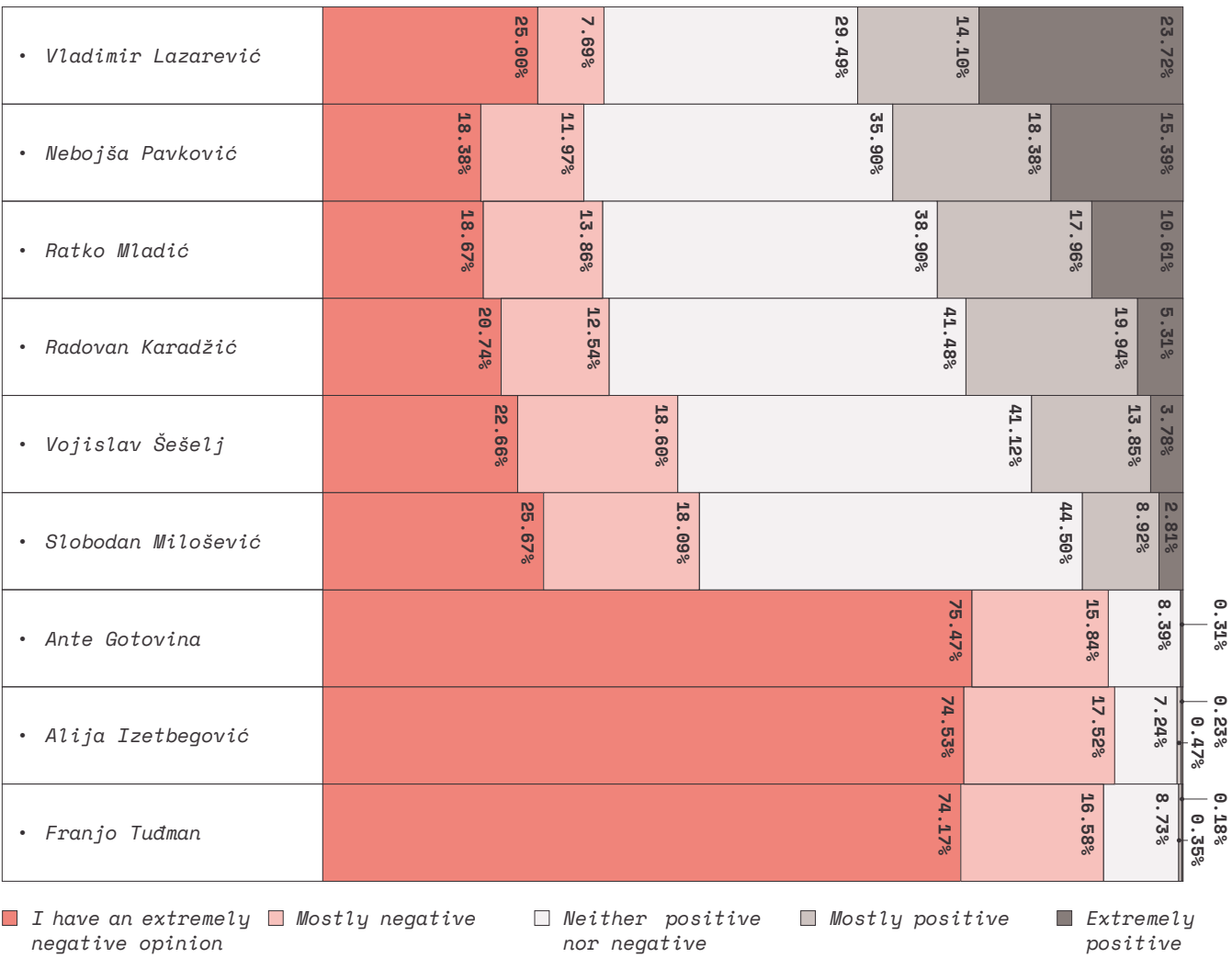
CHART 23: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WARS OF THE 1990S HAVE YOU HEARD OF?



while about half of the young people (47.03%) have heard of Alija Izetbegović, the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Around one-third (35.39%) know who Ante Gotovina, former general of the Croatian Army, is; one-fifth (25.71%) know Nebojša Pavković, former lieutenant general of the Yugoslav Army and convicted war criminal; and slightly less than one-fifth (17.14%) know Vladimir Lazarević, former lieutenant general of the Yugoslav Army and convicted war criminal. (Chart 23).

We asked the respondents who had heard about these individuals what their opinions them were. The answers reveal that, although there are slight variations, young people generally have a much more positive opinion about actors of Serbian nationality than about actors belonging to other ethnic groups. (Chart 24).

CHART 24: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THESE INDIVIDUALS?



In addition to general opinions about the Hague Tribunal, we wanted to understand young people’s views on the responsibility of specific war criminals who were indicted and convicted by this court. This information is particularly important in the current social climate in Serbia, where some war criminals are glorified as heroes, and many receive media attention and various forms of support from state institutions. As with some previous questions, a large percentage of young people (in this case roughly half, between 49% and 58%, depending on the individual) said they did not know the answer to this question. Predictably, based on their opinions about the Hague Tribunal expressed in this study, those who did share their opinions mostly believe that these individuals did not commit the crimes for which they were indicted and convicted by the Hague Tribunal.

CHART 25: DO YOU THINK RADOVAN KARADŽIĆ IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIMES HE WAS CONVICTED OF BY THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

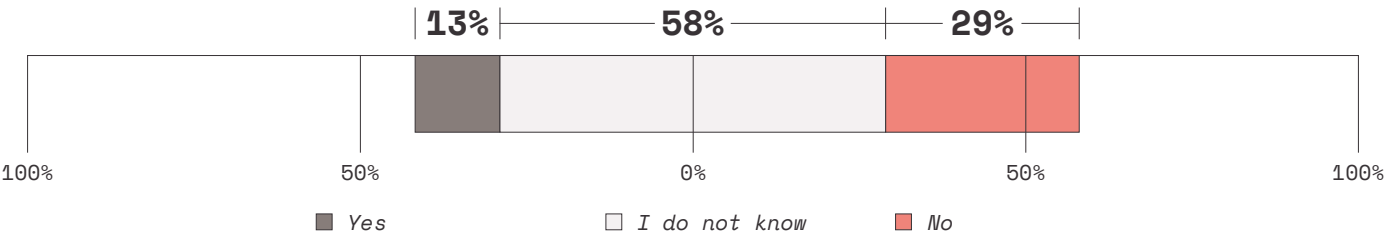


CHART 26: DO YOU KNOW WHICH CRIMES EXACTLY WAS RADOVAN KARADŽIĆ CONVICTED OF BY THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL, REGARDLESS OF YOUR OPINION ON THE MATTER?

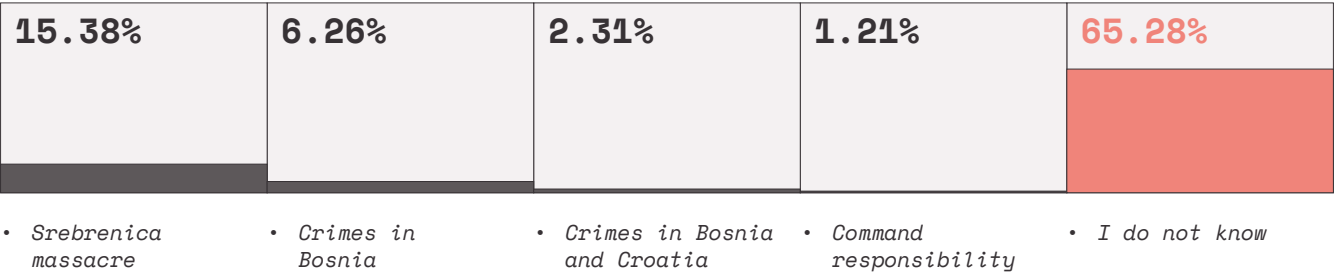


CHART 27: DO YOU THINK RATKO MLADIĆ IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIMES HE WAS CONVICTED OF BY THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

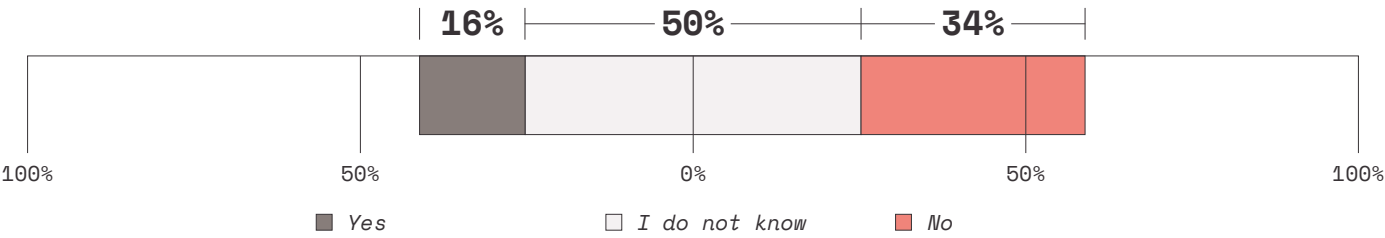


CHART 28: DO YOU KNOW WHICH CRIMES EXACTLY WAS RATKO MLADIĆ CONVICTED OF BY THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL, REGARDLESS OF YOUR OPINION ON THE MATTER?

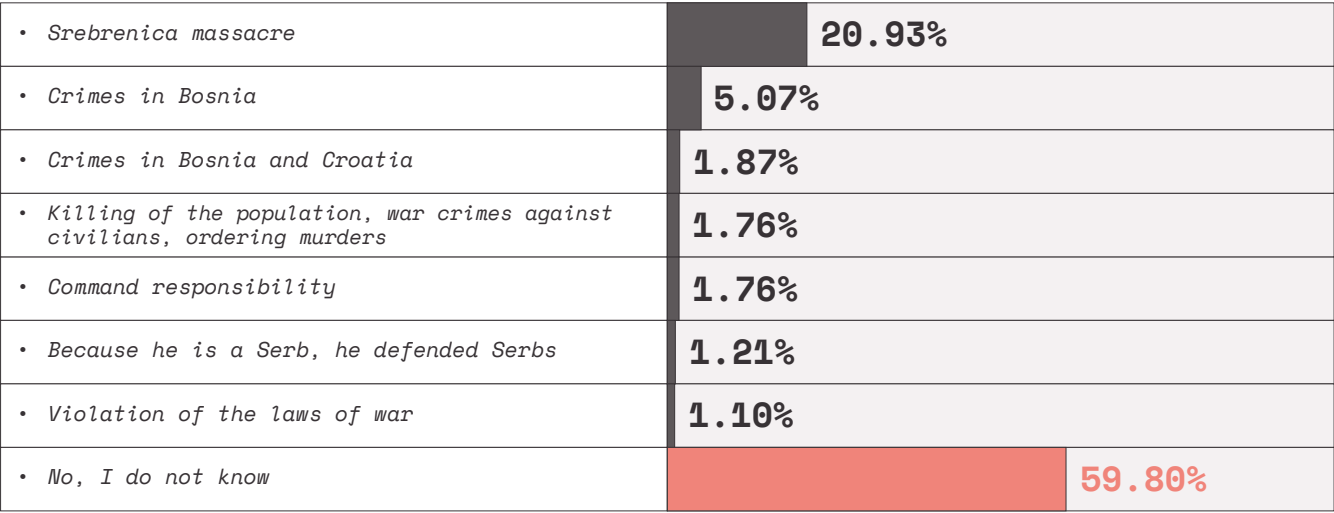


CHART 29: DO YOU THINK SLOBODAN MILOŠEVIĆ IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIMES HE WAS CHARGED WITH BY THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

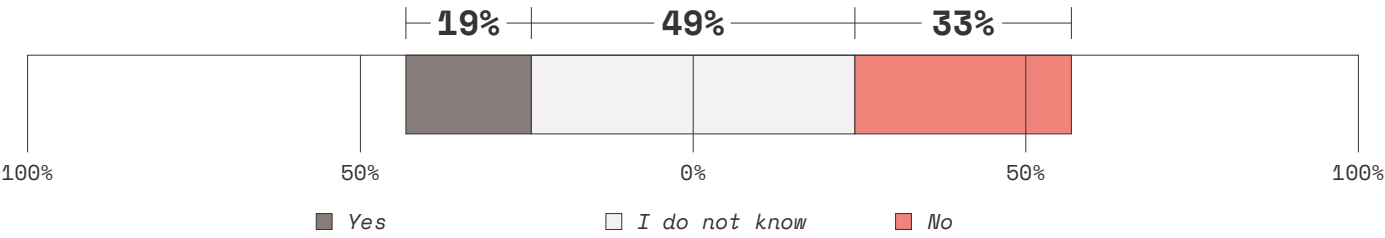


CHART 30: DO YOU KNOW WHAT CRIMES SLOBODAN MILOŠEVIĆ WAS CHARGED BEFORE THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL, REGARDLESS OF YOUR PERSONAL STANCE?

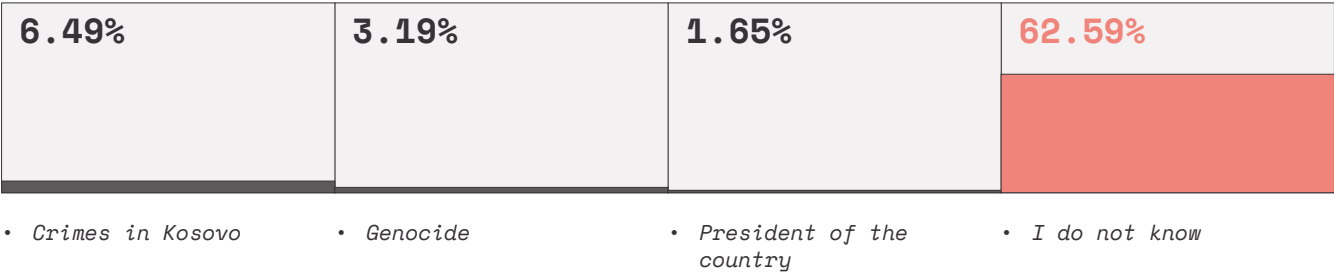


CHART 31: DO YOU THINK VOJISLAV ŠEŠELJ IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIMES HE WAS CONVICTED OF BY THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL?

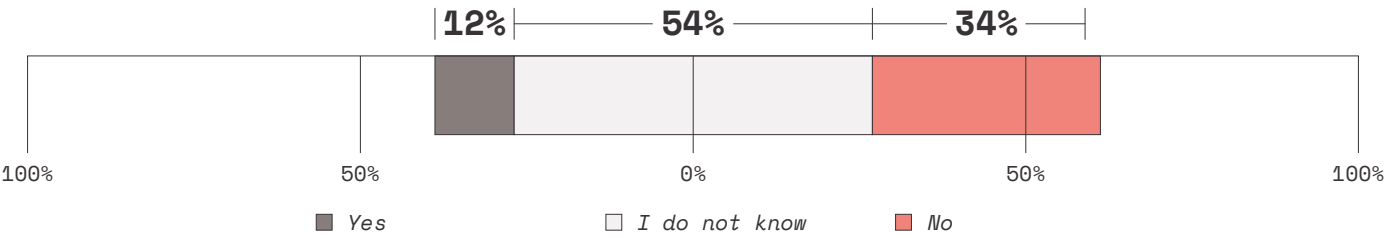
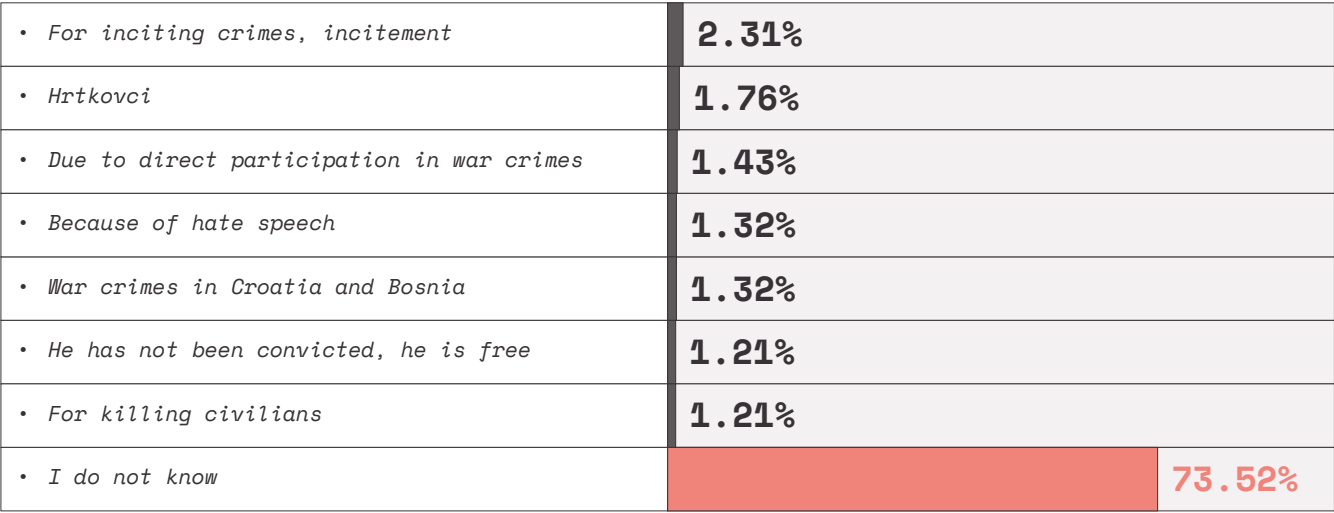


CHART 32: DO YOU KNOW WHAT CRIMES WAS VOJISLAV ŠEŠELJ CONVICTED OF BEFORE THE HAGUE TRIBUNAL REGARDLESS OF YOUR OPINION ON THE MATTER?



A recent analysis of the politics of memory surrounding the wars of the 1990s in Serbia showed that the focus of the culture of remembrance in Serbia is "exclusively on Serbian victims, while victims of non-Serb nationalities and crimes committed by Serbian forces are completely invisible." <sup>19</sup> It appears that young people’s responses reflect this kind of politics of memory related to the wars of the 1990s. We provided young people with a list of events and first asked whether they had heard of each event. As with previous findings, a very small percentage of young people had heard of most of the events offered. Out of twenty-one events listed, fewer than 20% of respondents heard of eighteen of them, and nearly one-fifth of young people (18.94%) did not hear of any of the events. Only three events were known by between 42% and 62% of young people in Serbia. Nearly two-thirds of young people (62.09%) have heard about the expulsion of Serbs from Croatia in 1995 (“During Operations Flash and Storm in 1995, members of the Croatian army and police committed war crimes against Serbs”). Just over half (53.52%) had heard about crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the Kosovo War (“Members of the KLA committed crimes during the Kosovo War (1999)”). The third event that stands out for being relatively well-known among young people is the Srebrenica massacre (“In Srebrenica in July 1995, several thousand Muslims/Bosniaks were executed over a few days”), which about a little over one-third (42.42%) of young people have heard of. This distribution of events is interesting and most likely points to two

19 Đureinović, Jelena, *Politics of Memory on the Wars of the 1990s in Serbia: Historical Revisionism and Challenges of Memorialization* (Politika sećanja na ratove devedesetih u Srbiji: ISTORIJSKI REVIZIONIZAM I IZAZOVI MEMORIJALIZACIJE)

factors. One is the centrality of crimes against Serbs in the dominant narrative in Serbia, which explains why these two events are the ones the majority of young people have heard of (“During Operations Flash and Storm in 1995, members of the Croatian army and police committed war crimes against Serbs” and “Members of the KLA committed crimes during the Kosovo War (1999)”). The fact that the third most recognized event is the genocide in Srebrenica can be explained by it being the most publicly visible war crime committed during the wars of the 1990s. It also represents the gravest single crime committed during these wars. (Chart 33).

Precisely because the dominant narrative in Serbia conceals certain crimes, and some segments of society deny or relativize some of the war crimes, we asked those young people who had heard of each event whether they believed it had actually happened. The data clearly shows the influence of the politics of memory we described earlier. Young people are least likely to doubt the authenticity of events in which Serbs were the victims. The events whose authenticity is doubted by the largest number of young people include the killing of Albanian civilians in Suva Reka and Podujevo, the killing of civilians in Bijeljina, the expulsion and killing of Albanians from Kosovo before the bombing, and the existence of a mass graves in Batajnica. Additionally, compared to these events, a relatively small percentage of young people express doubts about the killing of several thousand Muslims in Srebrenica. The most likely reason for this is that the genocide in Srebrenica, as mentioned earlier, is the largest single crime committed during the wars of the 1990s and, as such, has a significant presence in public discourse.

CHART 33: HEARD ABOUT THE EVENT

• Not heard about any of the events	18.94%
• In Podujevo and Suva Reka (Kosovo), members of the Serbian armed forces killed a large number of women, children and elderly people of Albanian nationality	4.73%
• In 1992, paramilitary formations from Serbia killed civilians in Bijeljina	5.71%
• During the war in Bosnia there were camps for Croats and Muslims (Omarska, Trnopolje, Keraterm and others)	7.14%
• In 1992, members of the Serbian armed forces systematically raped Muslim women in Foča (BiH)	7.47%
• In 1995, in the vicinity of Trnovo, members of the Scorpions' unit shot captured young men of Bosniak nationality brought from Srebrenica and filmed the entire event with a video camera	10.44%
• In 1993, in the Medak Pocket near Gospić, members of the Croatian armed forces committed crimes against civilians of Serbian nationality	10.44%
• A large number of corpses of Albanian civilians were found in the mass grave in Batajnica	10.44%
• On the territory of Serbia, during 1992 and 1993, in Sjeverin and Štrpci, Serbian citizens of Bosniak/Muslim ethnicity were abducted from trains and buses and then killed	10.55%
• In Kosovo, even before the bombing, Albanians were killed and expelled	11.10%
• During the war in Croatia, Croats (Hrtkovci, Kukujevci) were intimidated and expelled from Srem	11.87%
• Captured Serbian women were raped in the Čelebići camp	11.87%
• In the Lora camp in Split, members of the Croatian military police tortured prisoners of war of Serbian nationality	13.08%
• In 1992, in Tuzla, a line of YNA members who were retreating according to a previously concluded agreement with the Bosnian armed forces were attacked and then many soldiers were killed	13.96%
• The YNA bombed Dubrovnik	14.95%
• Paramilitary formations from Serbia and members of the YNA killed civilians in Vukovar	15.28%
• During 1991, citizens of Serbian nationality in Osijek were killed, tortured and persecuted	17.36%
• Sarajevo was under siege by Serbian forces for over a thousand days (3 years)	19.45%
• During the siege of Sarajevo, many civilians were killed by sniper shots	20.11%
• In Srebrenica in July 1995, several thousand Muslims/Bosniaks were shot in a few days	42.42%
• Members of the KLA committed crimes during the war in Kosovo (1999)	53.52%
• During operations Flash and Storm in 1995, members of the Croatian army and police committed war crimes against Serbs	62.09%

CHART 34: THEY DO NOT BELIEVE IT HAPPENED

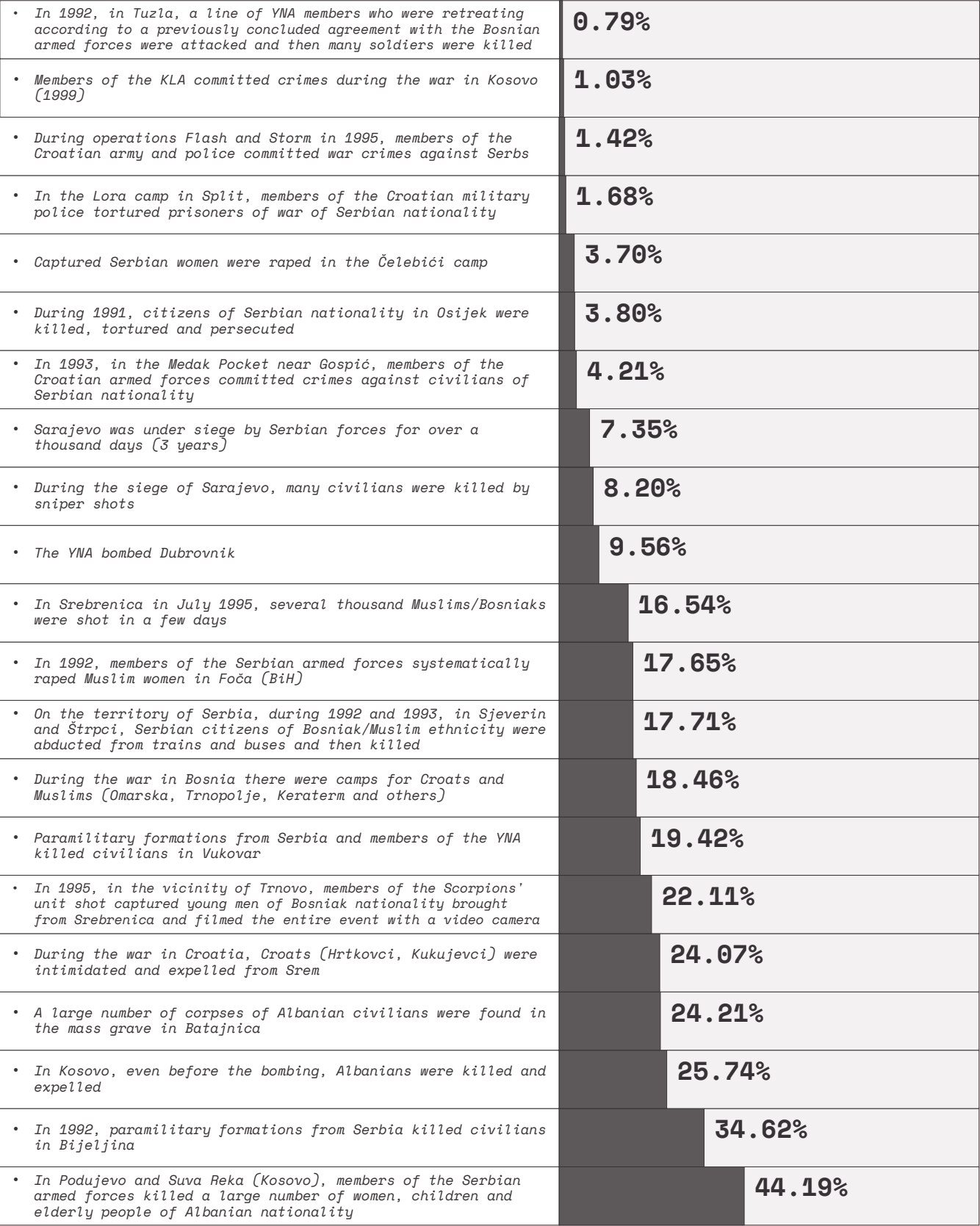
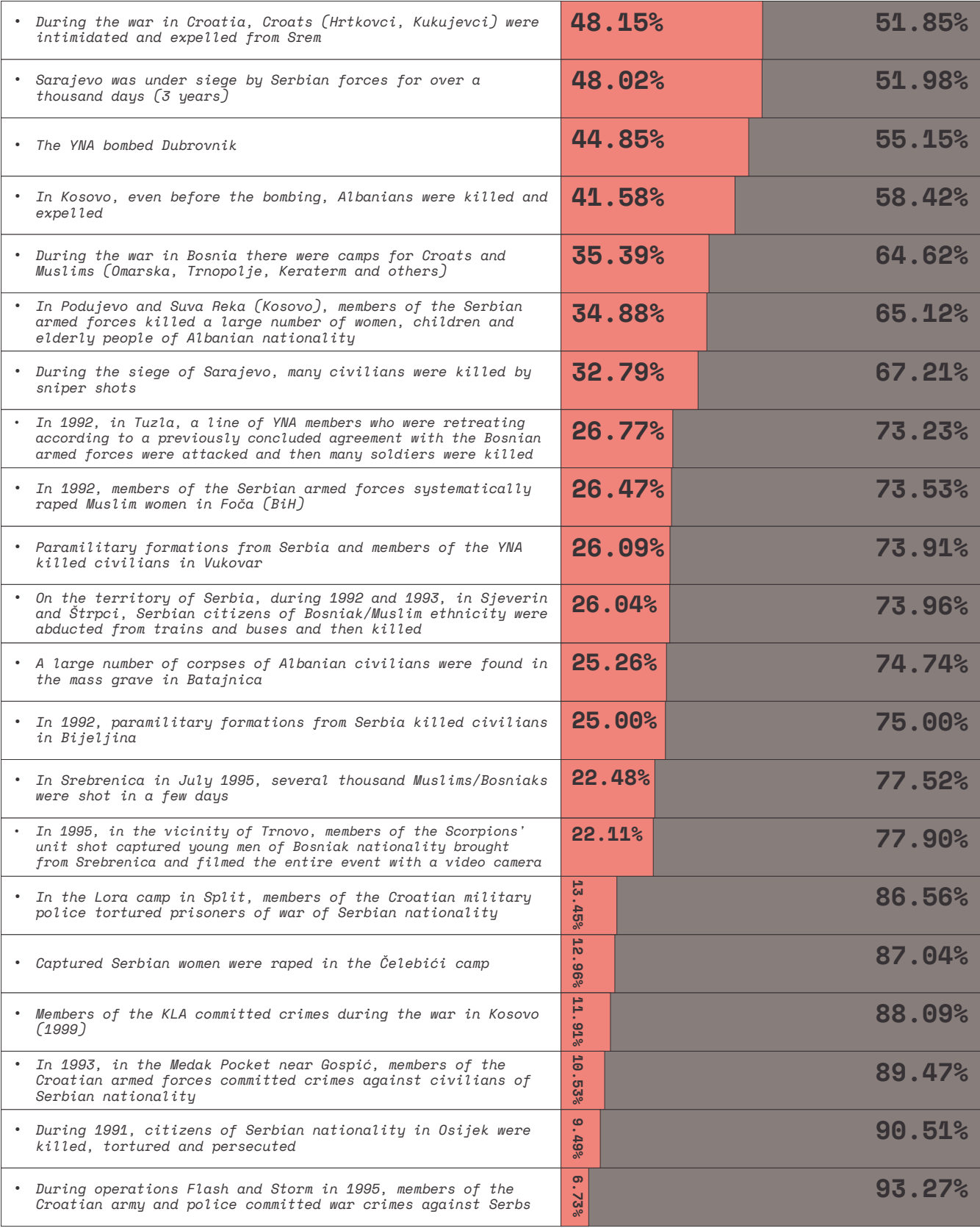


CHART 35: IN YOUR OPINION, WAS THIS EVENT AN INEVITABILITY OF WAR (JUSTIFIED IN THE GIVEN SITUATION) OR A WAR CRIME (FOR WHICH THE PERPETRATORS SHOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE)?



■ Inevitability of war      ■ War crime



Precisely because of the relativization and attempts to justify committed war crimes, we asked young people who had heard of the events whether they considered the event an inevitability of war (justified in the given situation) or a war crime (for which perpetrators should be held accountable). Unfortunately, the same pattern appears as in the previous question. The crimes that nearly half of young people (48%) consider to have been an inevitability of war (and not war crimes) are the intimidation and expulsion of Croats in Hrtkovci, as well as the siege of Sarajevo by Serbian forces for over a thousand days (3 years). Following these are the bombing of Dubrovnik by the Yugoslav People’s Army, which 44.85% consider an inevitability of war, and the

expulsion and killing of Albanians from Kosovo before the NATO bombing (41.58%). In contrast, only about 10% of young people consider the crimes committed against Serbs to have been an inevitability of war.

Additionally, we asked young people which, in their opinion, was the greatest crime committed during the wars of the 1990s in the territories of the former Yugoslavia. While one-fifth (19.78%) did not know how to answer, almost one-fifth (19.01%) believe that Operations Storm and Flash represent the greatest crimes committed during these wars. Following that is the NATO bombing (12.09%), and then “the killing of civilians of any nationality” (8.13%). Srebrenica was mentioned by

just under 5% of young people, followed by the killing of civilians and children (3.85%). Other crimes, which were mentioned much less frequently (around 1%), are shown in *Chart 36*.

Once again, we see a similar pattern as in previous responses. The largest number of young people consider the two events in which Serbs were the victims to be the greatest crimes committed during the 1990s wars in the Yugoslav territories. Overestimating the number of victims and/or the relative importance of events in which members of one’s own group were victims points to a victimization narrative, as shown in previous studies<sup>20</sup>. The third most popular answer, “the killing of civilians

of any national group”, somewhat relativizes the question as it is not a direct answer naming a specific crime. Such a response may also indicate an avoidance of responsibility for crimes committed by members of one’s own group.

Less than 5% of young people consider “Srebrenica” to be the greatest crime committed during the wars of the 1990s in the territories of the former Yugoslavia, while more than a third (38%) believe that the killings of Bosniaks in Srebrenica constitute genocide. On the other hand, as many as 28% disagree with this designation, and one-third (34%) choose the answer “I don’t know.” (*Chart 37*).

CHART 36: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE GREATEST CRIME COMMITTED DURING THE WARS OF THE 1990S IN THE TERRITORIES OF THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA?

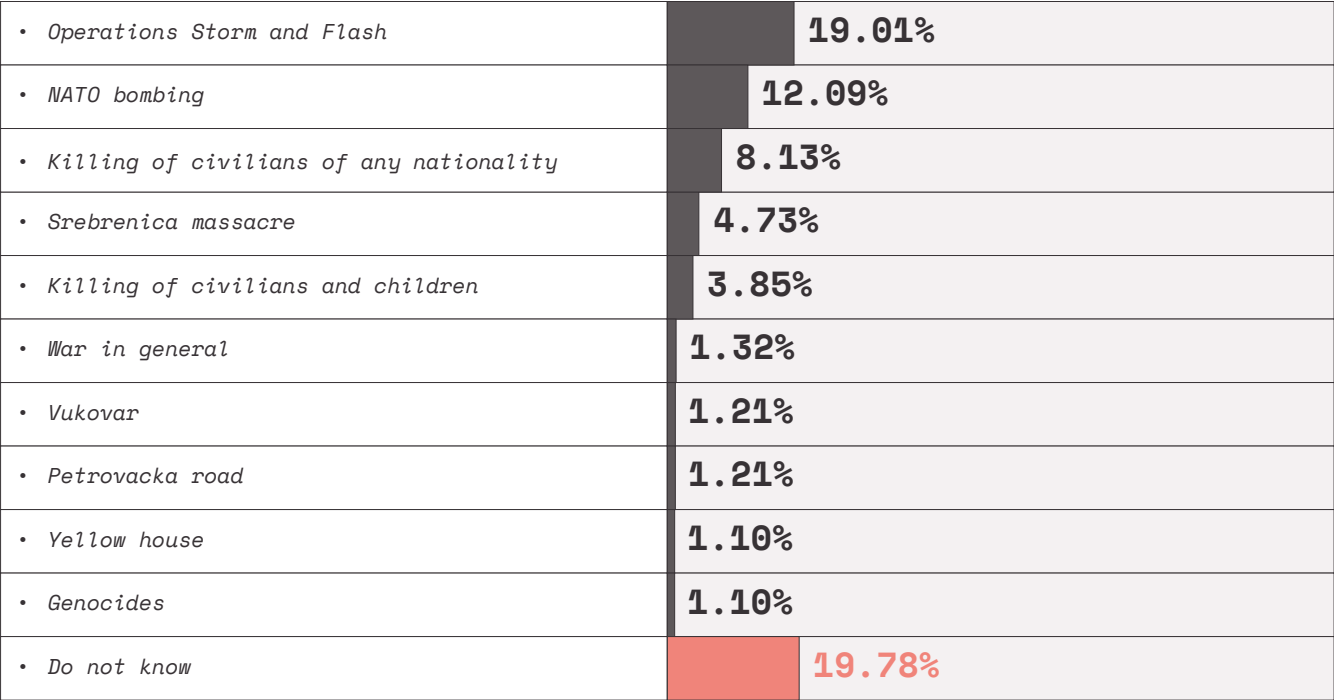
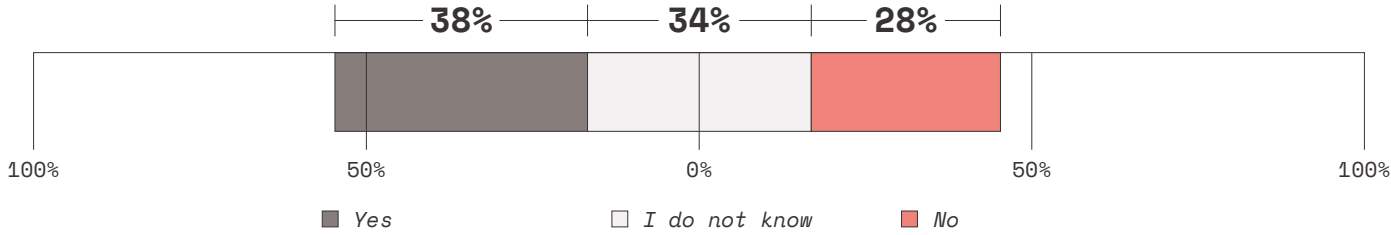


CHART 37: DO YOU THINK THE KILLINGS OF BOSNIAKS IN SREBRENICA CONSTITUTE GENOCIDE OR NOT?



<sup>20</sup> Rodoljub Jovanović and Angela Bermúdez, *The next Generation: Nationalism and Violence in the Narratives of Serbian Students on the Break up of Yugoslavia*, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 21, no. 1 (April 2021): 2–25, available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12339>.

One of the most influential theories for understanding socio-psychological changes in society during conflicts is Daniel Bar-Tal’s<sup>21</sup> theory of the socio-psychological foundations of conflicts. It states that during long and difficult-to-resolve conflicts, members of society experience a series of negative events such as stress, hardships, uncertainty, losses, and suffering. Along with these negative experiences, society members face certain challenges. The most critical challenges are coping with stress, satisfying various needs, and resisting the enemy. To face these challenges, they develop a shared socio-psychological repertoire consisting of social beliefs, opinions, and emotions. These beliefs, opinions, and emotions become institutionalized through communication channels and influence the development of the socio-psychological infrastructure. The socio-psychological infrastructure consists of three elements: collective memory, the ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientation. When institutionally spread, these elements together create a culture of conflict that affects how new information and experiences are processed. In this context, the social ethos is understood as “a configuration of shared central social beliefs that provide the dominant orientation to a society.”<sup>22</sup> Social beliefs are “knowledge shared by members of a society about topics and issues of special significance to that society.”<sup>23</sup> This theory assumes the existence of eight themes or social beliefs of the ethos of conflict, three of which (justification of one’s own group’s goals,

21 Daniel Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts: Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics* (New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

22 Bar-Tal, 174.

23 Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts*.

delegitimization of the opponent, and victimization of one’s own group) develop during intractable conflicts and are key themes that fuel and sustain such conflicts. The other five themes (positive image of one’s own group, security, patriotism, unity, and peace) exist in every group but take on a specific form in societies experiencing intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2013).

In this study, we presented young people with a scale measuring the ethos of conflict related to the Serbia-Kosovo conflict. All the questions forming the scale, organized into subscales, are shown in Table XX along with their corresponding scores. The overall ethos of conflict score (3.155) is slightly but significantly higher than the theoretical average of the scale. Looking at individual beliefs/themes of the ethos of conflict, we see that among young people in Serbia, justification of one’s own group’s goals (3.917), victimization of one’s own group (3.410), positive image of one’s own group (3.309), and delegitimization of the opponent (3.184) are strongly expressed. Three of the four most pronounced social beliefs (justification of one’s own group’s goals, delegitimization of the opponent, and victimization of one’s own group) are exactly those considered key beliefs that develop during conflict.

There is no difference in the ethos of conflict scores between male and female respondents, nor between those from rural and urban areas, while younger respondents have lower ethos of conflict scores. There is no significant difference based on whether respondents had family experience of war.

CHART 38: THE ETHOS OF CONFLICT THEMES

ETHOS OF CONFLICT SCORE	3,155
JUSTIFICATION OF THE GOALS OF ONE'S OWN GROUP	3,917
1. <i>The fact that Serbs have lived in Kosovo for centuries gives them the right to claim it as their homeland.</i>	3,960
2. <i>Serbs have an exclusive right to the territory of Kosovo because it is their historical homeland.</i>	3,874
UNITY	3,182
3. <i>We should not allow Albanians to see that there are disagreements among us regarding our views on this war.</i>	3,841
4. <i>The strength of Serbia is also reflected in the fact that its citizens freely express different opinions about this war.*</i>	2,524
VICTIMIZATION OF ONE'S OWN GROUP	3,410
5. <i>Despite Serbian efforts for peace, Kosovo Albanians repeatedly advocated for war.</i>	3,764
6. <i>Albanians were victims of this war just as much as the Serbs.*</i>	3,056
DELEGITIMIZATION OF OPPONENTS	3,184
7. <i>Among Albanians, there have always been many moderate voices that wanted the conflict to end.*</i>	2,781
8. <i>Albanians have never been people who can be trusted.</i>	3,586
PATRIOTISM	3,071
9. <i>Some values are equally important as sacrificing for the homeland.*</i>	2,334
10. <i>One of the main goals of the education system should be fostering loyalty to Serbia.</i>	3,809
SECURITY	2,841
11. <i>Regular demonstrations of military power are the most effective way to eliminate threats to Serbia's security.</i>	3,193
12. <i>Military power, as such, is not sufficient to guarantee Serbia's security.*</i>	2,489
POSITIVE IMAGE OF OWN GROUP	3,309
13. <i>Serbs have as many flaws as Albanians.*</i>	2,922
14. <i>The fact that the Serbian people heroically defended themselves against the Albanians attests to their many virtues.</i>	3,697
PEACE	2,326
15. <i>Peace is impossible without compromises.*</i>	2,216
16. <i>Reconciliation will truly be achieved only when Albanians and Serbs together "face the facts.".*</i>	2,436
* Reverse-coded items	



As in recent years Serbia has witnessed an increasing revision of the past and relativization of crimes committed during the wars of the 1990s, we sought to examine the presence of moral disengagement strategies<sup>24</sup> among young people in Serbia. These strategies most often come into play when denying the existence of crimes is no longer possible, and they serve to justify the involvement of group members in immoral acts, such as war crimes, in various ways. They include four groups of strategies: redefining the act itself (social and moral justification, favoring one’s own group, and euphemistic labeling), redefining agency (diffusion and displacement of responsibility), redefining the harm (minimizing and framing the consequences), and redefining the victim (dehumanization and blaming the victim).<sup>25</sup> Similar to the case of the ethos of conflict, the data show that the moral disengagement score among young people in Serbia (3.300) is higher than the theoretical average score. Young people most strongly endorse the harm-redefining strategy (3.457), particularly through framing the consequences (3.477). The second most prevalent group of strategies is redefining the act (3.422), specifically social and moral justification (3.620) and euphemistic labeling (3.565) (*Chart 39*).

24 Albert Bandura, *Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities*, *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3, no. 3 (August 1999): pp.193–209, available at [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspro303\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspro303_3).

25 Bandura.

CHART 39: STRATEGIES OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

MORAL EXCLUSION SCORE	3,300
REDIFYING ACTS:	3,422
SOCIAL AND MORAL JUSTIFICATION	3,620
1. Everything Serbian forces did during the wars was for the sake of protecting their loved ones and their homes.	3,476
2. Serbs did what they had to do during the wars in order to preserve the rights and honor of their people.	3,764
FAVORING ONE’S OWN GROUP	3,081
3. If Serbian forces can be held responsible for any actions during the wars, they are negligible compared to the crimes committed by others.	2,944
4. The recent wars have once again proven that our army is braver and more honorable than others.	3,219
EUPHEMISMS	3,565
5. During the war, Serbs took more decisive actions only when the situation on the ground demanded it.	3,586
6. Serbian forces cannot be held responsible for any unforeseen consequences of their defensive actions during the war.	3,666
REDEFINING AGENCY:	3,304
DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY	3.113
7. Every Serbian soldier who committed wrongdoings in the war should admit it – that would be a true patriotic act.*	2,457
8. Serbian soldiers were simply fulfilling their duty like all other comrades.	3,768
SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY	3,495
9. Since the Serbian army was forced to defend itself in the wars, all responsibility lies with others.	3,348
10. Serbian soldiers cannot be blamed for their actions in the wars when they had no choice in the given circumstances.	3,642
REDEFINING HARM:	3,457
MINIMIZING CONSEQUENCES	3.436
11. The alleged mass crimes of Serbian forces during the wars are actually rare and isolated incidents.	3,459
12. The numbers of alleged victims from other groups are more propaganda than historical fact.	3,412
FRAMING CONSEQUENCES	3,477
13. Problematic acts committed by Serbian forces during the war were a necessary evil, rather than planned crimes.	3,443
14. Reports of Serbian crimes are actually just descriptions of wartime actions typical of any modern conflict.	3,512
REDEFINING THE VICTIME:	3,019
DEHUMANIZATION	2,679
15. Croats, Bosniaks, and Albanians are known for their atrocities during the war, as they were throughout history.	3,599
16. I feel sorry for all people who suffered in this war, regardless of nationality*	1,758
BLAMING THE VICTIM	3,360
17. Due to their aggressive policies, those peoples (Croats, Bosniaks, and Albanians) are solely responsible for their own suffering.	3,316
18. The victims of those people (Croats, Bosniaks, and Albanians) are actually the consequence of their own conquest campaigns.	3,403
* Reverse-coded items	

YOUNG PEOPLE'S OPINIONS ABOUT KOSOVO

Since the issue of Kosovo and the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo remain unresolved and are ongoing topics subject to negotiations<sup>26</sup>, we wanted to understand young people’s opinions about this matter. To start, we asked which solution they would support—that is, what they believe Serbia should do regarding Kosovo. The data in *Chart 20* show their responses. The largest group, about one-third of young people (32.75%), believe Serbia should continue working to withdraw recognition of Kosovo. The next most popular option, chosen by just under one-fifth of respondents (17.14%), is for Serbia to maintain the status quo. About 13.41% think Serbia should work on reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians and postpone the question of Kosovo’s status. Nearly one in ten respondents (9.34%) support some form of territorial exchange. A slightly smaller percentage (8.24%) believe Serbia should not recognize Kosovo but should make compromises in certain areas, such as Kosovo’s membership in international organizations. Only 6.7% think Serbia should recognize Kosovo as an independent state.

To better understand the background of these opinions, we presented young people with several commonly expressed public statements regarding the Serbia–Kosovo relationship and asked to what extent they agreed with them. As with some previous questions, a

26 The data were collected before the events in Banjska in September 2023.

relatively large percentage of young respondents (between 23% and 32%) chose the neutral option, "neither agree nor disagree." Around two-thirds (63%) disagreed with the statement "Kosovo is not my problem because I don’t live there." A similar level of disagreement was expressed toward the statements "Kosovo is an independent state" (60%) and "I would support recognizing Kosovo if, in return, we gained EU membership and economic progress" (66%). For these three statements, the percentage of those who agreed ranged between 11% and 16%. More than half of the respondents agreed that, legally speaking, Kosovo is an occupied territory under NATO control, while only 16% disagreed. Interestingly, the statement "The state has effectively recognized Kosovo’s independence but pretends it hasn’t" divided respondents—almost one-third (31%) disagreed, but as many as 40% agreed. (*Chart 40*).

Interestingly, younger respondents showed a greater willingness to support the recognition of Kosovo if Serbia were to gain EU membership and economic progress in return. Those who did not vote in the last elections are more likely to agree with the statement “Kosovo is not my problem because I don’t live there.” This result is understandable, as it may reflect a form of political apathy that affects both participation in the electoral process and the perceived importance of normalizing relations with Kosovo for Serbian citizens.

WHAT SHOULD IN YOUR OPINION SERBIA DO REGARDING THE MATTER OF KOSOVO?

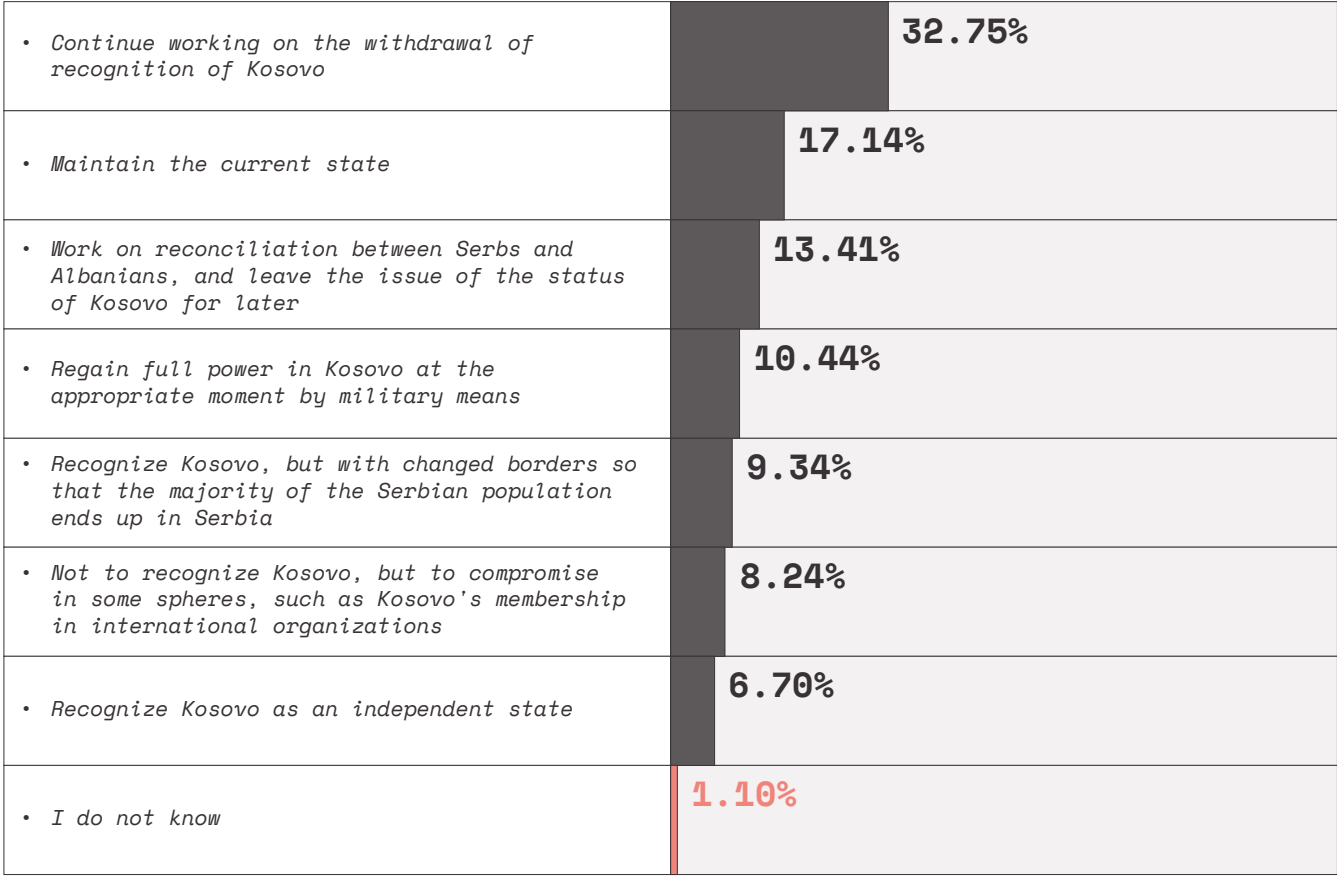
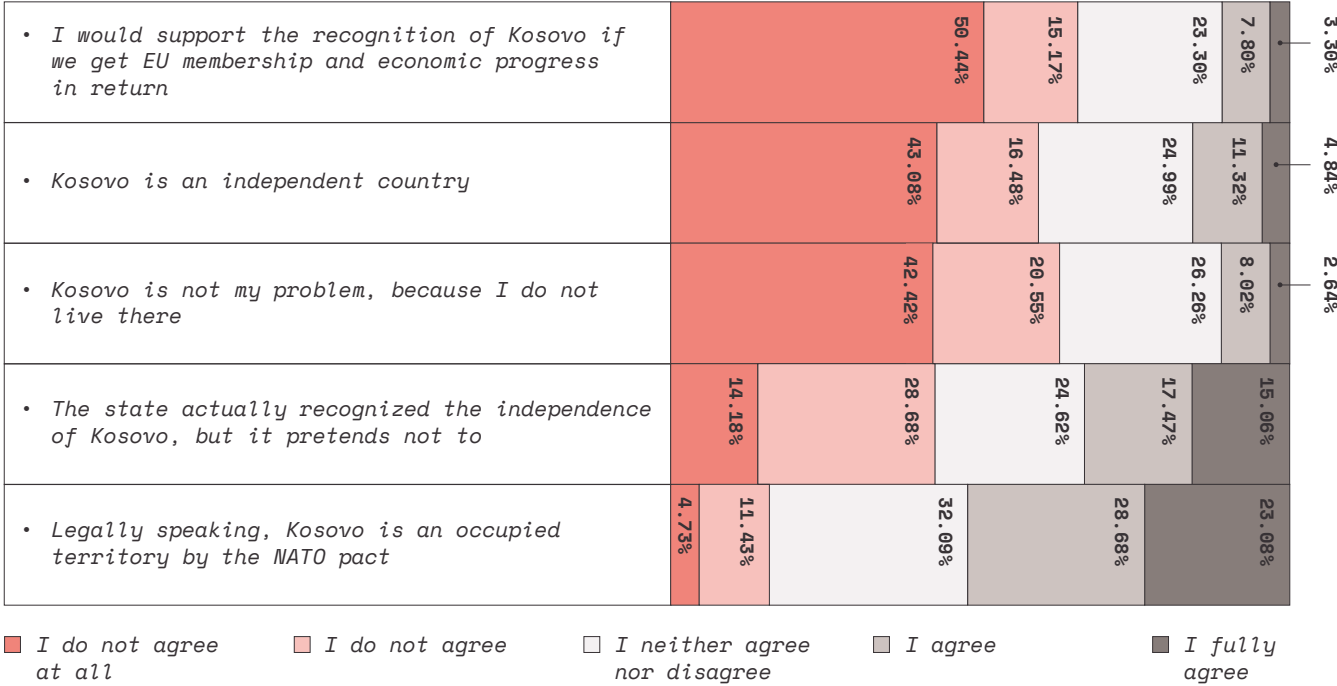


CHART 40: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS RELATED TO KOSOVO?



In recent years, Serbia has witnessed an increased public presence of convicted war criminals<sup>27</sup>, as well as a growing number of murals that glorify them in various ways. These phenomena are part of a broader politics of memory concerning the 1990s wars in Serbia, especially after 2012, which is shaped by a dominant narrative claiming that "the Serbian people can finally and proudly remember their heroes and victims."<sup>28</sup> This raises several important questions: What does remembrance of the 1990s wars mean to young people growing up surrounded by such a narrative? What does reconciliation in the region mean to them—and do they even believe reconciliation is possible? To begin answering these questions, we asked young people whether they believe efforts toward reconciliation between the former warring sides should be pursued. The good news is that half of them (52%) believe that reconciliation should be worked on, while only 11% think it is not necessary. (*Chart 41*). To better understand the responses to the previous question, we asked young people why they think reconciliation is important, as well as why they believe efforts toward reconciliation should not be pursued. Once again, a large percentage of respondents answered that they did not know (48.13%). Most of those who provided an answer expressed a kind of tautological view—"reconciliation is important for peace in the Balkans." A smaller percentage gave reasons related to building the future (12.31%), normalizing relations (5.61%), and economic progress (2.86%) (*Chart 42*).

27 *The opinion about War Crimes in the 2022 Election Campaign (Odnos prema ratnim zločinima u izbornoj kampanji 2022. godine); War Criminals in the 2020 Election Campaign (Ratni zločinci u izbornoj kampanji 2020. godine);*

28 Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory of the 1990s Wars in Serbia: HISTORICAL REVISIONISM AND CHALLENGES OF MEMORIALIZATION (Politika sećanja na ratove devedesetih u Srbiji: ISTORIJSKI REVIZIONIZAM I IZAZOVI MEMORIJALIZACIJE)*, p. 5.

On the other hand, when asked why reconciliation efforts should not be pursued, nearly all respondents chose "do not know" (89.34%). The few answers given can be grouped into several categories: those who believe that hostilities will always exist and cannot be overcome; those who think reconciliation is impossible due to the brutality of the crimes committed; and those who equate reconciliation with forgetting the victims and crimes. Although a very small percentage, the last view indicates that a certain number of young people fundamentally do not understand what reconciliation truly means and entails.

Although a large number of young people believe that efforts toward reconciliation are necessary, there are differences in how possible they consider reconciliation between Serbs and various other groups who were on opposing sides during the wars of the 1990s. Once again, we see that a significant percentage of young people (between 32.2% and 37.47%) do not have a clear stance on this matter. In general, young people are not very optimistic about the possibility of reconciliation. They have the most confidence in the possibility of reconciliation between Serbs and Croats (3.096), followed by reconciliation between Serbs and Bosniaks (2.964), and the least confidence in the possibility of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians (2.626) (*Chart 43*).

Given that various studies have demonstrated that contact with members of another group most often leads to a reduction in prejudice, we wanted to see what percentage of young people had the experience of traveling to countries of the former Yugoslavia Serbia was at war with. Half of the young people (49.53%) never traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, or Kosovo. As expected, the largest number of young people—almost

CHART 41: DO YOU THINK RECONCILIATION BETWEEN FORMERLY WARRING SIDES SHOULD BE PURSUED?

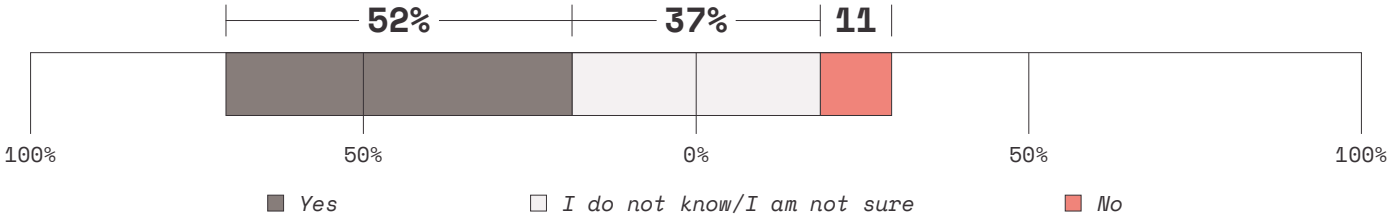


CHART 42: WHY DO YOU THINK RECONCILIATION IS IMPORTANT?

• For peace in the Balkans	19.23%
• For the future and future generations	12.31%
• To normalize relations	5.61%
• For economic development and cooperation	2.86%
• Because spreading hate is harmful	2.53%
• Because we are the same people and neighbors with relatively similar languages	2.53%
• I do not know	48.13%

CHART 43: RECONCILIATION PROSPECTS

• Reconciliation is possible between Serbs and Bosniaks	9.23%	15.60%	37.47%	31.65%	6.04%
• Reconciliation is possible between Serbs and Croats	12.75%	18.24%	34.07%	29.78%	5.17%
• Reconciliation is possible between Serbs and Albanians	23.08%	20.11%	32.20%	20.44%	4.18%
	I do not agree at all	I do not agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I fully agree

half—traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina (40.13%), nearly a third to Croatia (28.66%), and the smallest number to Kosovo (13.34%). About 16% traveled to both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. (*Chart 44*). Additionally, we asked young people how safe they would feel if they were to travel now to Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kosovo. Young people would feel

safest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (61% safe, and only 16% unsafe). Regarding safety in Croatia, opinions are divided: 40% of young people would feel safe, while as many as 29% would not feel safe if they went there now. Half of the young people (51%) describe traveling to Kosovo as unsafe, while only one-fifth (20%) would feel safe in Kosovo. (*Chart 45*).

CHART 44: HAVE YOU EVER TRAVELED TO ( )?

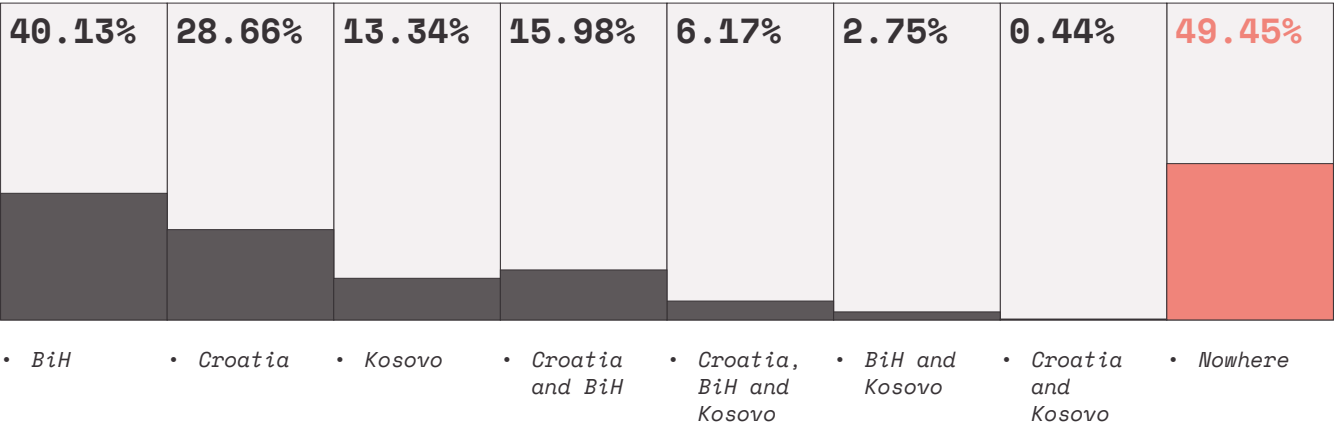
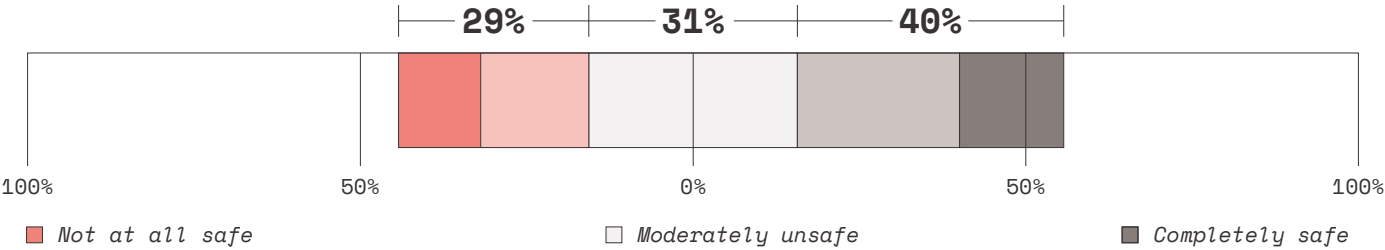
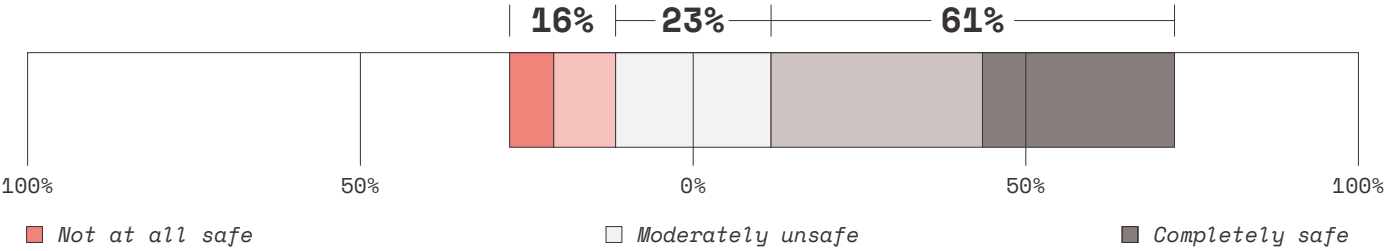


CHART 45: HOW SAFE WOULD YOU FEEL TO TRAVEL TO...

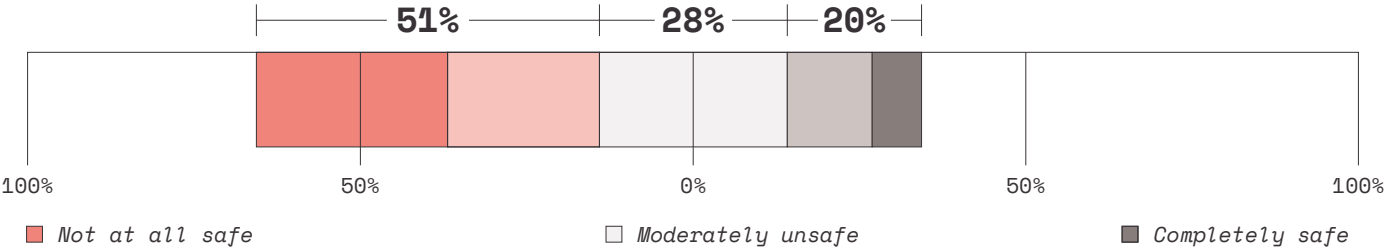
→ CROATIA?



→ BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA?



→ KOSOVO?



WHO SHOULD WORK ON RECONCILIATION?

The majority of young people believe that all segments of society should work together on reconciliation (38.13%), about one in ten respondents think that state institutions should take on this role (10.77%), while a very small percentage believe that individuals/citizens (5.27%) or activist groups (2.2%) should be responsible for working on reconciliation. (Chart 46). Since state institutions have the potential to either help or hinder reconciliation processes through various activities, we wanted to find out what young people think about how much certain state institutions contribute to reconciliation. All three institutions we asked about were rated very poorly by young people in terms of their contribution to reconciliation (on average between 2.31 and 2.46 on a scale of 1 to 5). The institution perceived as contributing the least to reconciliation is the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (2.318), followed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia (2.386), while the institution seen as contributing the most among these three is the President of the Republic of Serbia (4.465). Approximately half of the young respondents believe that the National Assembly of Serbia (56%), the Government of Serbia (54%), and the President of Serbia (52%) do not contribute to reconciliation, while only between 14% and 20% believe they do contribute. (Chart 47).

CHART 46: WHAT PARTIES SHOULD WORK ON THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE FORMERLY WARRING SIDES?

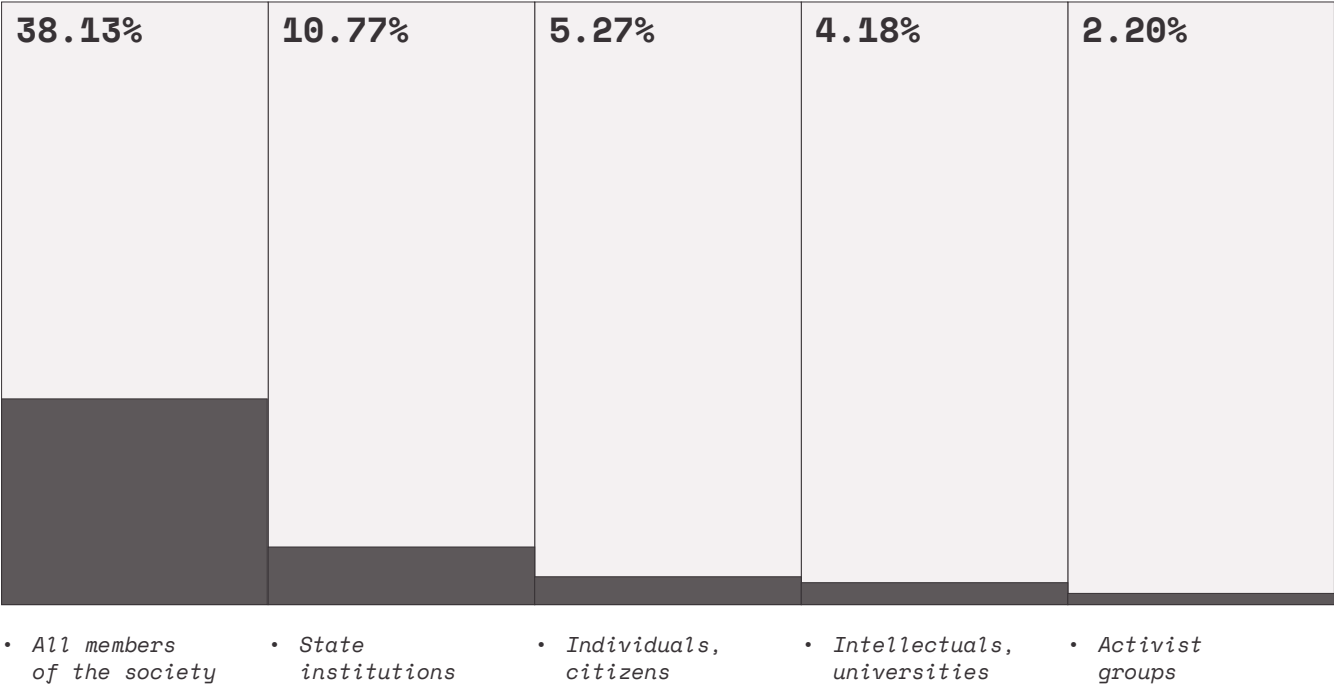
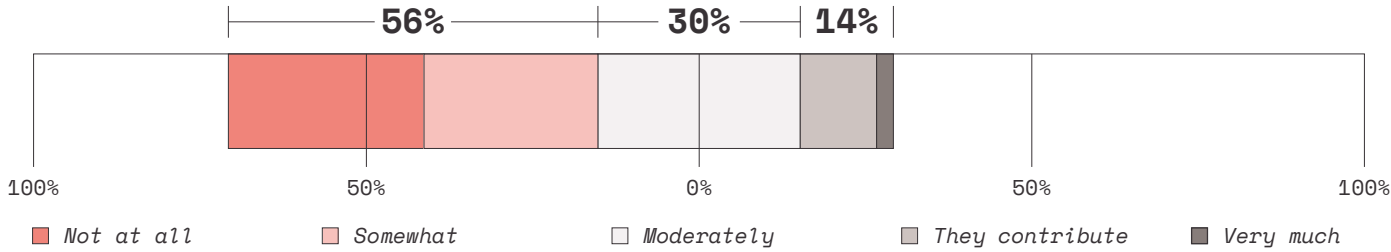


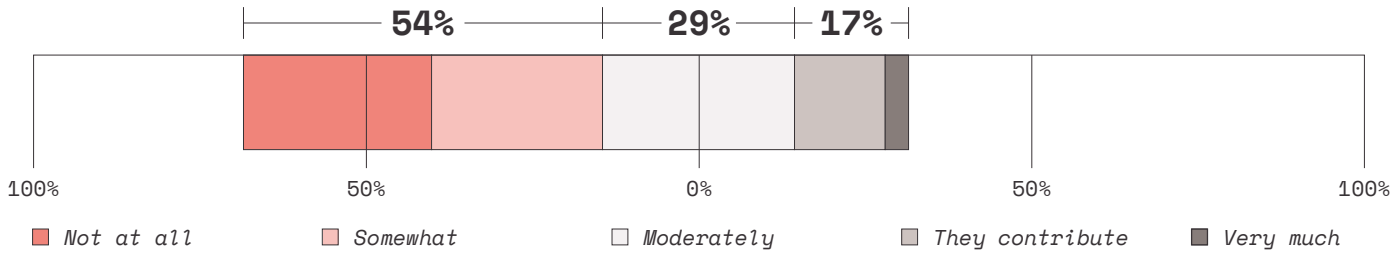


CHART 47: HOW MUCH, IN YOUR OPINION, DO THE FOLLOWING ENTITIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION IN THE REGION?

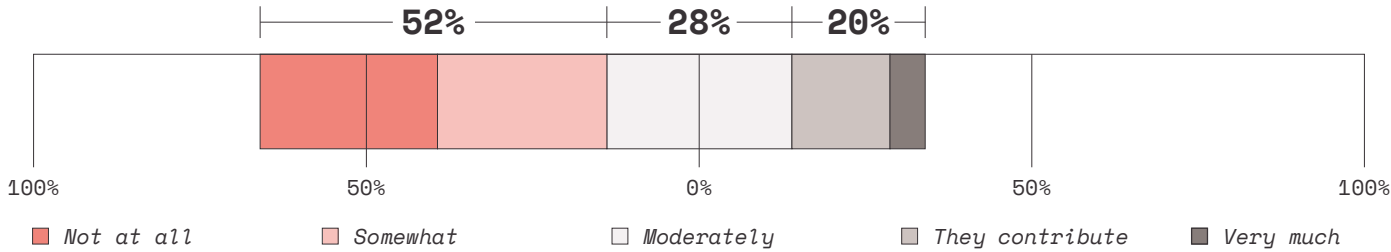
→ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



→ GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



→ PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



To better understand young people’s opinions about reconciliation, we asked them how important they considered confronting the events of the wars in the former SFRY, offering several statements commonly present in public discourse about the 1990s wars. Young people are divided on this matter — about half (46.55%) believe confronting the past is important, while the other half (43.67%) do not (*Chart 48*). However, a more detailed look at agreement with individual statements reveals a clearer picture of their views. Among those who consider confronting the past important for Serbia, about half (55.89%) believe it is necessary to finally show that Serbs are not to blame for the crimes attributed to them (which represents 26.07% of the total sample). The other half (47.10%) think it is important

because only by confronting the truth and accepting responsibility can we expect a better future (20.57% of the total sample). On the other hand, among those who think confronting the past is not important, there are different reasons for this stance. About one-third (31.23%) share the view that reconciliation is impossible because we will never agree on the truth about the events (which is 13.64% of the total sample). A similar percentage believes that the whole truth will never be revealed. Nearly one-fifth (16.37%) believe that confronting the past will bring no change in the future (7.15% of the total sample). Additionally, about 10% consider the topic of confrontation irrelevant today (11.33%) and think Serbia faces more important problems, such as economic development (9.82%).

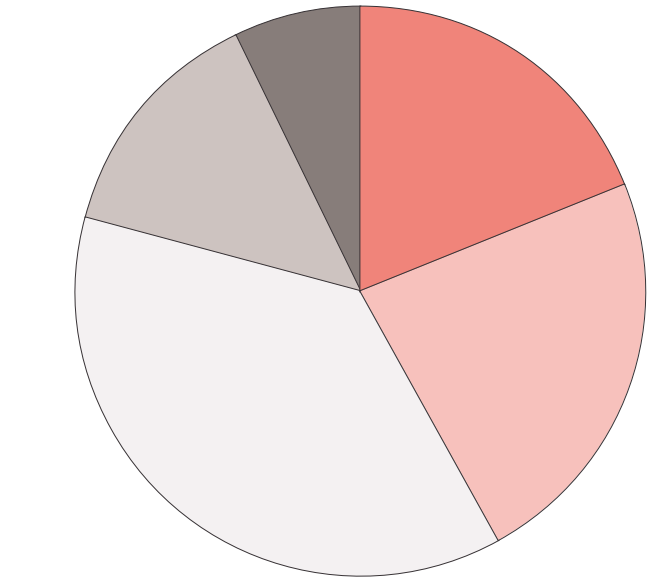
CHART 48: IS CONFRONTING THE EVENTS OF THE WARS IN THE FORMER SFRY IMPORTANT FOR SERBIA?

• It is important so that we finally show that the Serbs are not guilty of the crimes attributed to them	26.07%
• It is important because only if we face the truth and accept our share of responsibility can we expect a better future	20.57%
• It doesn't matter, because we will never agree on the truth about those events anyway	13.64%
• It doesn't matter because the whole truth will never be revealed	13.64%
• It doesn't matter, because such a confrontation will not change anything in the future	7.15%
• It doesn't matter, because it is no longer a relevant topic today	4.95%
• It doesn't matter, because Serbia faces much more important problems, such as starting the economy and improving people's well-being	4.29%
• I do not know	9.68%

CHART 49: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS A NEED TO ESTABLISH A REGIONAL BODY THAT, ALONGSIDE COURTS, WOULD DEAL WITH ESTABLISHING FACTS ABOUT CRIMES COMMITTED DURING THE WARS (E.G., A JOINT VICTIMS' LIST)?



The majority of respondents (42%) express little (23%) or no support (19%) for the establishment of a regional body that, alongside courts, would deal with establishing the facts about crimes committed during the wars. A smaller



percentage (20%) express much (13%) or very much support (7%) for the creation of such a body. Again, a large portion of respondents hold a moderate stance (37%), which can also be interpreted as a form of neutrality (*Chart 49*).

In recent years, we have witnessed an increasing presence of convicted war criminals in public life; some are active in political campaigns, while others publish books financed by ministries of the Republic of Serbia. The majority of young people consider such occurrences unacceptable (*Chart 50*). Nearly two-thirds (64.51%) agree that it is unacceptable for individuals convicted of war crimes to actively participate in political life, while only 15.71% disagree with this statement. As shown in *Chart 50*, the situation is practically the same for the other statements.

The picture changes somewhat when asked about murals glorifying Ratko Mladić, a convicted war criminal. In fact, practically half (48%) of young people do not think that murals of Ratko Mladić should be removed. (*Chart 51*). It seems that young people tend to agree with limiting the public presence of war criminals when these views are presented in an abstract way, as in the previous question (e.g., “People who have been legally convicted of war crimes should not hold public office”), but when it comes to a concrete example of glorifying convicted war criminals in the form of murals, their opinion changes. Additionally, a vast majority of young people (85%) said they had not noticed an increase in murals and graffiti related to the wars of the 1990s. Since this increase is evident and has been documented by many

organizations, it is possible that young people simply do not pay much attention to content related to the 1990s wars. An alternative explanation could be that young people do not perceive such content on walls as a problem.

Since the dominant narrative about the 1990s wars is saturated with figures of victims and heroes, we examined whether young people believe there were heroes in the 1990s wars and who they consider them to be. While the majority of respondents said they "did not know" if there were heroes, one quarter (25%) said there were, and approximately one third (32%) said there were none (*Chart 53*). When asked who these heroes were, most again said they did not know. However, among the small percentage willing to answer, most identified Ratko Mladić as a hero (6.59%), followed by the heroes of Košare (5.05%) (*Chart 54*). After that came ordinary people/civilians/innocent people at 2.2%, Radovan Karadžić at 2.09%, and all those who defended/ soldiers at 1.43%.<sup>29</sup>

Most young people never heard of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (92%), but among those who have heard of the organization, the majority correctly identify its main activities.

29 Only responses given by more than 1% of respondents are presented.

CHART 50: POLITICAL AND PUBLIC ACTIVITIES OF CONVICTED WAR CRIMINALS

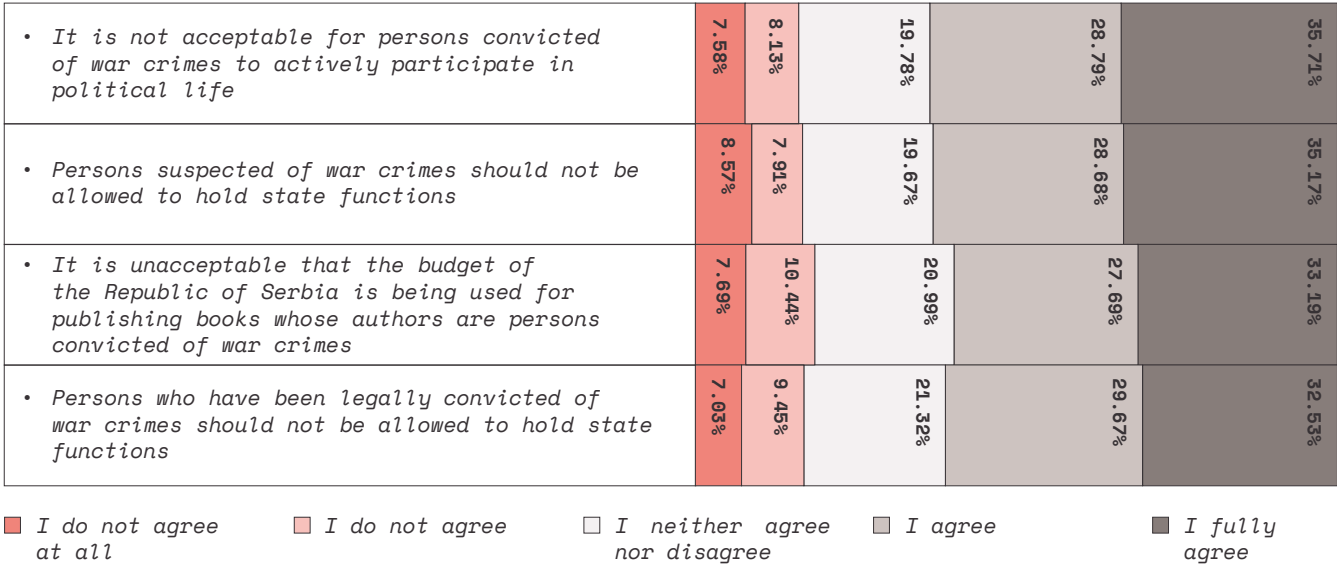


CHART 51: DO YOU THINK THAT MURALS/GRAFFITI OF RATKO MLADIĆ SHOULD BE REMOVED?

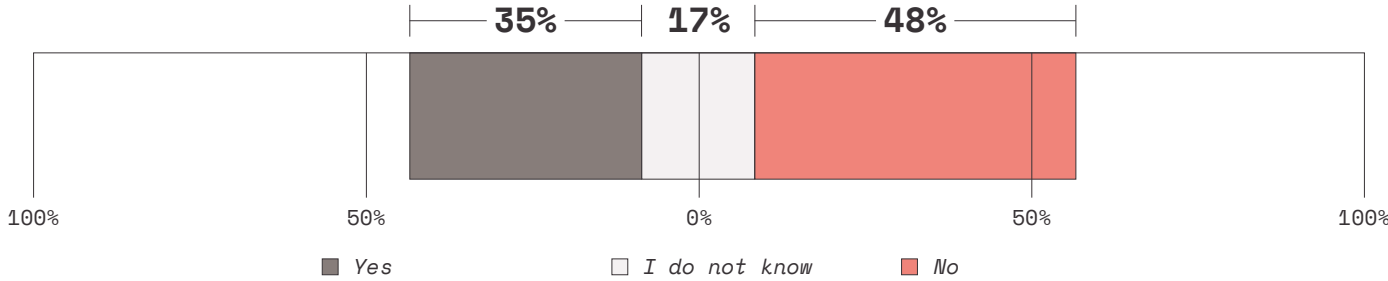


CHART 52: CAN YOU NAME ANY MURAL/GRAFFITI RELATED TO THE 1990S?

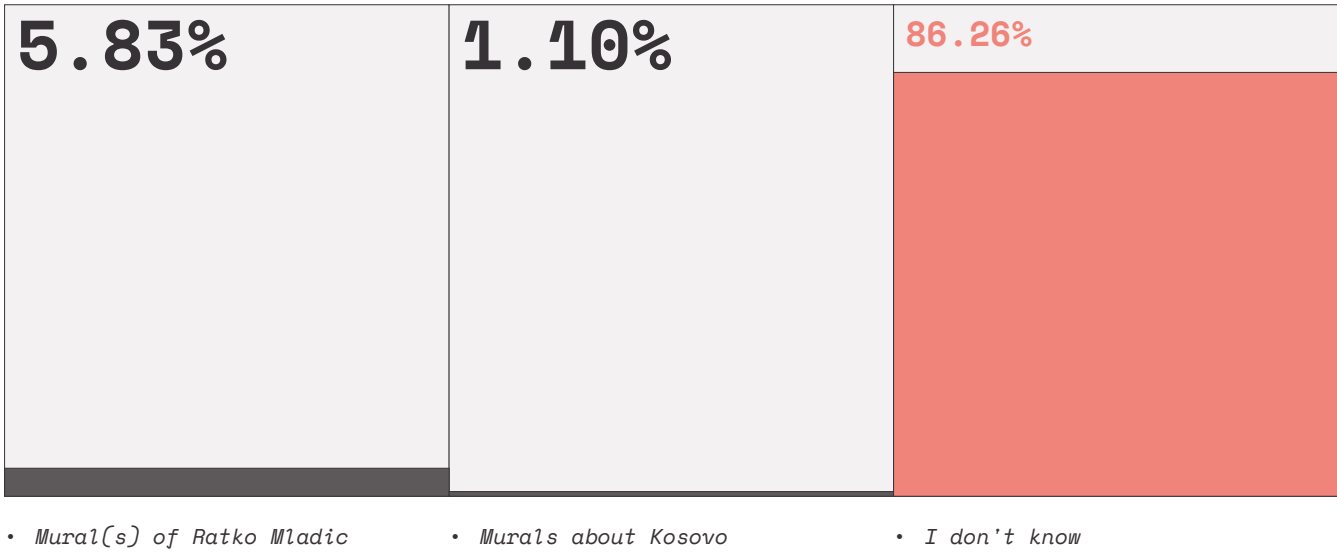


CHART 53: WERE THERE ANY HEROES IN THE 1990S WARS?

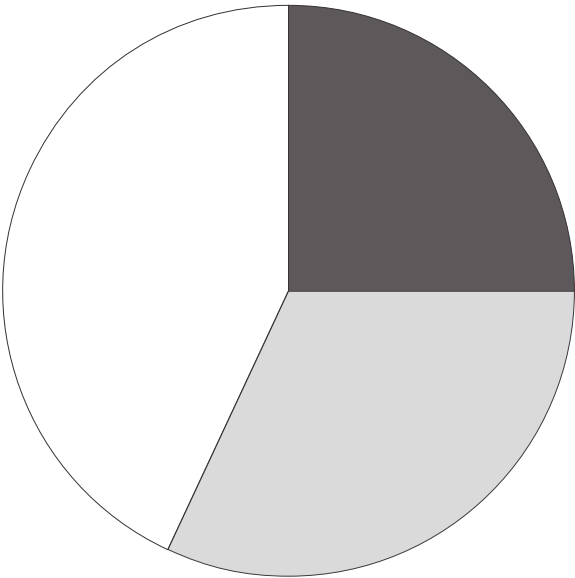
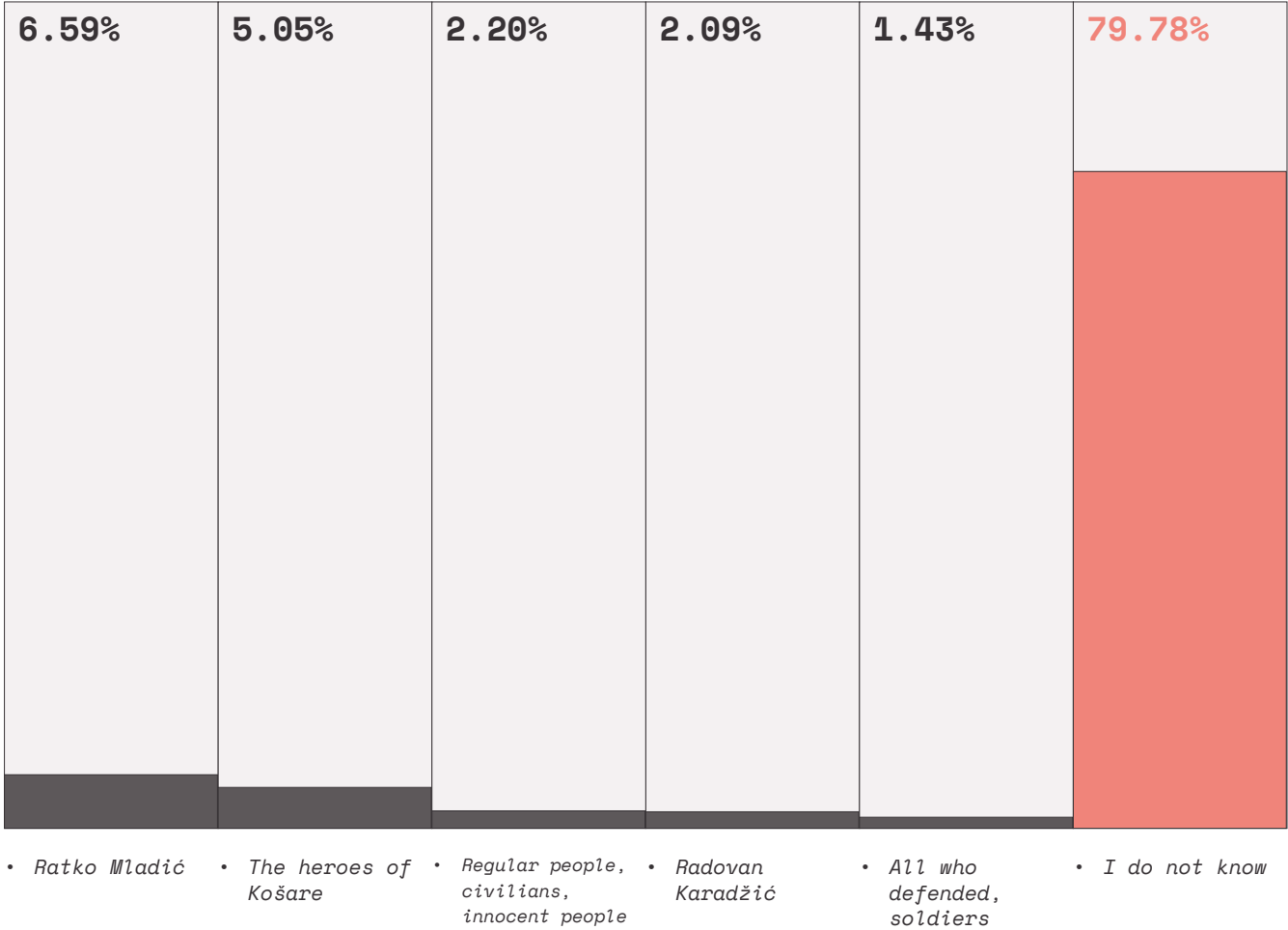


CHART 54: WHO ARE THE 1990S WARS' HEROES?





Based on the presented data, various conclusions can be drawn. Here, we will focus on several findings that, in our opinion, are the most important and robust. The knowledge young people have about the wars of the 1990s is, by their own assessment, very modest, as is their general knowledge of history. Male respondents and older participants consistently rate their knowledge as higher. The largest share report acquiring knowledge about the 1990s wars from teachers/in school or from parents/family members. As expected, young people who have family members with some form of war experience learn more about the wars through direct contact with those who experienced the war firsthand. Young people estimate that very little is taught about the wars during history classes, and the majority believe that more should be taught about the 1990s wars. Interestingly, those who think more should be taught in school tend to have a higher score on the ethos of conflict scale, agree more with strategies of moral disengagement, and hold a more negative view of the Hague Tribunal. Knowledge about the number of victims is also limited; most young people underestimate the total number of victims of the 1990s wars. At the same time, they overestimate the number of victims from the NATO bombing, which aligns with the dominant narrative present in the media, speeches of state representatives, and history teaching materials. Moreover, young people's knowledge is biased. They possess more knowledge about events where Serbs were victims and know little about those where the victims were members of other ethnic groups. Accordingly, the vast majority have never heard of the existence of mass graves on Serbian territory, while the small percentage who have heard of them relatively correctly identify their locations.

When it comes to the Hague Tribunal, young people also assess their knowledge as modest, yet they predominantly express a negative opinion about it. A large percentage believes that the Tribunal was a political court rather than a legal institution—a phrase often heard in Serbian public discourse, which reflects the perception that the court's decisions were biased and aligned with certain political interests. Most do not believe that the Tribunal's verdicts were fair and impartial, nor that it contributed to uncovering the full truth or to the democratic development of Serbian society. Their perception of the Tribunal's bias is further illustrated by the widespread agreement with statements such as “The main purpose of the Tribunal was to place the blame for war crimes on Serbs” and “Its purpose was to fulfill the demands of the international community.” In addition, most young people in Serbia are not aware that a Special Court for War Crimes exists in Serbia to handle cases related to the wars of the 1990s, and the majority do not support domestic trials for war crimes.

The actors involved in the wars of the 1990s and the opinions about them represent a distinct topic that helps us better understand young people's views on those conflicts. Most respondents have heard of Slobodan Milošević and other figures who were active on the Serbian side during the wars. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents have never heard of Alija Izetbegović, Ante Gotovina, Nebojša Pavković, or Vladimir Lazarević. The opinions of those young people who are familiar with these individuals reveal a clear pattern that also appears in later responses. Namely, it seems that opinions about these actors depend almost entirely on their ethnic background. Regardless of the Hague Tribunal's verdicts or the type of role they played

during the war (military or political), all Serbian actors who participated on Serbia's side are evaluated more positively than those from other ethnic groups who were active participants in the wars. A more detailed examination of opinions about four individuals indicted/convicted for war crimes by the Hague Tribunal confirms this pattern. The results are consistent across all four: the majority of respondents believe they are not responsible for the crimes for which they were indicted or convicted. Most are also unaware of the specific crimes, although those who do respond generally identify them with relative accuracy. The majority of young people in Serbia have not heard of most of the 21 war crimes committed during the 1990s conflicts. A similar ethnic pattern observed in their opinions about individual actors is also evident in their familiarity with and evaluation of specific war crimes. Of the 21 war crimes we asked about, the highest awareness was recorded for crimes committed against Serbs—with the exception of the Srebrenica genocide. In addition to the surprisingly high percentage of youth who express doubt about the authenticity of many of these events, the data reveal a pattern consistent with responses to previous questions. The lowest levels of doubt are expressed regarding crimes committed against Serbs, while the highest levels of doubt are reserved for crimes committed by Serbian forces. A similar pattern emerges in responses to the question of whether these events were an inevitable part of war or war crimes. Crimes against Serbs are much more frequently labeled as war crimes compared to those committed against other ethnic groups. These findings reflect a strong alignment between young people's opinions and the dominant narrative in Serbia regarding the wars of the 1990s. While crimes against Serbs are placed at the center of that

narrative, crimes against other groups are often relativized, justified as wartime necessity, or even outright denied. Another data point that clearly demonstrates the focus on Serbian victimhood is found in responses to the question of what the most significant war crime of the 1990s was. The two most common answers are "Operation Storm and Flash" and "NATO bombing," while the genocide in Srebrenica ranks fourth, mentioned by less than 5% of respondents. Interestingly, despite this, more than one-third of young people still believe that the killings of Bosniaks in Srebrenica constitute genocide.

We also examined two theoretical constructs—ethos of conflict and moral disengagement—which may help explain young people's opinions about the wars of the 1990s and about ethnic groups that were on the opposing side in those wars. While the ethos of conflict specifically refers to the conflict between Albanians and Serbs, the moral disengagement scale refers to the wars of the 1990s as a whole. The data show that young people in Serbia exhibit elevated levels of both the ethos of conflict and a tendency toward strategies of moral disengagement. In terms of the ethos of conflict, this is not surprising given the intensification of rhetoric surrounding the normalization of relations with Kosovo and the challenges present in that process since the fall/winter of 2022. As for the moral disengagement score, which indicates a tendency to justify crimes committed by members of one's own group, it further reinforces the previously presented opinions of young people about specific war crimes and actors involved in the 1990s conflicts. When it comes to the normalization of relations with Kosovo, the majority of young people believe that the state should continue working to withdraw

recognition of Kosovo, while an additional 17.14% think the status quo should be maintained. Slightly more than one in ten respondents support working on reconciliation while postponing the status issue for later, and only 6.7% of young people believe that Serbia should recognize Kosovo as an independent state. This position becomes more understandable when we see that the largest number of young people agree with the statement that Kosovo is, legally speaking, a territory occupied by NATO forces. Interestingly, although they do not believe Serbia should recognize Kosovo as an independent state, a significant number of young people agree with the statement that “the state has in fact recognized Kosovo, but is pretending it has not.”

Finally, we asked young people about their opinions about reconciliation and memory, specifically regarding some of the recent trends of revisionism and the relativization of crimes and actors from the 1990s wars. Although the majority of respondents believe that efforts toward reconciliation are necessary, a large number remain doubtful about the possibility of reconciliation between certain groups. More than 40% think reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians is not possible, about 30% believe reconciliation between Serbs and Croats is not possible, and around 25% think reconciliation between Serbs and Bosniaks is not possible. This assessment of reconciliation prospects aligns with the respondents’ personal experiences. Most have traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina and would feel safest traveling there. Following Bosnia and Herzegovina is Croatia, while Kosovo ranks last in terms of perceived safety.

The majority of respondents believe that all parts of society should work together on reconciliation, while one in ten think that state institutions should take the lead in this area. However, most respondents assess that Serbian state institutions (the National Assembly, the Government, and the President) do not do enough to promote reconciliation. About half of the young people consider confronting the past important, but they are divided on the reasons why. Most say the main reason is “to finally show that Serbs are not responsible for the crimes attributed to them,” while a significant portion believes it is important “because only by facing the truth and accepting our share of responsibility can we expect a better future.” Nevertheless, the majority do not think there is a need to establish a regional body in

charge of establishing the facts about the crimes. When it comes to the political and public actions of convicted war criminals, the majority of respondents agree that various forms of such actions are unacceptable when the question is posed in an abstract form. However, in the specific case of glorifying convicted war criminals through murals (such as Ratko Mladić), opinions differ, and most believe that the mural of Ratko Mladić should not be painted over. Interestingly, most young people say they have not noticed an increase in the number of murals and graffiti related to the wars of the 1990s. This is not surprising considering that as many as one-third of young people believe that Ratko Mladić is not responsible for the crimes for which he was convicted. One quarter of young people believe there were heroes in the wars of the 1990s, but most do not specify who they are. Among the small percentage who do answer, the majority name Ratko Mladić as a hero of the wars, followed closely by the heroes of Košare.

A significant percentage of respondents choose the option “I don’t know” or other neutral responses when asked questions on these topics. This could be interpreted as a sign of young people’s lack of knowledge, disinterest, or lack of motivation to share their opinions. However, some authors argue that, particularly regarding issues related to transitional justice and reconciliation, these answers reveal more than mere ignorance or disinterest. While a portion indeed reflects a lack of knowledge, many of these responses can actually be viewed as a specific form of participation in transitional justice processes, manifested in three ways. First, these answers can represent resistance, where choosing “I don’t know” signals opposition to certain transitional justice processes. Second, they can indicate restraint, expressed when voicing a particular opinion might be perceived as a threat to social peace and consensus. Finally, these responses might reflect the feeling among respondents that transitional justice processes are constructed by and for a narrow group of people, leaving ordinary citizens feeling excluded and not legitimate participants in the debates on these matters.<sup>30</sup> In the context of the data presented in this report, it is most likely that a combination of all three phenomena is at play.

<sup>30</sup> Ivor Sokolić, *Claims to Ignorance as a Form of Participation in Transitional Justice, Cooperation and Conflict* 58, no. 1 (March 2023): pp.102–28, available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367221090111>.

# CONCLUSION

→ Young people in Serbia have limited knowledge about the wars of the 1990s, and what they do know mainly comes from school and from parents or other family members. They believe that insufficient attention is given to this topic in schools and that more time should be devoted to teaching about the wars of the 1990s.

→ When it comes to war crimes and their perpetrators, this limited knowledge is conditioned by the ethnic identity of both victims and perpetrators, reflecting the dominant narrative in Serbia regarding the 1990s wars. Young people have the most knowledge about crimes committed against Serbs, while they know very little about crimes committed against other ethnic groups; these are often justified or even outright denied. An exception is the Srebrenica massacre, which many young people have heard of and recognize as genocide. Accordingly, the gravest crimes are identified as those committed against Serbs. Actors of Serbian nationality involved in the wars are rated much more positively than actors of other nationalities, regardless of the severity of the crimes for which they were charged or convicted, or other factors.

→ The majority perceive the Hague Tribunal and its verdicts as politically motivated and biased, viewing it as a court whose main goal was to place all the blame on Serbs. Accordingly, most believe that even those actors who were indicted for war crimes by the Tribunal are not actually guilty of those crimes.

→ These findings are further supported by two socio-psychological scales. When it comes to the wars as a whole, young people show a tendency toward moral disengagement strategies, which serve to justify crimes

BASED ON THE PRESENTED DATA, CERTAIN CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN ABOUT THE OPINIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA ABOUT THE WARS OF THE 1990S

committed against other ethnic groups. In relation to Kosovo specifically, they demonstrate elevated scores on the ethos of conflict scale.

→ Regarding Kosovo, the majority of young people believe that “Kosovo, from a legal standpoint, is a territory occupied by NATO” and that Serbia should continue campaigning for the withdrawal of recognitions and maintain the status quo. Although only a small percentage support Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo as an independent state, a significant number agree that Serbia has, in practice, already recognized Kosovo.

→ Young people believe that efforts toward reconciliation should be made, but many consider reconciliation with other ethnic groups in the region to be impossible. While most think that all sectors of society should work toward reconciliation, the majority believe that the institutions of the Republic of Serbia are doing very little in this regard.

→ Opinions are divided when it comes to the importance of dealing with the past. Among the half who believe it is important, only half think so because they believe that acknowledging one’s own responsibility is necessary for building a better future. A full quarter, however, believe it is important primarily to finally demonstrate that Serbs are not guilty of the crimes they are accused of.

→ Although they agree that the public and political engagement of convicted war criminals should be limited, they do not object to murals and graffiti glorifying one of them, and some explicitly name Ratko Mladić as a hero of the wars of the 1990s.

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