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Trends. To Contest or not to Contest: A Necessary Ambivalence in Yugoslavia

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(***IBPP Note. (Oct 5, 2000). After this article was written, the highest court in Yugoslavia annulled parts of the September 24th presidential elections. The annulment seemed to suggest that those elections with all 5 candidates would have to be repeated. After the annulment was made known, mass demonstrations in Belgrade occurred including the storming of the parliament building and the knocking of state television off the air. Also, Tanjug, the official news agency of Yugoslavia, announced that Vojislav Kostunica was the elected president, while independent journalists had taken over Studio-B, a second television station, which had been under the control of the Milosevic government. In addition, segments of the police, security, and military forces were at least passively facilitating opposition demonstrations and other actions.***)

There are very intense international, regional, and local controversies over the need for a second round of voting after the election for the federal presidency of Yugoslavia seems to have given Vojislav Kostunica more than enough votes to win the office outright.

Should Mr. Kostunica and his supporters contest a second round? Yes, say some observers. After all, Mr. Kostunica can only win a larger electoral victory this time. His political credibility and leverage will only be greater. He will have reinforced democratic tenets by once again demonstrating the people's preference for him over Slobodan Milosevic. And Mr. Milosevic with all his alleged expertise in fraudulent electoral behavior will not be able to mask the size of the next Kostunica victory. Moreover, the unrest, anger, and moral empowerment arising from segments of the Yugoslav population will prove ineffective in driving Mr. Milosevic from office and can only peter out. In the meantime, such collective behaviors may hurt the general population much more than Mr. Milosevic and his cronies. As well, many Yugoslavs may not be yet as energized by the size of Mr. Kostunica's victory or Mr. Milosevic's defeat as they might in a culture with a precedent for something approaching free and fair elections. And Mr. Milosevic will merely declare himself the victor if Mr. Kostunica does not contest a second round.

Should Kostunica and his supporters boycott a second round? Yes, say some observers. Given that Mr. Milosevic seems to have engaged in fraudulent methods before, during, and after the first vote, what is to prevent him from engaging in the same sort of activities again? Besides, there is growing unrest, anger, and moral empowerment in Yugoslavia that surely will sweep Mr. Milosevic out of office. And, of course, Mr. Kostunica has already won enough votes to preclude a second electoral round. In addition, the voters, having in all likelihood already elected Mr. Kostunica--but to no immediate effect on future governance--may well be less likely to go through the motions again.

The fact is that political psychological data are not helpful in the idiographic task of deciding what to do. Each observer of and participant in the current controversy have engaged in a unique calculus of selections from past behavior; inferences about the main player's traits; the dynamics of collective behavior through time; dependence on various authoritative sources, observations, pseudo-experiments, and the formal and informal argumentation and logic constituting reason; and even powerful psychodynamics that may be unknowable to the self. Some observers will make the right call,

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some the wrong. But the even linkage between their calls and components of their a priori calculus will be highly problematic.

Like the decision in the recent past to bomb Yugoslavia by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to stop Serbian atrocities against Kosovar Albanians, the decision to contest or boycott a second round may be no more than an example of flying blind. (See Dieussaert, K., Schaeken, W., Schroyens, W., & d'Ydewalle, G. (2000). Strategies during complex conditional inferences. *Thinking and Reasoning*, 6, 125-160; Djilas, A. (October 4, 2000). Yugoslavia can trust its voters. *The New York Times*, p. A31; Emler, N., & Stace, K. (1999). What does principled versus conventional moral reasoning convey to others about the politics and psychology of the reasoner? *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29, 455-468; Goldberg, J. H., Lerner, J. S., & Tetlock, P. E. (1999). Rage and reason: The psychology of the intuitive prosecutor. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29, 781-795; Klaczynski, P. A., Gordon, D. H., & Fauth, J. (1997). Goal-oriented critical reasoning and individual differences in critical reasoning biases. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 470-485.) (Keywords: Boycott, Democracy, Elections, Kostunica, Milosevic, Yugoslavia.)