DPC

Democratization Policy Council

ЕВРОТИНК
ЦЕНТАР ЗА
ЕВРОПСКИ СТРАТЕГИИ

CENTER FOR
EUROPEAN STRATEGIES
EUROTHINK
eurothink.mk

SELL OUT, TUNE OUT, GET OUT, OR FREAK OUT?

Understanding Corruption, State Capture, Radicalization, Pacification, Resilience, and Emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

Sell Out, Tune Out, Get Out, or Freak Out?

Understanding Corruption, State Capture, Radicalization, Pacification, Resilience, and Emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

2021

Sell Out, Tune Out, Get Out, or Freak Out?

Understanding Corruption, State Capture, Radicalization, Pacification, Resilience, and Emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

Democratization Policy Council (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Valery Perry (Project Manager)
Senada Šelo Šabić (BiH Field Research Director)
Kurt Bassuener (BiH/North Macedonia Political Analyst)
Saša Kulenović (BiH Media Lead Researcher)
Alma Midžić (Field Research Assistant)

EUROTHINK – Center for European Strategies (North Macedonia)

Ivan Stefanovski (Project Coordinator)
Ljupcho Petkovski (Political Analyst)
Dimitar Nikolovski (North Macedonia Field Research Director)
Magdalena Lembovska (North Macedonia Researcher)
Ajshe Mehmeti (North Macedonia Field Research Assistant)

Executive Summary and Recommendations

This initiative was inspired by a simple question: can the ideas presented in Sarah Chayes' book *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*, help in understanding the social, political, and economic dynamics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and North Macedonia in 2020?

Chayes made the contention, based on her deep and multifaceted experience on the ground in Afghanistan and her study of other countries, that systemic corruption and self-dealing as practiced by governments (commonly referred to as state capture) fuels popular resentment that feeds into radicalization, including (but not limited to) violent extremism. This research project is an exploratory proof of concept to determine whether or not the state capture model/extremism nexus developed by Chayes is applicable to countries in the Western Balkans. A mixed methodology approach including a historical document review, highly localized field research, an extensive media/social media review, and an online poll generated a vast range of data for study and triangulation. Following nearly nine months of desk research, theoretical study, and fieldwork, the answer is "Yes." The fundamental analytical linkage between corruption, state (and party) capture and radicalization is sound. However, for the two Western Balkan countries studied, additional explanations and nuances provide a fuller description of the social processes underway, while also providing a foundation for prescription.

This process began with an analysis of the Chayes framework and model, providing a conceptual framework for further consideration and application. Then, nine municipalities in BiH were selected, ensuring a diverse mix of ethno-national, geographic, and internal administrative/political characteristics.[1] This selection includes municipalities from both entities, Brčko District, four cantons and two geographic regions (Krajina and the north east). The team specifically excluded large cities that have been the focus of much past research and programmatic engagement (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Tuzla). Nine communities in eight municipalities in North Macedonia were selected for geographic, ethnic, and linguistic diversity.[2]

In BiH, an extensive media tracking spreadsheet was developed, consisting of 3,020 items related to corruption, state capture, extremism, and polarization. Traditional and online media were monitored, including a preliminary survey of approximately 25,000 posts from BiH users on 4Chan during the project period. In North Macedonia, the more complex and complicated media environment included a wide survey and comparison of sources in both the Macedonian and Albanian language, a review of dozens of portals, Facebook pages/groups, YouTube, and Twitter feeds.

---

[1] Bihać, Bosanski Petrovac, Brčko, Glamoč, Maglaj, Mrkonjić Grad, Petrovo, Srebrenik, and Žepče.
[2] Chair, Gazi Baba, Gostivar, Kumanovo, Shtip, Struga, Strumica, Tetovo, and Veles.

Certain elements of the extensive planned fieldwork were affected by COVID-19 and related travel restrictions. However, in BiH two full rounds of fieldwork were conducted (one before and one after the pandemic emerged), with a remote outreach round in between. In North Macedonia, several target communities were visited before the pandemic, with the remaining field outreach commencing once restrictions were lifted. Nearly 200 individuals participated in interviews and focus groups; in North Macedonia this notably included a number of retired police officers, and members/leaders of local patriotic originations considered as extremist, or potentially extremist.

An indicative online poll was not initially foreseen, but was conducted to compensate for the pandemic's (limited) impact on planned travel. Over 1,700 responses were collected in the two countries. Following the completion of data collection, findings were prepared to plainly outline key trends, anecdotes, examples, and outliers. The field element of the research was so rich that in addition to summarizing data highlights in thematically organized Findings chapters, a granular, ethnographic, descriptive summary of each of the communities researched was prepared, to in effect provide an anthropological look at the impact of recent history on these places and their inhabitants. These snapshots are intended to provide a living narrative of these communities over three decades since the end of Yugoslavia, as they react and respond to regional and global change. This substantial body of data was reviewed to understand each case study country on its own and comparatively, to understand similarities and differences. *The findings and analysis confirm that extremism is a function of malgovernance as manifest through state capture, corruption, and the lack of justice. Taken together, these characteristics deprive citizens of a sense of dignity, purpose, and meaning.*

Inspired by the models presented by Chayes,[3] and together with local expertise and the empirical findings of this study, three conceptual models were developed to describe a) the problem set; b) citizen response options; and c) options to effect systemic change. Each of these models was inspired by and is applicable to both BiH and North Macedonia.

The political economies of BiH and North Macedonia are described in Model 1:

---

[3] For Afghanistan, Egypt, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Nigeria.

Model 1
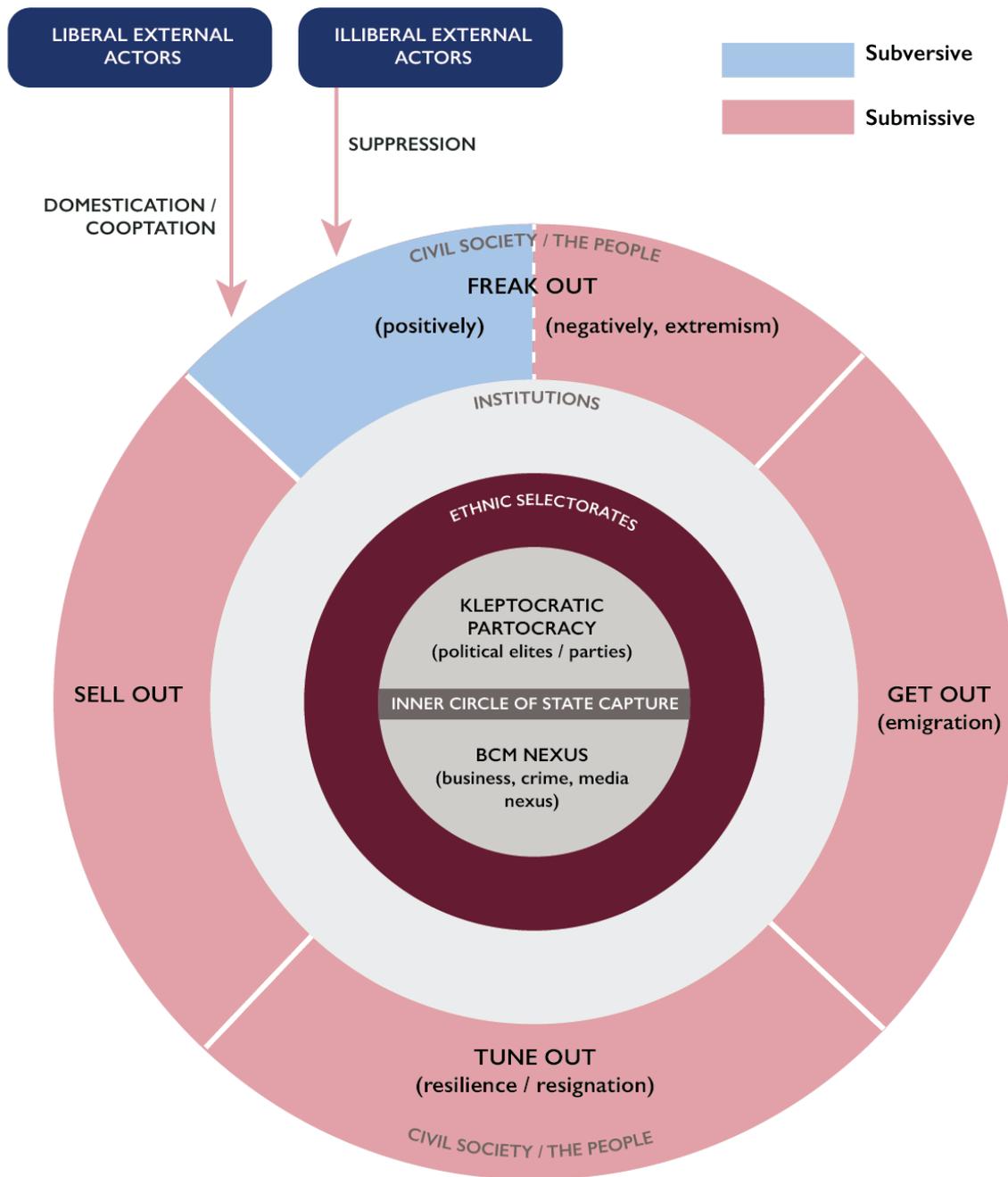
The model represents a tripartite inner core of state capture consisting of a kleptocratic partitocracy and business/criminal/media nexus, the ethnic selectorate that keeps them in power, and the institutions that both facilitate and maintain the capture. The outer circle represents non-aligned and unserved citizens. The captured three inner layers are funded from domestic and external sources, with the former coming from taxes, fees, concessions, and tenders, and the latter from external forms (financial, material, and moral) of support from liberal or illiberal actors.

The individuals who choose to "sell out" often do so for purely transactional reasons – not on the basis of a deeply help ideology or belief system. Similarly, some may join in the hope that they can have a positive impact "from within," only to find the obstacles to change are too substantial. This suggests that they are potentially open to new systems, particularly if and when they believe to feel that the system to which they have sold out is no longer valuing them or offering them anything. In practice, support is leased or rented, not bought in perpetuity. While the inner circle (Model 1) relies on gaming the structure, this dynamic works from the bottom-up as well, with individuals also exploiting systemic incentives.

Understanding these options fed exploration of the kinds of resilience extant and needed in the case study countries. Analysis of the response options available to citizens in this kind of system led to development of Model 2:

Model 2
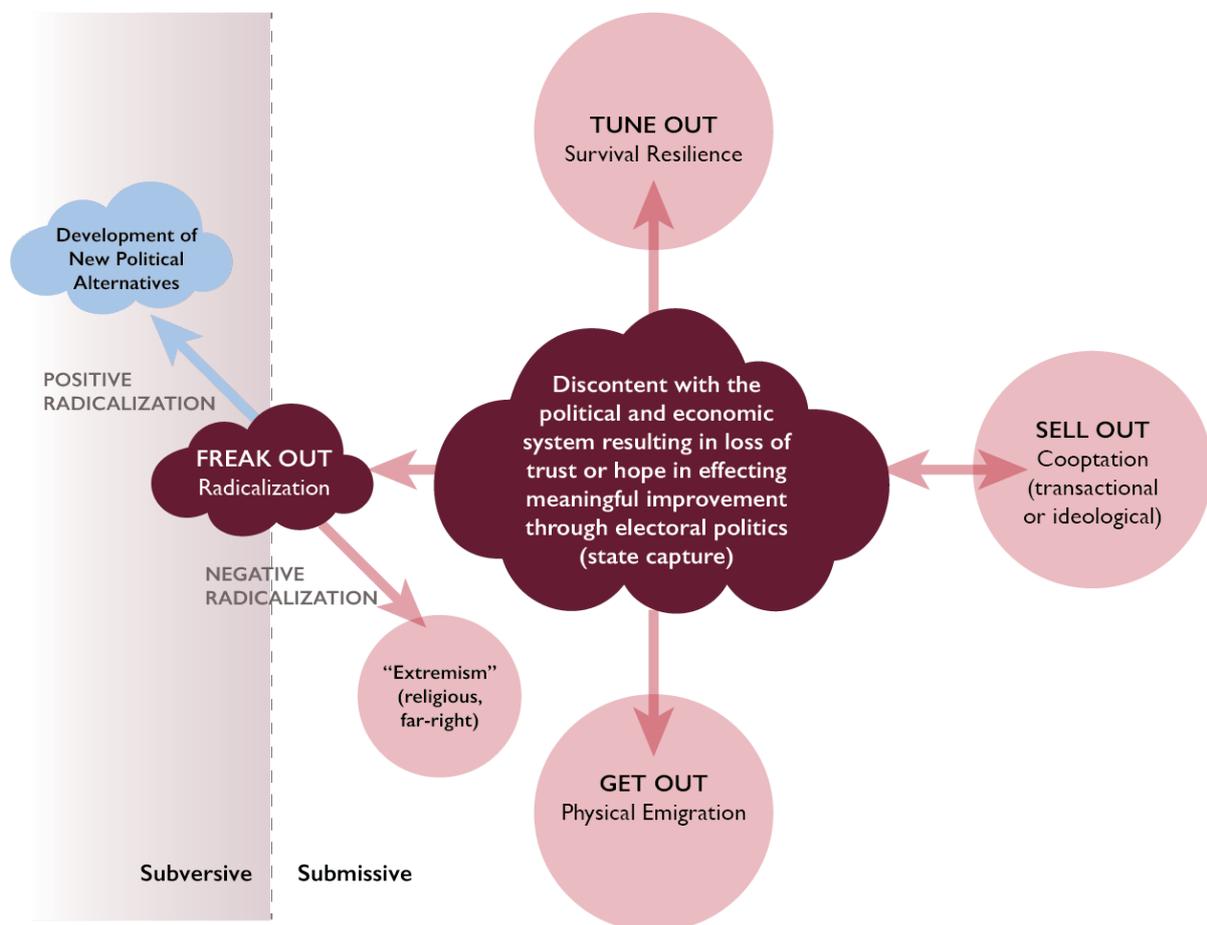
While Chayes' focus was on the emergence of violent extremism as a consequential output of such social, structural conditions, this study identified five potential response options available to citizens in these structures. *Citizens may tune out, get out, or sell out; or they may radicalize (freak out) in a submissive or in a subversive way.* This radicalization can be undertaken through non-violent means, but also potentially through violence.

- *Get out*: emigration, to a country that functions "normally" and is seen as free from the pervasive broken politics that have typified life in the region for more than a generation.

- *Sell out*: join a political party or otherwise effectively become part of the system and patronage machine.

- *Tune out*: remain, but seek to live to the extent possible outside of or away from the structures and politics perceived to be repellent and unjust.

- *Freak out*: radicalize to seek substantial change in a system you reject:

  - Positive radicalization: join with like-minded radicalized individuals into a peaceful and progressive yet subversive posture, adhering to and propagating liberal values based on accountable and participatory government, and potentially seeking to expand support for your ideological worldview to ultimate challenge the system.
  - Negative radicalization: join with like-minded radicalized individuals into a submissive and regressive posture, adhering to and propagating illiberal values and potentially seeking to expand support for your ideological worldview to ultimately challenge the system, potentially using non-violent or violent means.

Further research aimed at studying the factors that may lead individuals or groups to gravitate towards one of these five options or another would be fruitful in terms of model testing.

The question of what can be done to affect change or progress in such an entrenched system led to Model 3:

Model 3

SUPPORT & LEGITIMACY

LIBERAL EXTERNAL ACTORS

INNER CIRCLE OF STATE CAPTURE
(Power Conglomerate, Selectorates, Institutions)

SUPPORT & LEGITIMACY

ILLIBERAL EXTERNAL ACTORS

DOMESTICATION / COOPTATION

BUILDING ALTERNATIVES

SUPPRESSION

COOPTATION

SUBVERSIVE DIRECTION

SUBMISSIVE DIRECTION

TRANSACTIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL

POSITIVE RADICALIZATION

RESERVOIR OF DISCONTENT
(popular and civil potential)

GET OUT

FREAK OUT

TUNE OUT

SELL OUT

NEGATIVE RADICALIZATION

DOMESTIC DEMOBILIZATION

PHYSICAL EMIGRATION

EXTREMISMS

RESIGNED RESILIENCE

This model demonstrates how the inner circle seeks to maintain power through cooptation not only of a portion of its own population, but also through savvy cooperation with liberal and illiberal external actors. Those local citizen elements seeking to affect change on the inner circle can potentially be positively radicalized to find peaceful ways to demand reform. Their effectiveness can be helped or hindered by the posture or actions of external actors.

Each of these models is described in full, and linked to the research findings, in the Analysis chapter.

A number of meta-conclusions have been drawn:

- ***These countries were born captured***: While Dayton BiH and Ohrid (North) Macedonia are viewed by some as post-Cold War successes in conflict management, the actual positive impact of these peacebuilding initiatives were ultimately limited due to an inadequate appreciation of the depth of the advantages conferred upon those who most effectively engaged in economic activities related to economic "transition" (and in BiH, who learned to profit in the wartime economy). This, together with governing structures influenced by war/violent conflict, set the stage for a political economy in each country that has been remarkably resistant to change.
- ***Resilience***: Communities in BiH and North Macedonia show a great deal of resilience. The problem is that not all forms of resilience are created equal in terms of providing the foundation for a society that is able to thrive.
- ***The resource curse***: The international community constitutes these countries' resource curse, manifest through financing and loans, as well as the status and legitimacy bequeathed through the EU accession process. Resources exploited solely for the sake of a party or individual/family in power – in the absence of accountable checks and balances – further tips the balance in favor of the status quo. Blaming citizens for "voting for these guys" is simplistic and hastens all of the noted response options *except for* positive radicalization.
- ***There is effectively no autonomous, constructive local governance in BiH***: This will be seen as controversial, as some of the findings and conclusions suggest that the municipal level of government is the most reliable current and potential partner. However, while there are institutions and activities at the municipal level, there is little genuine local agency, because all of the *real* decision-making and influence comes from the middle layers of government – that is, the entities and cantons – that have from the start been captured by the dominant parties of each ethno-national group. This is reinforced by the reality that while there are more local media sources than anticipated, local news does not probe deeply into local political coverage, investigations, etc.
- ***North Macedonia's almost completely distinct social and infospheres*** speak to growing and hardening inter-group social distance. There are two distinct media environments for Macedonian and Albanian speakers, as there are two parallel worlds of daily co-existence. Whether this means the future could more resemble the bilingual example of Canada or the island of Cyprus remains an open question.
- ***Reciprocal radicalization*** is not just a phenomenon, but is a top-down policy goal with drivers in both countries. The most extreme examples are evident in the media space, where tit-for-tat scapegoating and othering is omnipresent. This is aided and abetted in the real world by political polarization, and the politicization of everything from the media to education to access to basic public services.

Read as a whole, while this research succeeded in dissecting and applying Chayes' model, it went beyond a simple theory-testing exercise. It also inspired theory-building, offering new thoughts on resilience and a more nuanced description of positive and negative radicalization, and it begins to outline an action research path for support of liberal democratic development in the region through a fundamental rethinking of liberal populism. It also provides an in-depth, ethnographic view of the now generational impact of the post-Yugoslav transitions of these countries, and of the impact of a failed or stillborn "transition"

in which the ethos of capitalism was unleashed while the transparency and rule of law that must accompany it were not. 2020 represents the end of a 30-year cycle that included the end of the Cold War; the emergence of a unipolar world and a presumption that democracy had irreversibly prevailed as the natural future global political option; 9/11; the global financial crisis; the rise of ISIS; the global migration crisis; and the rise of the far-right in consolidated democracies – from both the top-down and bottom-up. In this context radicalization and cognitive or behavioral extremism should be viewed not as an individual pathology, but as *a structural reaction to political, economic, and social organization* linked to a two-century long tradition of contemporary political violence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are written for both countries – and in fact, apply to others in the region. While some are easily actionable given the will, they are largely aimed at *philosophical* shifts in approaches to the promotion of accountable democracy, and the incremental (re)construction of a more stable international order based on the belief that accountable, rights-based democratic systems grounded in the rule of law provide the best basis for comprehensive human security with dignity.

For the liberal international community:

- The basic understanding of "transition" requires new thinking and formulation to shift away from assuming that "transition" implies a more or less linear progression towards an inevitable "western" model of liberal democratic governance. Instead, long-lasting "transition" phases in these two case study countries (and elsewhere) suggest a new and distinct governance model that neither meets nor even aspires to accepted models of democratic good practice. The increasing use of political economy analysis models by analysts and democratization agencies offer a platform to recalibrate understanding of these dynamics, and findings that arise from such analysis should feed into new post-transition modelling that can better inform both policy and programming decisions.
- Further research on the impact of electoral models on the quality of accountable democracies is needed, grounded in case studies from the past 30 years and aimed at citizens who need their faith in democratic systems to be rekindled.
- P/CVE projects have already begun to shift towards long-running challenges such as youth engagement and reconciliation. These efforts should shift to challenge participants to envision the systems they would like to see, and build their capacity to press such ideas forward.
- P/CVE youth projects should have longer timeframes (5-10 years) to allow for strategic engagement on bridge-building cultural tourism opportunities, regional environmental protection efforts, and economic rejuvenation schemes. However, there should be integrated and regular staff turnover to seed experience more broadly, nurture new talent, and avoid sclerosis. Positive political alternatives developing out of these efforts should be encouraged.
- This report should be used to prompt discussions in policy and academic circles, to contribute to the growing literature on extremism and its drivers.
- The international community, primarily the EU and the US, must carefully decide who they proclaim and engage as *values-based allies*. This refers to political parties, NGOs,

media, and other actors. The "declarative democrats," i.e., the mainstream political parties in both countries, which have contributed to the deterioration of society, need to be seen as the reason money and attention invested in these (and other) countries have failed to lead to visible positive change. They may require engagement, but do not necessarily deserve the moral endorsement or legitimation they aim to secure to help to secure their hold on the various levers of influence. Not every relationship is one between allies.

- Public appearances and statements confer approval on the individuals involved. Less time and validation should be given to those representing the anti-democratic inner core, and more to the outer ring of citizens and the embattled individuals within the institutional ring struggling to ensure independent action. The word "partner" should be reserved for the outer ring.

- Anti-corruption efforts should continue and be redoubled, with a focus on the top. In both countries the Priebe reports should be a daily reference and foundation for further high-profile efforts – a launchpad for mobilization by civic actors. Whistleblowers need protection. Local prosecution should be supported. Support to investigative journalism should be massively increased. Global Magnitsky sanctions should become a standard instrument.

- Election fairness and probity must be strengthened through independent observation (domestic and ODIHR-centered) and meaningful sanctions for malfeasance.

- There is transformative potential in improving education, health care, and the environment. Programmatic activities should be aimed in this direction, with supportive policies from liberal external actors from the top-down.

- Physical presence by international organizations (EU), development bodies (USAID, SIDA, etc.), foundations (Heinrich Boell, etc.), and NGOs is needed in smaller cities and towns. As COVID-19 is hampering the "normal" functioning of large capital-based offices, the time is right to reconfigure, hiring diverse staff throughout a country who are more plugged in to local needs, dynamics, and opportunities, collaborating via Zoom, etc. These people will be better placed to identify a new generation of forward-looking partners and ideas.

For CSOs

- CSOs in large cities continue to ignore actions and activists in smaller places. More efforts are needed to connect and reinforce both layers.

- CSOs are viewed with suspicion by many who are not involved and do not know anyone. A significant priority should be placed on making these places open and welcoming, and not another closed circle.

- Seek to change the way donors think about programming. Make a realistic assessment of what is impeding success. Don't be afraid to suggest ideas that may seem positively "radical."

- CSOs should make the case to donors that a period of cathartic, group-therapy-style conversations is essential before effective citizen actions can really produce change.

For local governments (in partnership with local citizens)

- Begin a series of future visioning activities with young people, business leaders, activists. Aim to ensure that more local funds can be invested in local priorities, without higher-level political distortion or transaction costs. Set up local constituency service centers – not political party offices – that citizens can use to bring ideas and complaints to elected officials.
- Organize public discussion fora that will be ready to prevent and react to polarizing or violent incidents involving people of different ethnic or religious background. Integrate locally-respected religious and civic leaders. Support coordinated learning with other similar peaceful movements emerging against the far-right worldwide.

For citizens

- In 2020, it is clear that no external saviors will single-handedly fix the problems of a generation. Citizens' shared aspirations for justice and dignity are powerful and universal. Local level environmental protection victories are important; the dots can be connected to higher level structural impediments that constrain further local development. Citizens need to understand that they will be supported in this.
- While international actors alone will not solve any community's problems, they can be used to create pressure. Just as elected officials and party leaders seek to ensure their voices are heard by the international community, so should citizens be ensured a regular forum. Regularly and explicitly engaging with international actors to create top-down pressure in support of their bottom-up action will not only increase the likelihood of success, but serve as a barometer of the health of power alliances that need to be tackled.

Table of Contents

Acronym List

ARBiH	Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine Army of the Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DPA	Dayton Peace Agreement
FC	Football Club
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighter
HE	Hydro-electric
HVO	Hrvatsko vijeće obrane Croatian Defense Council
IEBL	Inter-entity Boundary Line
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
IRC	Islamic Religious Community
MPO	Macedonian Patriotic Organization
MZ	Mjesna zajednica (local community)
NDH	Nezavisna Država Hrvatska Independent State of Croatia
NLA	National Liberation Army
NMK	North Macedonia
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
RS	Republika Srpska
UCK	Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (Kosovo Liberation Army)
VE	Violence Extremism
VRS	Vojske Repubike Srpske Army of the Republika Srpska

Political Party Glossary

<u>Bosnia and Herzegovina</u>

SDA	Stranka demokratske akcije Party of Democratic Action	Founded by Alija Izetbegović, who was imprisoned in the 1980s for being sentenced for spreading pan-Islamism, SDA has been the leading Bosniak political party since the early 1990s. After his death in 2003, son Bakir took over the de facto leadership role, following some leadership struggles. Bakir's wife Sebija has shown an appetite for her own political career, in addition to being appointed by the government to head up BiH's largest hospital/university clinical center.
SBB	Savez za bolju budućnost Union for a Better Future	Founded by Fahrudin Radončić, who was born in Montenegro's Sandžak region and moved to Sarajevo in 1991. His wealth was accumulated during the war period in a not clearly transparent manner. Radončić owns BiH's largest daily, *Dnevni Avaz*. A Bosniak political party, SBB was started in 2009.
Stranka za BiH	Party for BiH	Stranka za BiH was founded by Haris Silajdžić in 1996 after Silajdžić split from SDA. An early party slogan was, "For a BiH without entities." The party voted against the April Package of constitutional reforms in 2006, and also against police reform, claiming neither went far enough in unifying the country. It is also a Bosniak party.
SNSD	Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata Alliance of Independent Social Democrats	SNSD was founded by Milorad Dodik, and initially enjoyed great support from the international community as a "moderate" Serb political alternative. SNSD's defeat of SDS was viewed as a victory by many, including US projects that supported party capacity building.[4] SNSD supported the April Package of constitutional reforms in 2006, but since then has been increasingly against any state-strengthening efforts in BiH, has continually strengthened ties with Serbia, and has greatly

---

[4] Nenadović, Maja. *Installing Democracy in the Balkans? Analysis of Political Party Assistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo*. University of Amsterdam PhD Dissertation, 2012.

		increased divisive rhetoric.
HDZ	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Croatian Democratic Union	HDZ BiH, together with its mother party HDZ in Croatia, has been the dominant force in Bosnian Croat political life since the war. Dragan Čović has led it since 2005, and has allied with Dodik's SNSD as he seeks support for a *de facto* or *de jure* Croat third entity. HDZ-1990 was a spinoff, which has basically disappeared confirming HDZ BiH as almost the only Croat political option.
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka Serb Democratic Party	SDS was the main nationalist Serb option leading up to, during and after the war. Closely tied with Radovan Karadžić and other war criminals, in recent years it has been in opposition to SNSD. However, their pro-Serb(ia) and anti-Bosnia platforms are almost identical.
SDP	Socijaldemokratska partija Social Democratic Party	SDP is the social democratic legacy of the non-nationalist former Communists that emerged just before the war. Its supporters include people who consider themselves Bosnian, and it often siphons voters away from the Bosniak nationalist parties. It has little presence in the RS. It has spurred a number of spin-off parties as individuals dissatisfied with individual leadership have broken off. This further splinters their potential voter block.
DF	Demokratska Fronta Democratic Front	DF was founded by a former loyal member of SDP, Željko Komšić. While his personal pedigree as a Sarajevan who stayed in the city during the war, and who as a Croat offers a non-nationalist view, earned him much support for his DF bid for the Croat seat on the BiH Presidency, the party's lack of vision or strategy, and the lack of party outreach in the RS or Croat majority areas, makes this another party mostly competing for Bosniak and Bosnian votes.
Naša stranka	Our Party	This center left party was formed by two cultural figures in 2008 as an effort to break the hold of the nationalist parties and offer an alternative to SDP. Its main base is in Sarajevo, and it attracts mostly urban, educated voters. It also competes for Bosniak and Bosnian voters, and has to date had limited outreach/engagement in Serb and Croat dominated parts of the country.

North Macedonia

SDSM	Socijaldemokratski sojuz na Makedonija Social Democratic Union of Macedonia	SDSM was formed in April 1991, as a successor of the former communists. It has a center-left profile. From September 1992 -1998, and then again from 2002 to 2006, the SDSM was the largest party in parliament, and the leading party in the coalition governments. Since June 2017, SDSM is again in government, together with its coalition partners, DUI and the DPA. The party president, Zoran Zaev, is the current prime minister. The party is a strong proponent of the Prespa Agreement and the Law on the use of languages, which enhances the status of the Albanian language throughout the country.
VMRO-DPMNE	Vnatreshna makedonska revolucionerna organizacija – demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity	VMRO-DPMNE was formed in June 1990, taking its name from the former Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization dating from the 19th century. It is a conservative group that describes itself as a Christian-Democratic party. Following the first multi-party elections in 1990, VMRO-DPMNE became the strongest party in the parliament, and played a leading role in the government of experts that lasted until 1992. The party was again in power from 1998-2002, and from 2006-2017. Since the early parliamentary elections in 2016, the VMRO-DPMNE has been in opposition. In the 2017 local elections, the party won in only five out of 81 municipalities. VMRO-DPMNE strongly opposes the Prespa Agreement and the new Law on the use of languages. The coalition led by the VMRO-DPMNE won 44 seats in the last early parliamentary elections.
DUI	Demokratska unija za integracija Democratic Union for Integration	DUI is a member of the current governing coalition. The party was established in June 2002 as the main political force of the former members of the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA). It presents itself as having a center-left profile. Since emerging from the September 2002 elections as the biggest ethnic Albanian party, DUI has been the dominant political force in the ethnic Albanian community. Since then, except for the period from 2006-08, DUI has been in coalition governments with both the SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE. However, the 2016 early parliamentary elections saw a decrease in

		the popularity of DUI, dropping to 10 seats in parliament from 19 in the previous elections, with many of its traditional voters turning towards two other ethnic Albanian parties, BESA and the AA, as well as to SDSM. DUI is again the largest coalition partner among the ethnic-Albanian parties in the current SDSM-led government. The party is a strong supporter of the Prespa Agreement. After the 2020 early parliamentary elections, DUI regained its status as the most popular ethnic Albanian party winning 15 seats.
BESA	Dvizhenje BESA Movement BESA	The Movement BESA was officially registered as a political organization in April 2015, following a founding convention in November 2014. BESA is an ethnic Albanian party, and presents a nationalist, conservative, and religious (Muslim) profile. Following the 2016 early parliamentary elections in which BESA won five seats, the party was the biggest ethnic Albanian opposition party. Following the 2017 local elections, when BESA managed to win only in the municipality in Zhelino, the party split. This split eventually led to the formation of the breakaway AlternAtivA party. In the early 2020 parliamentary elections, BESA entered into a multiethnic pre-election coalition with the SDSM, winning 4 seats and becoming part of the government.
AA	Alijansa za Albancite Alliance for Albanians	The Chairperson of the AA, Zijadin Sela, served as a member of parliament for the DPA (see below) in 2011-13. In 2013-17, he served as mayor of Struga. Sela attempted to carry out reforms in the DPA, establishing the DPA Movement for Reform. Before the 2016 early parliamentary elections, Sela's DPA-MR formed the Alliance of Albanians with two other parties. Following the 2016 early parliamentary elections in which they won three seats, the AA joined the governing coalition, together with SDSM and DUI. In the 2017 local elections, the AA won in three municipalities. However, after SDSM supported DUI candidates in the second round of the local elections, the AA decided to leave the governing coalition and go into opposition. In 2018, the alliance held a congress and officially became a political party. The AA has a predominantly center-right and nationalist

		orientation. In the last early parliamentary elections, the coalition between the AA and AlternAtivA won 12 seats, becoming the main ethnic Albanian opposition in parliament.
DPA	Demokratska partija na Albancite Democratic Party of Albanians	DPA is a nationalist conservative grouping that was established in July 1997. Before the 2001 insurgency and the success of DUI in the 2002 elections, DPA had been the leading ethnic-Albanian party. Since the 2002 parliamentary elections, the party has mainly been in the opposition, except for 2006 and 2008 when it joined VMRO-DPMNE's governing coalition. In recent years, DPA has seen a significant drop in support. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, DPA won only two seats. In the 2017 local elections DPA managed to win only in the municipality of Studenichani, a municipality that borders on Skopje. In the 2020 early parliamentary elections, DPA won only 1 seat and remained in the new government together with SDSM, DUI, and BESA.
AAA	AlternAtivA	The AlternAtivA is the most recently created ethnic-Albanian political party. It was established in February 2019 following a split in the BESA movement in the wake of the local elections. A former junior partner in the government, the AlternAtivA entered into a pre-election coalition with the AA. They are currently part of the largest ethnic Albanian opposition coalition in parliament, holding 12 seats together with the AA.
Levica	Levica	Levica is a movement party created just before the early parliamentary elections in 2016. After a weak showing in their first elections, in the 2017 local elections they managed to gain several municipal council seats throughout the country, including 1 seat in the Skopje City Council. Unlike the name suggests, the party has a catch-all, anti-establishment orientation, holding both left and right wing standpoints on various issues. In the last 2020 elections Levica won 2 seats, and is one of the most vocal parties in opposition.

Map - Bosnia and Herzegovina
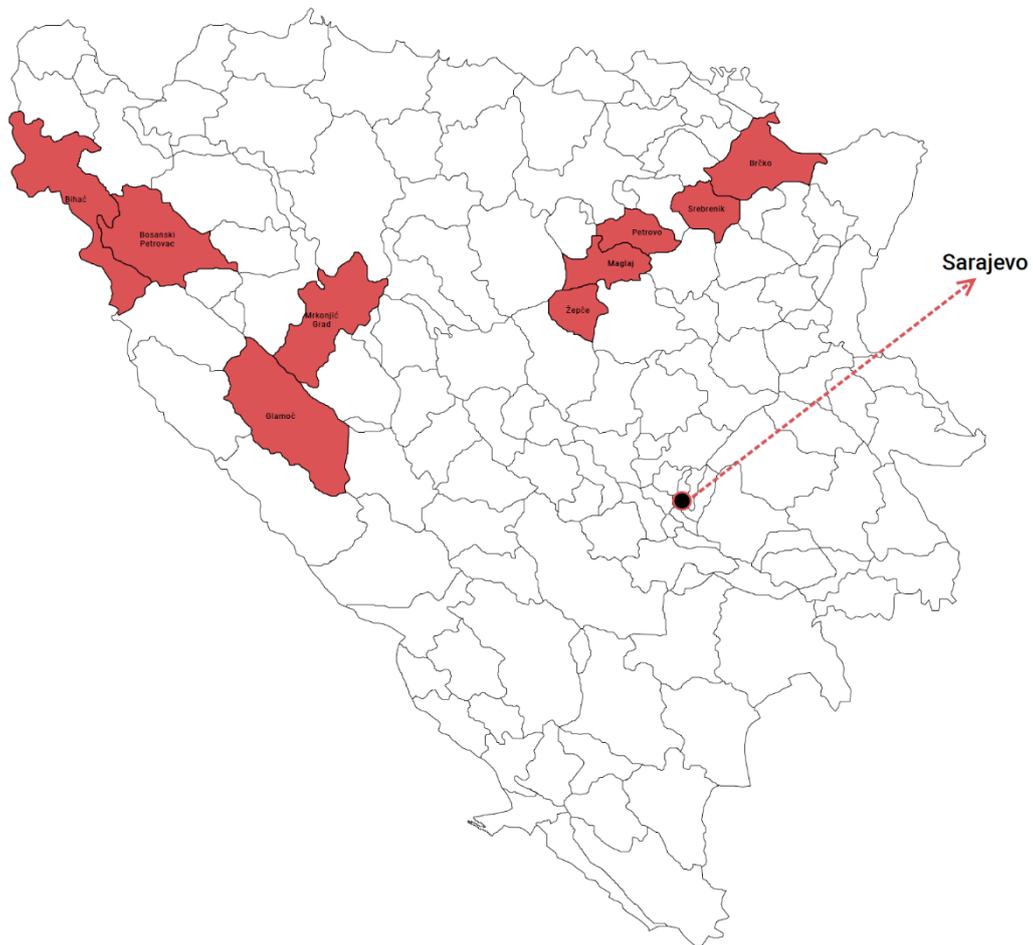
Map - North Macedonia
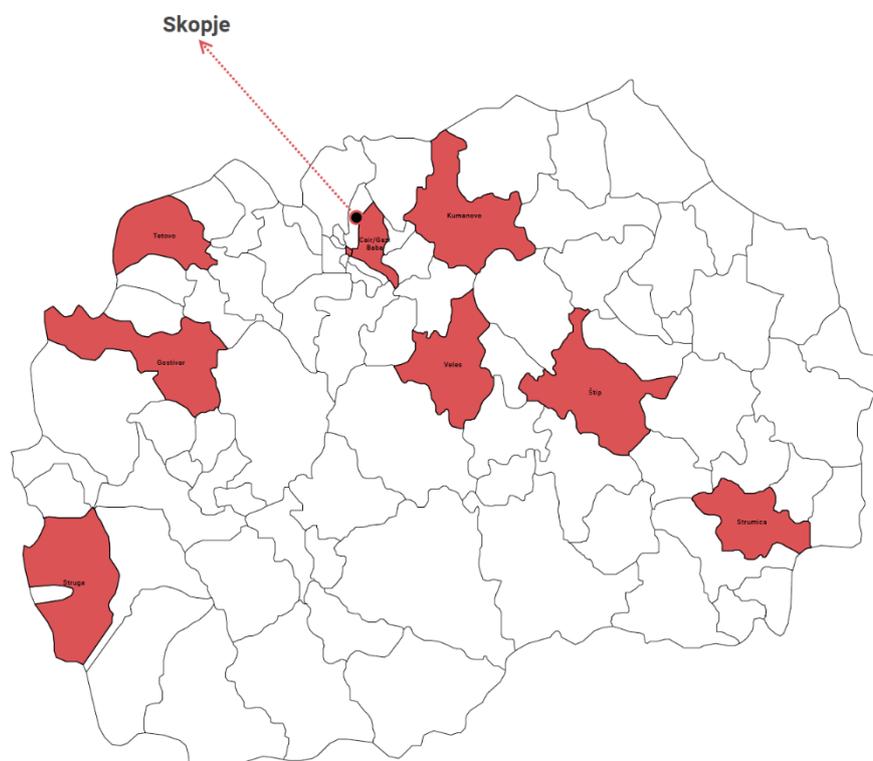
Timeline of Notable Events: Bosnia and Herzegovina

The following timeline provides some overarching context about the broad socio-political and event environment in the time of this research, from late 2019 until summer 2020.

July 2020
- 25 year anniversary of Srebrenica genocide; counter events
- General elections in Croatia
- In the last days of July, Una-Sana canton prepares to dismantle improvised migrant camp in Polje, near the Miral camp

June 2020
- Mostar "deal" announced
- Selmo Cikotić (SDA) appointed Minister of Security
- Politicians involved in respirator affair released on bail
- Threats made by SDA against BiH Chief Prosecutor
- RS cancels mobile hospital contract
- Violence in migrant camp near Velika Kladuša results in one stabbing
- Elections in Serbia
- Radončić announced resignation as Minister of Security
- New floods around Tuzla region

May 2020
- Bleiburg Mass in Sarajevo sparks inter-ethnic political tensions, and also anti-fascist protest march in Sarajevo
- Indictments filed against two ISIS members
- Dobrovoljačka commemorations and counter events
- Russia seeks to send military medical equipment convoy and personnel to Mostar (supported by HDZ, opposed by SDA)
- Major lockdowns start to lift
- Fadil Novalić, FBiH prime minister, and two others arrested in respirator affair; they are released in late May
- Zagreb Summit (EU officials and WB leaders) takes place online; the summit conclusion does not mention enlargement

April 2020
- IMF makes loan to BiH; lack of agreement between entities on their shares leaves money deposited with Central Bank
- A well-known epidemiologist dies; family accuses the Sarajevo canton healthcare system of negligence
- EU pledges 3.3 billion euro assistance to the Western Balkans during the pandemic

March 2020
- COVID-19 lockdowns begin
- Asim Affair comes to light (SDA)

February 2020
- RS threat to leave BiH institutions to protest Constitutional Court decision on agricultural land

January 2020
- Sarajevo canton government ousted
- RS day
- Croatia starts presidency of the EU council, announces active advocacy for Western Balkan enlargement

December 2019
- The EU's Priebe report on rule of law released
- BiH state government formed 14 months after general elections (no agreement on formation of FBiH government during the entire project implementation period)
- Sarajevo sets new pollution records

Timeline of Notable Events: North Macedonia

The following timeline provides some overarching context about the broad socio-political and event environment in the time of this research, from late 2019 until summer 2020.

July 2020
- Elections result in an insecure majority, with SDSM having a slight lead over VMRO-DPMNE; DUI wins in Albanian ethnic camp; Levica enters parliament
- The State Election Commission (SEC) computer system is hacked, leading to suspicions concerning the regularity of the whole process
- DUI leader Ali Ahmeti called to testify in court at the Hague

June 2020
- Elections date agreed: 15 July
- Deputy Health Minister (DUI) is replaced due to using his position for partisan promotion
- State of emergency is ended
- Numerous "bombs" (wiretapped conversations) released to the public, involving both the government and opposition

May 2020
- Neighborhood in Skopje outskirts illegally "re-named" after KLA fighter
- Roma organize protests including jihadi messages following insults on Facebook
- Coronavirus infection numbers pick up again

April 2020
- Police intervene in the distribution of humanitarian aid coming from the Zaev family, claiming it is a bribe related to the elections
- Orthodox Easter is celebrated amid lockdowns, crowds gather in churchyards and share communion
- State of emergency is extended
- The cobblestone in the Old Bazaar in Skopje is changed overnight, raising controversy
- Protests in Signelikj (Skopje) amid lockdown, due to police intervention

March 2020
- First COVID-19 lockdowns, state of emergency is declared
- Elections are postponed
- Names of elementary schools in Chair are changed from Macedonian to Albanian persons, including one KLA fighter
- DUI officials testify in "Monster" court case
- Two DUI officials are found guilty of electoral fraud in Chair in 2013
- North Macedonia becomes NATO member

February 2020
- New information on "Monster" case emerges
- "I am Boycotting" Movement starts collecting signatures to participate in elections as independents
- Organized Crime and Corruption Public Prosecutor opened a case related to the fallen facade of AD "MEPSO"
- Investigation and detention of individual for participation in the war in Syria
- First COVID-19 case is registered in North Macedonia
- Technical Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Rashela Mizrahi, removes the new country's name from a placard and uses the old

January 2020
- Zaev steps down, technical "Przino" government begins work

December 2019
- Prosecutor's Office opens an investigation of 8 people suspected of abusing their power and position in urban planning in Tetovo
- Anti-pollution protests in Skopje
- Changes in the electoral system discussed in Parliament
- Work of Macedonian-Bulgarian commission halted due to upcoming elections

November 2019
- Investigations into the work of Special Prosecutor's Office continue and reveal further corrupt practices
- North Macedonia sends aid to Albania following earthquake
- "Shvercerat" organize controversial anniversary celebration in the Macedonian National Theater
- Toxic spillover at the Ohis chemical plant in Skopje
- Skopje among the most polluted cities in the world

Mini Background on Key Affairs

A few issues or scandals recur throughout the text, and are briefly explained below.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Asim Affair

In late February 2020, Asim Sarajlić, the Deputy Head of SDA, was embroiled in a scandal following the leak of audio in which he was seemingly heard arranging public employment in return for promises of votes.[5] Following the scandal, Sarajlić resigned from his official functions within the SDA (under pressure from Bakir Izetbegović), including from his position as SDA vice-president. However, he remains an MP. The initial reaction of the party was to claim Bosniak victimization and to question the veracity of the audio; there has been no unequivocal condemnation of such acts. Journalist Avdo Avdić analyzed this affair as the result of the conflict between the Izetbegović family on one side and the Zvizdić and Čampara families on the other.[6] COVID-19 quickly pushed this story from the media space.[7]

The Ventilators Affair

In late April there was significant outcry in the media and on social media when it emerged that a company registered to work in the area of agriculture – primarily berries – in Srebrenica received a large tender to purchase ventilators from China and import them to BiH. [8] In addition to the questionable choice, and the lack of permit to import medical equipment as a berry firm (a permission hastily secured later), analysis on the price of the tender led to questions about the amount paid for the ventilators and where the money was going in light of the cost.[9] While there was significant media outcry, in June analysts were

---

[5] "Nepotism allegations put strongest Bosniak party into the spotlight." *N1*. March 1, 2020. Available at http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a413315/Nepotism-allegations-put-strongest-Bosniak-party-into-the-spotlight.html; Kovacevic, Danijel. "Corruption Scandal Shakes Bosnia's Largest Political Party. *Balkan Insight*. March 3, 2020. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/03/corruption-scandal-shakes-bosnias-largest-political-party/; Imamović, Adisa. "Afera "Asim": Skandal potresa SDA, brojne i burne reakcije javnosti." *N1*. February 29, 2020. Available at http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a413233/Afera-Asim-Skandal-potresa-SDA-brojne-i-burne-reakcije-javnosti.html

[6] "Sarajlić je kolateralna šteta unutarstranačke bitke Izetbegovića i Zvizdića." *Radio Sarajevo*. March 6, 2020. Available at https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/avdo-avdic-sarajlic-kolateralna-steta-bitke-izetbegovica-protiv-campare-i-zvizdica/369484

[7] "RS: Mobilna bolnica prodana Turskoj kompaniji za pet miliona eura." *BHRT.ba.* July 17, 2020. Available at https://bhrt.ba/rs-mobilna-bolnica-prodana-turskoj-kompaniji-za-pet-miliona-eura/

[8] " Ventilators fruit company procured for Bosnia can be bought via Facebook." *N1*. April 29, 2020. Available at http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a429625/Ventilators-fruit-company-procured-for-Bosnia-can-be-bought-via-Facebook.html

[9] Nikola Cuckić, "'Ventilators' affair in BiH – fight against corruption or another political quarrel?," *European Western Balkans*. June 5, 2020. Available at https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/06/05/ventilators-affair-in-bih-fight-against-corruption-or-another-political-quarrel/; "Ventilators fruit company procured for Bosnia can be bought via Facebook," *N1*. April 29, 2020. Available at

openly stating that the political party nexus in the Federation would survive this scandal.[10] On May 30, the BiH Court released Fadil Novalić, Fahrudin Solak, and Fikret Hadzić from prison where they had been held for one month at the request of BiH prosecutors during the investigation. The BiH Prosecution office filed a complaint in less than 72 hours against this decision, insisting that release of the suspects could interfere with the efficient and undisturbed investigation, and that the release violated the principle of equality of citizens in court.[11] After that, Fadil Novalić was reported to be infected with COVID-19 and, after he recovered, he returned to his duties as prime minister while the investigation continued. His lawyers, apparently, hired a German expert in financial investigations. On August 12, the BiH Court rejected the complaint submitted by the Prosecution for releasing the suspects. The Prosecution is continuing the investigation.[12]

<u>RS mobile hospital affair</u>

In March 2020, at the onset of COVID-19, the RS Government, via the RS Institute for Public Health, procured a mobile hospital costing 4.29 million KM from an obscure company called, "Balkan global." The purchase was annulled on May 29 by the RS Emergency Headquarters, and the company returned the entire sum in June.[13] The hospital, according to the company's director, was then sold to Turkey for twice the sum - five million euro – than had been paid by the RS. [14] Due to the speedy procedure and a questionable procurement processes the public prosecutor's office opened an investigation into the case. In July it was reported that the prosecution's investigation continues.

North Macedonia

<u>Monster</u>

The "Monster" case is related to the killing of five ethnic Macedonians near Skopje in 2012. Six ethnic Albanians were ultimately convicted under terrorism charges. The killings, the trial and the verdict heightened ethnic tensions. Allegations of wrongdoings were included in the

http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a429625/Ventilators-fruit-company-procured-for-Bosnia-can-be-bought-via-Facebook.html

[10] Nedim Dervisbegovic, "Bosnian Power Alliance Seen Surviving Chinese Ventilators Affair," *Balkan Insight*. June 9, 2020. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/09/bosnian-power-alliance-seen-surviving-chinese-ventilator-affair/

[11] "Sud BiH odlucio: Fadil Novalic pusten na slobodu." *Oslobodjenje*. May 31, 2020. Available at https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/sud-bih-odlucio-fadil-novalic-pusten-na-slobodu-560863; "Tuzilastvo uputilo zalbu Sudu BiH na rjesenje o pritvoru u "aferi Respiratori". *N1*. June 3, 2020. Available at http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a438280/Tuzilastvo-uputilo-zalbu-Sudu-BiH-na-rjesenje-o-pritvoru-u-aferi-Respiratori.html

[12] "Traje istraga protiv grupe osumnjičenih u aferi 'Respiratori': Novalićevi advokati angažirali stranog eksperta." *Dnevni Avaz*. August 13, 2020. Available at https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/587988/traje-istraga-protiv-grupe-osumnjicenih-u-aferi-respiratori-novalicevi-advokati-angazirali-stranog-eksperta

[13] "Ristić potvrdio: Pokretna bolnica prodata u Tursku za pet miliona evra." *Nezavisne novine*. July 15, 2020. Available at https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/drustvo/Ristic-potvrdio-Pokretna-bolnica-prodata-u-Tursku-za-pet-miliona-evra/610655

[14] "Republika Srpska sells Mobile Hospital to Turkey for Twice as Much Money." *The Sarajevo Times*. July 16, 2020. Available at https://www.sarajevotimes.com/165144-2/https://www.sarajevotimes.com/165144-2/

wiretap leaks that helped to lead to former PM Gruevski's downfall.[15] As of late August, the case is again being discussed in front of the Basic Criminal Court in Skopje, after the Supreme Court abolished the verdict sentencing the defendants for life. The case is still used in daily politics for two main reasons: the prosecution was overtaken by the now dismantled and discredited SPO, and many important political figures, for example, PM Zaev have been called as witnesses in the case.[16]

Racket

The Racket case centered on the prosecution and jailing of the former head of the Special Prosecutor's Office Katica Janeva and several others, including a business man/reality show star, on corruption and allegations of trying to transport illegally obtained funds out of the country. Janeva was found guilty of accepting a bribe in exchange for milder treatment in a case.[17] Albeit found guilty and sentenced to a jail term, Janeva is still under house arrest awaiting the decision of the appellate court.

Cell 1 and Cell 2

Cell 1 and Cell 2 were two large law enforcement operations in 2015 focused on targeting individuals suspected of recruiting and facilitating the engagement of individuals from Macedonia to go to Syria as foreign fighters. 14 people were arrested. However there were claims of inappropriate and repressive measures used by the government in these operations.[18] Additionally, there is unofficial information that radicalized individuals have been rather active while incarcerated, and that a process of further radicalization of other inmates is possible. This stems from the corrupt and porous incarceration system in the country.

---

[15] "Macedonia Opposition: Ethnic Terror Convictions 'Suspicious'." *Balkan Insight*. May 27, 2015. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2015/05/27/zaev-macedonia-monster-case-convicts-are-innocent/

[16] "Најавени нови сведоци во случајот Монструм". (New Witnesses Announced in Monster Case.) *Radio Free Europe*. January 14, 2020. Available at https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/30376648.html

[17] Ljubas, Zdravko. "North Macedonia: Ex-Prosecutor and a TV Star Jailed in Corruption Case." *OCCRP*. June 22, 2020. Available at https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/12587-north-macedonian-ex-prosecutor-and-a-tv-star-jailed-in-corruption-case

[18] "Working With the Youth: Countering Violent Extremism in North Macedonia." Regional Cooperation Council. June 10, 2019. Available at https://www.rcc.int/p-cve/news/191/working-with-the-youth-countering-violent-extremism-in-north-macedonia

Introduction

Valery Perry

This research initiative was inspired by a simple question: can the ideas presented in Sarah Chayes' book *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*, help in understanding the social, political, and economic dynamics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and North Macedonia in 2020? One sentence, appearing early in the book, was particularly intriguing: "Acute government corruption may in fact lie at the root of some of the world's most dangerous and disruptive security challenges – among them the spread of violent extremism."[19] Following five years during which substantial attention has been placed on the issue of violent extremism in the Western Balkans, this idea appeared to be worth exploring.

Two broad questions grounded this initiative. The first was classical political science: How do systems and structural factors feed various types of extremisms in BiH and North Macedonia? The second was inspired more by action research in societies dealing with conflict, and not simply documenting and describing but beginning to probe for and explore solutions: How could popular dissatisfaction with the observed systemic and structural factors lead to a constituency for non-violent change?

These two country cases were selected for several reasons. As a practical matter, the team researchers and analysts have long and deep experience in these countries, providing a strong base in terms of the issues and literature, and also contacts to facilitate field research. Each country enjoys a certain level of heterogeneity (which brings both strengths and challenges) in spite of the violent tearing apart of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, even though internal *de facto* or *de jure* divisions and distinctions exist. Each country is governed according to agreements made to end war/violent conflict (the Dayton Agreement in BiH, and the Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia), and have been described by one of the team members as examples of "peace cartels."[20] (The structures and politics of each are described more in the Conceptual Framework.) Finally, they have each seen significant civic mobilizations – and de-mobilizations –in the past 7-8 years.

While BiH and North Macedonia are therefore good cases for this proof of concept pilot, they are by no means the only countries in the region for whom these research questions are relevant. Serbia's democratic backsliding has been accompanied by increasing centralization, loss of any semblance of independent institutions, and near total party (SPS) control of all levels of government and attendant public and often private assets (through tenders, concessions, etc.).[21] Montenegro – which was preparing for an election at the time of report

---

[19] Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.

[20] Kurt Bassuener, "Peace Cartels: Internationally Brokered Power-Sharing and Perpetual Oligarchy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia," PhD dissertation, submitted July 2020, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, UK.

[21] *Freedom in the World Survey: Serbia*. Freedom House. Available at https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2020 ; Kingsley, Patrick. "Serbia's Strongman Wins

drafting – is seen by some as a success story, but has had little leadership change over more than two decades, and is viewed as highly corrupt and captured.[22] Other countries in the European ecosystem – including some that are in the EU – face similar democratic weaknesses, including Hungary and Poland.[23] The model could be applied to these cases as well, and based on similarly collected granular data, assessed for relevance and nuance.

The models developed in the analysis and the recommendations are all grounded in the philosophical assumption that liberal, accountable, rights-based societies governed by the rule *of* law – not rule *by* law – is desirable, both for the people in a given society, and for a more peaceful world system generally. It is therefore inspired by liberal or democratic peace theory.[24]

This introduction will summarize some of the broad concepts and tenets that underly this research initiative, and which reinforce the final analysis.

Exhibit 1: In Lieu of Detailed Terms and Definitions

> ### In Lieu of Detailed Terms and Definitions
>
> It is common for studies of this topic to have an extensive terms and definitions section.[25] This report will not do this, other than to offer some broad parameters that guided the research team. Discussions of the two mains types of extremism – that defined by a far-right, nationalist, and often white supremacist ideology, and that defined by some militant interpretation of Islam – will follow the meanings and expressions used in Julia Ebner's 2017 book, *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism*. This is not to suggest that every right-leaning political expression is extreme, and is not aimed in any way to suggest that the Islamic faith itself is a driver of extremism.[26] However, diving into the nitty-gritty of the nuances of these worldviews, or to begin judging which variants are extreme, and which are *very* extreme, would just obscure the extent to which all of these trends can affect a social ecosystem.

Big in Election Boycotted by the Opposition." *The New York Times*. June 22, 2020. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/world/europe/serbia-election-vucic.html

[22] *Freedom in the World Survey: Montenegro*. Freedom House. Available at https://freedomhouse.org/country/montenegro/freedom-world/2020

[23] Gerhke, Laurenz. "Most Poles, Hungarians don't think their countries are democratic: poll." *Politico*. June 15, 2020. Available at https://www.politico.eu/article/minorities-in-poland-hungary-think-their-countries-are-democratic-report/

[24] Paris, Roland. *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*. Cambridge University Press, 2004; Brown, Michael E., Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (eds.) *Debating the Democratic Peace*. MIT Press, 1999.

[25] For a reader interested in more details, see the introductory chapter of Valery Perry's edited volume, *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019.

[26] When referring to adherents of a puritanical interpretation of Islam, unless noting a specific quoted mention, the team uses "Salafism" or its variants as a blanket term, rather than "Wahhabism," which in the local context is often pejorative. Generally all Wahhabis are Salafis, but not all Salafis are Wahhabis. Mohamed Bin Ali, Muhammad Saiful Alam and Shah Bin Sudiman. "Salafis and Wahhabis: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" *RSIS Commentary*. October 11, 2016. Available at https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16254-salafis-and-wahhabis-two-sides-of-the-same-coin/#.XyeK9UmLnOQ

Philosophical Approach to Terrorism, Violent Extremism, and Political Violence

The concepts of violent extremism and terrorism have become more of a policy focus in recent years, in general and more recently in the Western Balkans. Chayes' book on this issue is a part of the developing and maturing literature and analysis on these topics. However, until recently – and even in 2020, only reluctantly – the focus has inordinately been on Islam-adjacent manifestations of violent extremism such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, with the violent far-right being relegated as an unfortunate but somehow more forgivable deviation from a more familiar norm. The former, defined as terrorism, merited a national security response on the international stage, while manifestations of the latter (if acknowledged at all) tended to be viewed as discrete domestic matters in some given country in spite of its increasingly networked global nature. While partly explained by the reality of high-profile violent militant jihadist attacks in Europe,[27] the exoticization of this type of violent extremism is also reminiscent of a long history of exoticizing "the east."[28] Such pre-existing explicit and implicit bias continues to shape policies and programs.

After 9/11, the concept of a "global war on terror" shaped much US and western engagement globally, as both military and intelligence resources were expended to eliminate or reduce terrorism threats abroad or domestically. The rise of ISIS and other similar militant movements, the declaration of a "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq, and in particular the migration of tens of thousands of fighters and believers to the region to join in the caliphate building process led to a notable increase in support for studies and programming in the region that had terrorism and extremism as the explicit focus. The Balkans was a part of this policy refocus, due both to the presence of *mujaheddin* in Bosnia during the war, and two decades later, due to the decision of around 1000 people from the Balkans to go to Syria.[29]

While a counter-terrorism approach was paramount globally, a tentative and often reluctant shift began, away from a simplistic understanding of terrorism and counter-terror measures, and towards more study of what drives such processes. What could possibly lead thousands of people to hear the words of an inspirational preacher, or read a web site, or listen to a

---

[27] For example, the 2004 attacks in Spain, the 2015 Bataclan and associated attacks in Paris (as well as the Charlie Hebdo shooting in 2015), and the 2005 attacks in London, to name a few.

[28] Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978) introduced and explored this practice and concept when studying the legacies of imperialism and colonialism. Maria Todorova looked at the exotic notions held by many when thinking about "the Balkans," in her 1997 *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press).

[29] The Perry (2019) volume, while focused on extremism in Serbia, references the main literature available on the issue in general, regionally, and in BiH; Qehaja, Florian and Skender Perteshi. "The Unexplored Nexus: Issues of Radicalization and Extremism in Macedonia." *Kosovar Center for Security Studies*. March 2018, p. 39. Available at http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Extremism_in_macedonia_402663.pdf; Stojkovski, Filip and Natasia Kalajdziovski. "Extremism Research Forum: Macedonia Report." *British Council*. April 2018; Stojkovski, Filip and Natasia Kalajdziovski. "Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Macedonia." *Berghof Foundation/Democracy Lab Country Case Study 1*, 2018. Available at: https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_CaseStudy1_Macedonia_e.pdf; Bogdanovski, Andreja. "We did criminalize it – now what? Western Balkans Response to the Foreign Fighters Threat." *Analytica Policy Brief*. September 2014. See also Vlado Azinović, Kurt Bassuener, and Bodo Weber, *Assessing the potential for renewed ethnic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Security Risk Analysis*, Democratization Policy Council/Atlantic Initiative, October 2011. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/DPC-AI_BiH%20Security_Study.pdf

family member, and make the decision to go to Syria to fight, to build, or to raise a family? The question itself seemed almost irrational, suggesting the need to understand the personal psychological profiles of such individuals. But it did at least provide an opportunity for deeper study of the drivers underlying the phenomenon. Preventing or countering violent extremism (P/CVE) – in addition to the maintained and robust counter-terror approach – entered the "mainstream" lexicon in 2015, with an aim of interdicting such developments before acts of terrorism might be committed.[30]

While these preventive efforts were initially exclusively or nearly solely focused on radicalization among Muslims, there has been an increasing – and increasingly necessary – recognition that one cannot understand "Islamist extremism" without also understanding other forms of extremism, in particular far-right extremism. The interplay of these two forms has been explored, in terms of their relationship to one another (reciprocal radicalization),[31] and as manifestations of two sides of the same coin. These more nuanced understandings are critical globally, but hold particular relevance to the Western Balkans in light of demography and recent and more distant history.[32] The 2019 massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand was notable both for the demonstration that the far-right's capacity for propagating terror and perpetrating violence is no less dangerous than that of ISIS or similarly inspired groups, as well as for the demonstrated narrative linkages between the far-right and fear of Islam and Islamist extremism. It quickly emerged that the Christchurch shooter had been familiar with and inspired by the war criminals and associated "lore" of the wars in the Balkans in the early 1990s, which, among some far-right circles, were seen as the first emergence of the modern-day "fight against Islamic terror," by devoted Serbian "Christian" defenders.[33] This act of terror took place against a strong ideological narrative including manifestos by Anders Breivik and others, linked to ideas such as "the great replacement" and rooted to various degrees by white cultural supremacy, and opposed to those elements of globalization that result in more immigration, mobility, and diversity, and the international perspectives that come with it. These ideologies and their popular narratives are no less coherent or abhorrent than those propagated by ISIS and their ilk.

The certainty of the terrorism and violent extremism analysis and responses became muddied, however, as some analysts pointed out that it is simplistic and incorrect to focus on the individual pathology of radicalization, and to seek to understand the phenomenon by placing causation at the level of an individual's life experience and psychology. In his analysis

---

[30] Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President at the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism." *The White House*. February 19, 2015. Available at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/19/remarks-president-summit-countering-violent-extremism-february-19-2015

[31] Ebner, Julia (2017) *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism*. London: I.B. Tauris.

[32] Perry, Valery (ed.). *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry. Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019; Perry, Valery. "Reflections on Efforts to Prevent and Counter Radicalization and Violent Extremism in the Balkans." *Democratization Policy Council Policy Note 15*. June 2017. Available at http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/DPCPolicyNote15_ReflectionsonP_CVE.pdf ; Perry, Valery. "Countering the Cultivation of Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case for Education Reform." *Democratization Policy Council, Note #10*. September 2015. Available at http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/uimages/DPC%20Policy%20Note%2010%20Extremism%20and%20Educ ation%20in%20BiH.pdf

[33] Mujanović, Jasmin. "Why Serb Nationalism Still Inspires Europe's Far Right." *Balkan Insight*. March 22, 2019. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/22/why-serb-nationalism-still-inspires-europes-far-right/

of the European Commission's approach to understanding radicalization, Rik Coolsaet explains this tendency and the limitations it imposes on understanding and countering the roots of these social challenges. He argues that "individual trajectories never played a major part in assessing and countering the threat" in places like Northern Ireland, or when trying to understand the Shining Path, or Red Brigades.[34] He goes on to note the following:

> This focus on the 'evil ideology' as the main culprit for radicalization leading to terrorism had two obvious advantages that explained its success. Firstly, it narrowed down the inherent complexity of addressing the wide array of possible root causes that would have required a whole-of-government approach and turned it into a seemingly more manageable task of targeting the individuals involved. It thus became easier to devise counterstrategies that would prevent an individual from becoming a terrorist. Secondly, and more importantly, putting all the blame on the individual effectively decontextualized the concept of radicalization. It allowed a disregard of the crucial share the wider society has in the emergence of factors that give rise to the 'anger', as radicalization was originally understood.[35]

Rather than "simply" thinking about terrorism or violent extremism and pathologizing it as a manifestation of some individual psychological aberration, perhaps there is a need to place these phenomena in a structural context, and return to the concept of political violence.

The book *Age of Anger* by Pankaj Mishra examines the intellectual underpinnings of political change, social engineering, and political violence, finding historical comparisons that help to understand the global rise in far-right leaning movements as well as the emergence of ISIS, its spin-offs, and its progenitors. His survey of historical responses to endemic marginalization, resentment, and individual or collective nihilism are a reminder that while some elements are new (e.g., Internet facilitated communications, global travel, etc.), such social developments are not in themselves novel. The following description of Russian political violence in the 19th and early 20th centuries can be easily applied to more contemporary drivers of extreme social unrest: "It is true that rigidly autocratic Russia had developed a degree of repression whose counterpart was insane rebellion. In a country without a public sphere, where educated young men were trapped between an oppressive elite and a peasantry they had no contact with or means of knowing, violence came to seem attractive - the only form of self-expression."[36]

Fawaz Gerges similarly places the top-down and bottom-up expressions of political violence into a broader context. He draws on his own life experience in his home country of Lebanon, but also his study of militancy there and beyond, as he speaks with people who have been involved in various roles and ways in the communal destruction that has destroyed his

---

[34] Coolsaet, Rik. "All Radicalization is Local: The Genesis and Drawbacks of an Elusive Concept." *Egmont Paper 84*. Royal Institute for International Relations, 2016, pp. 20-21. Available at http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2016/05/ep84.pdf?type=pdf

[35] Barber, explaining his use of the term "jihad," wrote, "I use the term in its militant construction to suggest dogmatic and violent particularism of a kind known to Christians no less than Muslims, to Germans and Hindis as well as to Arabs," p. 9.

[36] Mishra, Pankaj. *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*. Farrar, Straus and Giroiux, 2017, p. 311.

homeland. In Gerges' description of the war and the escalating spirals of violence, he pointedly explains the political dynamics of the war: "Christian militias first used carrots and sticks, then blood and iron, to convert internal opponents to their cause. They were pioneers in the practice of putting religions in the service of political ambition. The Muslim jihadists learned well from their Christian counterparts. Thought this is now largely forgotten, Christian fundamentalism is partially to blame for fueling Muslim militancy."[37] He is describing the dynamics of reciprocal radicalization.

Gerges further offers a deeper insight on the decisions motivating a jihadist or foreign fighter, to reveal processes of both cognitive and behavioral radicalization.[38] Following on discussions with a jihadist who was radicalized after watching the war unfold in Bosnia in the early 1990s, he reflects on motivations, and on the not irrational and often values-driven decision making underlying the decision to fight for an idea. "Chivalry and zeal. Again, it is so easy for Westerners nursed on anti-Islamic diatribes by radio talk shows or overblown treatises on war and civilization to turn these young men into two-dimensional characters. Change the names, the language, the dress, and we can see in Abu-Jandal the young volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade, heading off to defend democratic Spain in the 1920s……"[39]

Radicalism and radicalization cannot be viewed simply as an unalloyed negative phenomenon. Inspired by Reinhart Koselleck and Giovanni Sartori Astrid Bötticher provides the following definition of radicalism, which takes pains to make a distinction from extremism:

> Radicalism refers to a political doctrine embraced by socio-political movements favoring both individual and collective freedom, and emancipation from the rule of authoritarian regimes and hierarchically-structured societies. In that sense radicalism, advocating sweeping political change, represents a form of hostility against the status quo and its establishment. Radicalism as an ideological mindset tends to be very critical of the existing status quo, pursuing the objective of restructuring and/or overthrowing outdated political structures. By their opponents, radicals are often portrayed as violent; but this is only partly correct, as radicalism tends to be associated historically more with a progressive reformism than with utopian extremism, whose glorification of violence it rejects. Unlike extremists, radicals are not necessarily extreme in their choice of means to achieve their goals. Unlike extremists who reject the extremist label, radicals also self-define themselves as radicals.[40]

---

[37] Gerges, Fawaz. *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy*. Harcourt, Inc. 2006, p. 82.

[38] Horgan, John. "Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation." *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol. 2, No. 4, 2008.

[39] Ibid, p. 99. Note: the Lincoln Brigade was comprised of Americans who went to Spain to fight the fascists; for more information see Hochschild, Adam. *Spain in our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

[40] Bötticher, Astrid. "Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism." *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol. 11, No. 4, 2017. Available at
http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/623/html

A positive example often noted is women's suffrage – an idea that seemed radical at the time but which is now in most places taken for granted.[41] However, this again treads into values territory, and can become more complicated. What of the radical that claims to deny women a right to vote by claiming it is their culture to protect them from the dirty business of politics? Or of a radical religious group that claims child marriage is a religious right that ensures the sanctity of family? The latter in particular is clearly against the values of liberal democracy (e.g., human rights, equality under the law) which the Euro-Atlantic audience to which this report is directed purports to hold. Yet a creeping encroachment to retreat from such values is evident in everything from efforts to cultivate opposition to the Istanbul Convention (including by Turkey and Poland) and other initiatives – including in and by "consolidated" democracies – to fundamentally redefine human rights.[42] A values-based struggle has emerged and gone mainstream, harkening back to some noble version of the past, rejecting science, and turning words such as "urban" and "cosmopolitan" into dog whistles that both stoke grievance and domestic polarization in a time of economic crisis, but also build in long-held anti-Semitic and racial tropes.

In his book *Islamic Fascism*, Hamed Abdel-Samad suggests that a fascist mentality has permeated Islamist movements since the early 20th century, mirroring the rise of fascist movements in Europe. Reviewing the tenets of fascism, he discusses Umberto Eco, who wrote that, "rejection of modernity and the Enlightenment – tied to a tendency toward irrationalism – is another feature of fledgling fascism; others include rejection of critical reasoning, xenophobia, sexism, and machismo."[43] The similarity in outlooks and tenets between these different far-right variants suggest that far from being ideological polar opposites, these two variants of far right extremism are different twigs on the same branch.[44] In his provocative yet prescient 1995 book, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber explored this in the early, heady days of the post-Cold War world, applying the word "jihad" to all far-right movements based on essentialist particularism, and "McWorld" for amoral, unrestrained global capitalism. (The word choices were also likely made to make for a sexier title that would be more easily sold.) He foresaw a coming values clash led by extremists and fostering inward-looking isolationism:

> If McWorld in its most element negative form is a kind of animal greed – one that is achieved by an aggressive and irresistible energy, Jihad in its most elemental negative form is a kind of animal fear propelled by anxiety in the face of uncertainty and relieved by self-sacrificing zealotry – an escape out of history. Because history has been a history of individuation, acquisitiveness, secularization, aggressiveness, atomization, and immoralism, it becomes in the eyes of Jihad's disciples the temporal chariot of wickedness, a carrier of corruption that, along with time itself, must be rejected. Moral

---

[41] Neumann, Peter. *Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region*. September 29, 2017. Available at https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/346841

[42] Gerhke, Laurenz. "Polish court to 'examine' Istanbul Convention on violence against women." *Politico*. July 30, 2020. Available at https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-court-violence-against-women-istanbul-convention/; Kaplan, Seth. "Human Rights Are in Recession. Can That Be Reversed?" *Foreign Policy*. July 23, 2020. Available at https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/23/human-rights-united-nations-guidelines-freedom/

[43] Abdel-Samad, Hamed. *Islamic Fascism*. Prometheus Books, 2016, p. 17.

[44] Some of these similarities are further explored in Perry (2019.)

preservationists, whether in America, Israel, Iran, or India, have no choice but to make war on the present to secure a future more like the past: depluralized, monocultured, unskepticized, reenchanted.[45]

These trends are part of a seeming retreat from the liberal democratic values that characterized the West and countries aspiring to join the west for decades. Instead, new forms of governance and leadership are emerging, ranging from Vladimir Putin's one man, ideology-free kleptocracy, to China's high-tech authoritarian state capitalism, augmented by an aggressive foreign policy and zero tolerance for dissent. This is being if not facilitated then at least enabled by the decline of commitment to a liberal vision and pursuit of a liberal, democratic peace in established democracies.

The emergence of COVID-19 has served as an extremism multiplier, hastening the breakdown of already weakened societies, and threatening not only public health, but political and social health. Extremism and extreme polarization have built on accumulating trends, but have been intensified by the pandemic and its impact on already existing fault lines – migration, economic inequality, and status anxiety, to name just a few.[46] COVID-19 is being used effectively by existing extremist groups or all kinds, tailored to fit their own agendas as needed.[47] The far-right has rapidly and skillfully embedded and exploited key themes - migration, globalization, governance, liberty, resilience, and conspiracy - into its COVID-19 narratives.[48] ISIS has exploited the pandemic, both prolonging the war and suffering in Syria, and looking forward to maintain and consolidate support systems.[49] Showing once again the ability of extremist groups to adapt and use new technologies, white supremacists were quick to use Zoom to spread fear, often targeting Jewish users.[50] The US-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) which is tracking this trend, noted one incident in which video of the 2019 Christchurch massacre (itself live streamed on Facebook) was streamed onto a Zoom feed, again showing the cultivation of extremist narratives that adherents build on globally.[51] And there is little leadership or policy – anywhere - pushing back, or offering an alternative vision.

---

[45] Barber, Benjamin. *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenges to Democracy*. Ballantine Books, 1995, p. 215.

[46] As just one example of analysis of the pandemic's impact in the Western Balkans see, "Democracy and the State of the Emergency: Political Battles Emerging out of the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia. Report Two." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, May 18, 2020. Available at *http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/16213.pdf*

[47] Francesco Marone (ed.) *Dossier: Extremism and Terrorism in a Time of Pandemic*. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. May 20, 2020. Available at https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/extremism-and-terrorism-time-pandemic-26158

[48] Richard McNeil-Wilson, "Framing in Times of Crisis: Responses to COVID-19 Amongst Far-right Movements and Organizations," *International Center for Counter-Terrorism*, The Hague, June 25, 2020. Available at: https://icct.nl/publication/framing-in-times-of-crisis/

[49] Andrew Hanna, "ISIS Offensive Exploits Pandemic," *The Wilson Center*, June 8, 2020. Available at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/isis-offensive-exploits-pandemic; Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, "ISIS is using coronavirus to rebuild its terrorism network in Iraq and Syria," *NBC News*, May 28, 2020. Available at https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/isis-using-coronavirus-rebuild-its-terrorism-network-iraq-syria-ncna1215941

[50] Zoe Schiffer, "White supremacists are targeting Jewish groups on Zoom," *The Verge*, April 15, 2020. Available at https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/15/21221421/white-supremacist-zoombombers-target-jewish-community-zoom

[51] "What is Zoombombing and Who is Behind It?," *Anti-Defamation League – ADL Blog*, May 4, 2020. Available at: https://www.adl.org/blog/what-is-zoombombing-and-who-is-behind-it

Experts have sought to explain these developments, often reaching back to the 2008 financial crisis, the cultural revolution of the 1960s, or even further, in their studies. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart explain and define a new brand of authoritarian populism, in which charismatic leaders build on dissatisfaction with the status quo by claiming to represent a "forgotten" people,[52] while then dismantling basic democratic norms and structures – often personally profiting in the process.[53] In the absence of new economic policies or models to address the inequalities stemming from globalization and the consequences of unregulated capitalism, they instead cultivate and depend on fear: identification of an "other" (minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ, etc.), and *inter alia* the dark vision of a looming sense of a threat against which only they can provide protection.

The authors propose a model they call the "cultural backlash theory," which consists of six sequential and self-reinforcing elements,[54] and they go on to apply this model to several case studies. They identify a "contagion of the right," as parties cluster right, particularly on issues related to the EU and immigration. This contagion has been further strengthened by greater formal and informal linkages among the right, broadening and deepening that narrative, in Europe and globally.

The second is global polarization, both within and among countries. In *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization*, edited by Thomas Carothers and Andrew O'Donohue, the polarization narrative is explored through a mix of country case studies that show the manifestations of this phenomenon.[55] The role of controlled and manipulated media and infotainment, the active undermining of democratic structures that weaken checks and balances, electoral systems that reinforce or promote division, and declining trust among people who feel tired and helpless in the face of change, combine to create self-fulfilling prophesies.

As the institutions, laws, and norms of a democratic society disintegrate, and as checks and balances including independent media (particularly local) and civic involvement are stifled, accountability mechanisms disappear, paving the way for abuse, self-dealing, and worse. Norris and Inglehart note that authoritarian populist leaders manage to personally profit as they sell disintegrative processes to an aggrieved population, creating more and more

---

[52] "The League of Forgotten Men" is President Buzz Windrip's militia in Sinclair Lewis' 1935 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_Can%27t_Happen_Here

[53] Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and Authoritarian Populism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2019.

[54] The six elements are: 1) socio-economic structural change; 2) a revolution in socially liberal and post-materialist values; 3) a tipping point in which a group feeling status anxiety due to noted socio-economic changes consolidates and activates; 4) period effects from economic conditions and immigration flows; 5) application of the rules of the games in terms of the electoral system and relevant political party rules that impact the vote; and 6) the emergence of an authoritarian leader, culture and regime.

[55] Carothers, Thomas and Andrew O'Donohue (eds.) *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019.

personal incentives for them to stay the course. Light nepotism and favors can easily evolve to more systemic corruption, ultimately including state capture.[56]

These developments have been playing out in Europe for the past decade, at a quickening pace, and experts have been describing the processes that are now finally being discussed in the more popular discourse. Hungarian sociologist Balint Magyar outlined his assessment of what was happening in his country in a 2013 book, *Post-Communist Mafia State*, and many of the observations he made have been long evident in the Western Balkans. While drafting this report, Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen wrote about the seeming hastening erosion of norms in the US, including on the issue of corruption, that she has been witnessing. She notes a forthcoming book by Magyar and a colleague, Balint Madlovics, entitled, *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes: A Conceptual Framework*. While not yet published, this book appears highly relevant to this research on BiH and North Macedonia. Gessen notes the following:

> It contains, among other insights, a critique of how we usually talk about and measure corruption. Magyar and Madlovics write that the problem with measurements used by, say, Transparency International, which produces an annual index of perceived corruption, is that the index assumes that corruption represents a departure from a norm: "They understand the state by its formal identity: as dominantly an institution of the public good, with some subordinates who deviate from that purpose and abuse their position by requesting or accepting bribes and appointing cronies without a legitimate basis." This view of corruption fails when confronted with a government to which corruption is central, or in which corruption is not voluntary but coercive—where the corrupt relationship is forced by one partner upon the other.[57]

The last sentence in particular describes a sense of what governance has looked and felt like by citizens in the Western Balkans for a generation. It is nearly impossible to talk about politics in a structured interview, in a *kafana,* or in a taxi, without the word "corruption" or varieties on the theme (*lopovi* ["thieves;]" *džepovi* ["pockets;"] etc.) coming up. A number of works make progress in sketching the outlines of the problem, but none are yet authoritative, or make the wider needed socio-political/political economy connections. Misha Glenny's *McMafia* takes a global look at corruption and organized crime, with strong Balkan ties.[58] Peter Andreas reveals the wartime roots of corruption and malgovernance in his book, *Blue Helmets, Black Markets*, an account of the Sarajevo siege dynamics and economy.[59] The Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN) and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) have written widely about the issue, applying investigative journalism

---

[56] In the media "state capture" is frequently described, and is even at times specifically noted. The terms *zarobljena država*, *заробена држава*, and *shtet i kapur* were (respectively) identified in the Bosnian/Croatia/Serbian, Macedonian, and Albanian media space.
[57] Masha Gessen, "The President is Shilling Beans," *The New Yorker*, July 16, 2020. Available at https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-president-is-shilling-beans
[58] Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2008.
[59] Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets, Black Markets – The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo*, Cornell University Press, 2008.

techniques, and uncovering significant acts of malfeasance.[60] Transparency International and a host of local NGOs have engaged on the issue through various (generally foreign funded) projects.[61] A special journal issue on the topic of state capture in the region looked at region-wide themes and specific manifestations in several countries.[62] In a hitherto unprecedented move for the EU, North Macedonia was characterized as a captured state by the European Commission in 2016.[63] Such a frank assessment has not been made in BiH.

And yet instances of everyday or higher level corruption is still often viewed by outsiders as a unique problem of the process of "transitioning" from socialist/communist economies to market economies, and of the associated (hoped for) political transformations. This framing of corruption as a failure of the transition process is flawed,[64] and fails to take into account the weakening of consolidated democracies, the weakening democratic consensus, the rise of authoritarian populism, and the already evident exploitation of the public good and trust that this will facilitate.

Similarly, the notion of resilience itself has often been oversimplified. Beyond the individual psychological studies of both the pros and cons of resilience,[65] in the broader social sphere this team is positing that resilience cannot be understood as an unalloyed good – at least not without reference to the context. A positive resilience can be seen in the ability of a community to, say, bounce back from devastating floods, survive some extraordinary hardship with solidarity (consider the three-and-a-half year siege of Sarajevo), or come together to protest against violent racially motivated acts. However, a negative sort of survival resilience is also possible; a shared social ability to instinctively weather the storms of protracted unsatisfactory social developments, with the aim of surviving *in spite* of the system. This is one of the theory-building elements this research is developing, and is explored more in the Analysis.

<div align="center">***</div>

With this literature in mind – as well as much more – the team set out to understand the Chayes analytical models, determine the applicability to the two selected countries based on data collection, and determine whether similar models could be developed – both visually and narratively. This report does that.

---

[60] See www.cin.ba and www.occrp.org.
[61] Blagovčanin, Srđan. "The Rule of the Cartel." *Transparency International*. May 2020. Available at https://ti-bih.org/english-the-rule-of-the-cartel/?lang=en
See *A Cross-Cutting Survey of Corruption and Anti-Corruption Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Overview, Challenges, and Recommendations*. USAID MEASURE BIH. February 2015. Available at https://impaqint.com/work/project-reports/cross-cutting-survey-corruption-and-anti-corruption-issues-bosnia-and
[62] Valery Perry and Soeren Keil. "The Business of State Capture in the Western Balkans: An Introduction." *Southeastern Europe* 42 (2018), pp. 1-14.
[63] https://freedomhouse.org/report/analytical-brief/2017/freeing-captured-state-macedonia-what-role-eu-accession
[64] Kurt Bassuener, "A Durable Oligarchy: Bosnia and Herzegovina's False Post-War Democratic Transition," in Sabrina P. Ramet, Christine Hassenstab, and Ola Listhaug, *Building Democracy in the Yugoslav Successor States*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p.216-255.
[65] Chamorro-Premuzic Tomas and Derek Lust. "The Dark Side of Resilience." *Harvard Business Review*. August 16, 2017. Available at https://hbr.org/2017/08/the-dark-side-of-resilience

From the beginning the team was wondering why there have not been more demonstrations of extremism considering the legacy of the damaging and disintegrative Yugoslav wars and the stagnant socio-economic context. We have identified and explained a number of safety valves that have emerged from the current social and political contexts that have mitigated the potential for more violent extremism. These safety valves, however, are negative factors, that actually contribute to the potential for sustained dissatisfaction, grievance, and radicalization. But we have also determined that there are in fact two variations of radicalization possible, one of which is actually necessary to address the structural sources of injustice, stagnation, and hopelessness that have blighted the countries and the region for a generation. This research explains these ideas, and the data that informed it, in detail.

Structure of the Volume

This volume is structured to play multiple potential roles for various readers. It provides detailed field-level insights on the two case study countries, painting thick descriptions of each, while allowing for space to compare and contrast. Anecdotes and direct quotes from fieldwork provide a megaphone for the voices of men and women who feel that no one listens to them, and that they have no conduits to express themselves to policymakers that might make a difference. Theories are referenced, to contextualize the specific within broader conceptual frameworks.

The contributions are organized as follows. The next chapter explains the original study by Sarah Chayes, summarizing her main findings and arguments, and outlining the models of state capture she offered that inspired this research. The countries she examines – including Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tunisia, Nigeria, and Egypt – are certainly different from BiH and North Macedonia in terms of physical size and democratic development. However, they remain instructive as archetypes, and in fact their comparably larger size often simply makes it easier to reveal trends that can go unnoticed in smaller state contexts. While anyone interested in these issues is encouraged to read her book from start to finish, this summary provides the basics needed to understand her ideas, and the application of these ideas to the two case study countries.

This is followed by a chapter that describes the overall research design and methodology.

The next two chapters set the scene by describing the media environment encountered during the research timeframe. This task was viewed as important in the project conceptualization as information production and consumption play such a substantial role in society and politics. However, the COVID-19 pandemic made this survey even more difficult, while even more important, as it revealed the virtual space in which millions of citizens living and working under various intensities of lockdown or isolation have sought to stay informed and make sense of this novel era. The review was also useful in illustrating the paucity of strong, investigative local news, and *inter alia* the heavy role that higher-level media outlets play in shaping discourse.

While both country media reviews were inspired by the overall research questions, they unfolded in different ways, resulting in parallel methodologies borne of the different country contexts and the exploratory nature of this initiative. The media and social media

environment in BiH, vibrant yet in many ways constrained and limited by the political and economic consequences, exists in multiple spaces that reflect the political divisions of the post-war country. However, the fact that everyone speaks Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian makes it a practical unitary language space. One researcher was responsible for the full media tracking effort, and following the fine-tuning of a selection of outlets, a targeted yet representative data set allowed for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. However the full team was able to contribute and participate in review of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian articles throughout the period, allowing for robust and ongoing discussion of media trends.

The North Macedonian linguistic context is very different, as Macedonian and Albanian are very different Indo-European languages, fostering two distinct information ecosystems. Two researchers therefore participated as leads, one covering each language environment. The North Macedonian team was more easily able to track the Macedonian sources, with more limited Albanian language capacity. This resulted in monitoring two *de facto* separate infospheres, and complexities that arose in the process led the team to focus on a largely qualitative survey. In spite of the methodological differences, the end result of both media review chapters is a rich portrait of each case study country that sets the scene for everything that follows.

The next two chapters focus on the fieldwork, with field visit findings summarized for each country. The teams endeavored to simply express the findings – free from analysis or interpretation – though at times some potentially subjective context was needed to properly convey the objective findings. Each of these chapters is broadly structured according to the three main themes of governance, extremism, and corruption, with closing comments on the visions and recommendations offered by interview and focus group respondents. Overall trends are explained, punctuated by particularly insightful quotes or paraphrased sentiments.

This is followed by a single chapter that explores the results of an unintended yet useful online poll. Again, the data presented is minimally analyzed. Data from both countries is presented together to facilitate easy comparison – both between the countries, but then also within the various internally different respondent groups (namely, those who filled out the Latin or Cyrillic versions in BiH, or the Macedonian or Albanian versions in North Macedonia). While not a scientific sample, with over 1700 responses, this data provided a useful additional data point.

These findings chapters are followed by one of the more unique elements of this research. During the field visits, and through the process of preparing field notes, the team realized it had more impressions than could be conveyed in even a quite lengthy report. Some of these stemmed from the simple act of driving to or through the targeted communities (e.g., while exploring the communities most affected by the migrant crisis in BiH's northwest). Others came from offhand sentiments shared by respondents outside of the framework of formal semi-structured discussions. Together with the preparatory desk research done prior to the first round of field visits, it was clear that there was a risk that the richest and most human elements of this-ethnographic research could be lost. Therefore, the teams decided to include narrative snapshots of all of the researched communities, using a similar structure while inviting a readable, narrative tone that aims to paint a picture that is human, and that better describes the state of local hopes and heartbreaks, opportunities and oppressions,

faith and fears. The team is confident that this was as worthwhile for the analysts as it will be for the readers, as it serves to bridge the raw findings and the conceptually grounded analysis. It was also essential in developing the models and analysis, as they demonstrate the lived dynamics of the integrated system.

The penultimate chapter is the Analysis, which brings together all of the data, considers it within the context of the conceptual framework described in Chayes' book, and then builds graphic representations that describe key elements and dynamics of the political economies being studied. This part of the report both expands the scope of the Chayes state capture frameworks, while contributing to theory building opportunities in the specific Western Balkans context.

Finally, short concluding remarks and recommendations chapter are presented, aiming to assist in operationalizing these findings, proposing future research, policy, and programming decisions, and inspiring bigger picture consideration of the issues presented in a 2020 social, political, and economic context that was scarcely imaginable when this idea was first entertained by the team in 2018. Some appendices close out the volume.

Taken together, this report fills a critical gap in the existing literature on the region, by systematically looking at structural drivers of polarization and extremism, and understanding how bottom-up and top-down processes affect the lives being lived by normal people in communities in both countries. In addition, the report investigates and assesses why pronounced and persistent popular discontent in both countries has not developed into a more radicalized direction – either progressive or reactionary.

Research Design and Methodology

Key Takeaways

- Nine municipalities in BiH and nine communities (in eight municipalities) in North Macedonia selected to ensure historical, geographic, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and political diversity.
- Secondary data sources included the Chayes book *Thieves of State*, various relevant books, studies, reports, and extensive media reviews.
- Primary data included municipal/community level field work, ultimately including approximately 200 individuals in interviews or focus groups.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on travel, particularly during the shutdowns but also by limiting the potential for multi-region and multi-stakeholder events envisioned for the end of the project. Travel between BiH and North Macedonia was also affected.
- Discourse analysis was used to triangulate data and analyze findings, relying on information collected in this initiative but also the cumulative expertise of the two country teams.

Research Design

At the project kick-off meeting in late 2019,[66] and in subsequent early discussions, the following key research questions were discussed and defined:

1. How do systems and structural factors feed various types of extremisms in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia?
2. How could popular dissatisfaction with the systemic and the structural factors lead to a constituency for non-violent change?
     a. How do structural factors generate narratives?
     b. How do they propagate?
     c. How do they drive or make it possible to drive narratives?
     d. How to support/promote alternative/progressive narratives?

To a large extent, this research is aimed at de-pathologizing radicalization and extremism, moving away from the individuals as the unit of analysis (Why did that person radicalize/engage in extremist activities?) and moving towards the broader society/social structure in which individuals live, engage, and grow.

---

[66] The research project was implemented between December 2019 and October 2020.

The research design was further informed by an interest in the following:

- Understanding the impact of state/high-level politics on the local level
- Using engagement and action research to promote interlocutors to share their own impressions and also consider their own analysis and potential prescriptions
- Plugging this data and local feedback into a framework informed by Chayes' work

An immediate challenge in structural research is its scope, as every aspect of political, economic and social life and engagement, today and in the past, combine to create a contemporary, living, human infrastructure. In the kickoff meeting in late 2019 a large variety of themes and keywords were identified, all of which can reflect and reinforce social trends.[67] In the course of the discussion, the wide variety of themes that can explicitly or implicitly describe and reflect the societies in the two case countries was brainstormed (see Exhibit below). Words and themes also do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by the context of speech, or of the speaker. While such a broad and extensive list is necessary to understand the structures, they are impossible to view as a checklist. They did however serve as a baseline and roadmap, in literature and media review, and field work.

Exhibit 2: Relevant Themes and Keywords

> **Relevant Themes and Keywords**
>
> Humiliation; Agency; Theft; Power(lessness); Corruption; Pride; Majorization; Dignity; Control; Inspiration; God; MMGA;[68] Loss; Invasion; Genocide; Empowerment; Treason/Traitor; Victim; Freedom; Death; Coward; Migrant; Family values; Future; Traditional; Defense; Foreign mercenaries; Poverty; Rights; Resistance; Idealism; Ideology; Ideals; Justice; Provocation; Commie; Good; Evil; Morals; Heritage; Elitism; WWII; Leader; Strength; Identity: Birthrate; Faith; Control; 'Golden age"; Siege; Exploitation; Brothers; Depopulation; Martyrs; Survival; "strani plaćenici"/ "stranski platenici"; Elites/elitism; Truth; Foreign Occupation

Municipality Focus and Selection

There was a strong interest in understanding the impact at the local level of higher level government policy and dynamics, and to capture a more nuanced and granular understanding of this impact. While BiH and North Macedonia have very different government structures, they do both have municipalities as the primary level/lowest tier of local self-government; therefore this is a suitable level of analysis. Each team made its selection based on a variety of characteristics and logistical considerations.

BiH has 144 units of local government,[69] and due to topography and infrastructure, the distance from Sarajevo to some of them (via road travel) can be up to 5-6 hours. The team

---

[67] For a good survey of the theoretical underpinnings and observed example of social change, see Sztompka, Piotr. *The Sociology of Social Change*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1994.
[68] "Make Macedonia Great Again"
[69] A combination of municilaities, cities, and Brčko District. See Council of European Municipalities and Regions: https://www.ccre.org/pays/view/11

wanted to select municipalities that tend to not be studied by researchers; for this reason Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Tuzla, and Zenica were excluded from consideration.[70] The team then wanted to focus on more than one geographical region to ensure variety, and also to focus on municipalities in a number of different internal administrative units (entities/cantons etc.). In addition the team sought to ensure a variety in terms of predominant ethno-national demographics (majority Bosniak, Croat, or Serb; relatively balanced, etc.). Finally, the team was interested in contested regions that had experienced significant dislocation in the war (to explore any possible link between wartime violence dynamics, social trauma, and subsequent political orientation), and/or recent cases of extremist presence, and therefore looked carefully at options along the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL), and along cantonal boundary lines.

This led to the identification of two de facto "clusters," one in the Krajina region (northwest) and one more in the north central/northeast of the country. This cluster approach both facilitated travel and also allowed for some observation of linkages in each area. A summary of some key reasons for these choices is detailed in the chart below.

Exhibit 3: BiH - Targeted Municipalities

Municipality	Local Characteristics	Location/unit in BiH
Bihać	Very distant from Sarajevo, leading to sense of (political) detachment and being neglected in political discussions; unique wartime history and subsequent Bosniak political party dynamics; among municipalities hit hardest by refugee/migrant transit issues; regional environmental challenges and activism; strong sense of local identity/personality; Bosniak majority	Federation; Una-Sana Canton (1)
Bosanski Petrovac	Mixed Bosniak/Serb town; shares cross-IEBL environmental concerns linked to nuclear waste site to be built in nearby Croatia; marginalized *vis-a-vis* both Bihać and Sarajevo	Federation; Una-Sana Canton (1)
Brčko	Mixed population; Rising political polarization over past 10 years, and rising local community divisions; reforms once viewed as models now dimming; Interesting border area provides both local/international border proximity; geographic flashpoint if security situation disintegrates	District
Glamoč	Major depopulation and environmental issues; strong sense of political/geographical disenfranchisement; major wartime population impact in Operation Storm; Serb majority; likely will be targeted in the event of any talk of internal land swaps	Federation; Canton 10

---

[70] BHRI alone has supported several studies: Zatega, Ermin. "Violent Extremism in Mostar and its Alternatives." BHRI unpublished report, 2019; "Religious Dynamics in Zenica: Draft Report from a Field Trip." BHRI unpublished report; "Exploring Sources of Grassroots Resilience to Ethno-national Extremism." BHRI unpublished report; Zoric, Goran. "Banja Luka Report." Unpublished BHRI Report. September 2019.

Maglaj	Bosniak majority; heavy wartime fighting; past/recent experience with mujahidin/Salafist adherents; close to Tešanj and other economically vital municipalities; heavily damaged by 2014 floods	Federation; Zenica-Doboj Canton (4)
Mrkonjić Grad	RS municipality in often-neglected area; major wartime population impact in Operation Storm; female mayor; strong local historical foundation narratives	RS
Petrovo	Serb majority; tucked in between Maglaj and Gračanica, with links to Doboj, recent investment in natural resources/thermal water health spa; end of war legacy carve-out	RS
Srebrenik	Bosniak majority; relatively prosperous, with examples of corruption (Jata/construction industry, and gas; clear political party links); close to Gornja Maoča (in same cantonal jurisdiction)	Federation; Tuzla Canton (3)
Žepče	Croat majority, but large Bosniak population; heavy wartime fighting; significant post-war political divisions; history of divided education/communities	Federation; Zenica-Doboj Canton (4)

While municipalities in Herzegovina or eastern RS would have been interesting (e.g., Višegrad), and while the team regretted not being able to look at Pale, for a small pilot set these two clusters were assessed as being suitably interesting, diverse, and generally under-researched.

North Macedonia's size and geography makes it relatively easier for field work, as most parts of the country can be reached within around two hours by car. However the country also has a rich history, and demographic, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and historical factors that create multiple micro-cultures that have their own dynamics. Beyond Skopje and the Polog region (Tetovo, Gostivar), most of North Macedonia has been under researched.

The team aimed to investigate municipalities that have exhibited polarization, thereby providing potential fertile soil for corruption and radicalizations (both positive and negative), as well as those that offer political, economic, and geographic diversity. Furthermore, selection was informed by the political history of North Macedonia, which largely contributes to today's state of play. Lastly, conducting predominantly ethnographic research in a multiethnic, multilingual, and multi-confessional country requires equitable representation of all groups, to the extent possible. Taking into consideration all of the aforementioned criteria, the team of investigators decided to focus on nine communities as described below. Chair and Gazi Baba are both located in the City of Skopje.

Exhibit 4: North Macedonia - Targeted Municipalities/Communities

Municipality	Local Characteristics	Location
Chair (City of Skopje)	Perhaps the municipality with the biggest problem in terms of religious radicalization; at least three mosques outside of the jurisdiction of the Islamic Religious Community (IRC); inter-ethnic and inter-confessional with Albanian Muslims dominating; the stronghold of one of the most notorious football fans (Shverceri) in the country	Located in Skopje
Gazi Baba (City of Skopje)	Gazi Baba is the urban slum of Skopje and Chair, facing problems both in terms of religious and right-wing radicalization; ethnically and religiously mixed, with ethnic Albanians dominating demographically; at least one mosque out of IRC's jurisdiction.	Located in Skopje
Gostivar	Ethnically mixed municipality consisted of Albanians, Macedonians, and Turks; multi-confessional with good track record of inter-ethnic relations; still, several confirmed cases of radicalization leading to VE have been confirmed, as well as FTFs.	70 km from Skopje
Kumanovo	Ethnically-mixed municipality with history of tensions among high-school students; populated mainly by Macedonians, Albanians, Serbs, and Roma, with Macedonians being the largest ethnic group; site of violent clash between police and armed Albanians in 2015; multi-confessional with ethnically segregated schools.	30 km from Skopje
Shtip	One of the most politically polarized municipalities in North Macedonia, due to its history of producing influential political leaders both on the Left and the Right of the political spectrum; hosts Macedonian Patriotic Organizations (MPOs); Roma and Turkish minorities present.	100 km from Skopje
Struga	Multi-ethnic and multi-confessional municipality mainly consisting of Macedonians, Albanians, and Torbesh (Macedonian Muslims); track record of ethnic nationalist outbursts, inter-religious quarrels in the villages, as well as high school segregation.	170 km from Skopje
Strumica	One of the most politically polarized municipalities in the country; has several registered Macedonian Patriotic Organizations, but also significant polarization among ethnic Macedonians; the Roma and the Turkish communities are the most prominent minorities.	170 km from Skopje
Tetovo	Ethnically-mixed municipality which was the most exposed to the 2001 violent conflict; Albanians are the majority, with Macedonians, Roma, and Turks following; home of the notorious Ballisti, fans of FC Shkendija from Tetovo, and the Vojvodi, fans supporting FC Ljuboten;	40 km from Skopje

	these two groups have a history of clashes.	
Veles	Veles is located in central Macedonia and it is known for hosting Macedonian Patriotic Organizations propagating right-wing extremism; some members are currently imprisoned following the April 27, 2017 violence in Parliament.	50 km from Skopje

The municipalities selected in North Macedonia are in general larger than those selected in BiH. This did not have a significant impact on the study or comparisons between the cases, and some further observations are explored in the Findings and Analysis chapters.

Secondary Data Sources

Three source of secondary data were used. First, the book *Thieves of State* by Sarah Chayes, which inspired this research project, is a key reference point for this initiative and is fully dissected.

Second, a broader set of academic and policy literature was reviewed throughout the project lifecycle, some of which are noted in the survey in the Introduction.

Third, extensive media reviews were conducted in each country. As people increasingly live in an information, news, and data saturated environment, understanding the outlines of this ecosystem is critical to understanding the socio-political environment.

Tracking traditional, online, and social media is difficult for many reasons. First the sheer volume of information available makes monitoring, reviewing and sorting difficult. In contrast to traditional media, transmitted through scheduled "traditional" means through formal daily or weekly editions (or in the case of broadcast media, produced and regularly broadcast chunks of content), online media posts are constant and unpredictable.[71] Second, and related to this, this sheer volume creates a lot of noise. Many items are simply reposts of already published content, which themselves can then generate comments and reactions. Third, determining the content and terminology to be tracked is difficult if one views extremism and political polarization as interconnected structural phenomena – as this study does. It is therefore simplistic and unhelpful to simply propose to track frequency of "hot" key words or phrases, as has often been done in research on ISIS and violent jihadist movements. While one might be able to glean some insights into the frequency of posts of an extremist preacher who has been directly or indirectly sympathetic to ISIS (e.g., Kudozović), and be able to count likes and shares and parse language, how could such a method be applied to an individual prominent in public political life, in some cases for decades? Some dangerous speech – such as that by Serbia's Vojislav Šešelj, is an example of hiding in plain sight that is acceptable only because it is not about jihad. But what about the steady drip and flow of intentionally crafted and delivered provocations by individuals like Milorad Dodik in BiH's Republika Srpska? Therefore this research monitored the media/social media environment to gain a broad understanding of the information environment at the macro- and micro levels,

---

[71] For reasons of practicality, even television broadcasts that were reviewed were done so online rather than in a given "live" broadcast.

viewing this as the agar in which the germs of extremism and violent extremism can be cultivated.

Other media monitoring and analysis informed this exercise. Some of the techniques used by Aktis in its study of the online space in BiH was useful in developing lists of keywords and filtering down thematic coverage through a pilot period. While that study relied in addition on automated collection tools in the initial sorting and selection of a large body of relevant online media items, the human element used in the final analysis and coding, as well as in the survey of selected Facebook pages, was instructive and affirmative.[72] The online information environment was viewed as being a potential platform for both top-down and bottom-up radicalization, drawing in part on research and theory used by Davor Marko in his study of online influencers.[73] The large number of reports and studies generated by initiatives such as Vox-Pol[74] show that there is not only a wealth of research being conducted, but a large variety of approaches of varying scope and scale.

For logistical, linguistic, and practical reasons the BiH and North Macedonia review processes were distinct. While thematically similar, the two country approaches ended up having different monitoring approaches, for a few reasons. First, the two countries have very different language spaces. While in BiH there are three constitutionally equal languages (Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian), they are mutually comprehensible, with many viewing differences as at most dialectical in nature.[75] Therefore, while there is no doubt that the variants have been used as a tool to divide the country's groups, and politicized media schisms are evident, media in all three variants can be reviewed as they exist in one linguistic space. The BiH team had one lead researcher who tracked this space, while the rest of the team was able to review them all and share/suggest other news items throughout the project. In North Macedonia, the two primary languages - Macedonian and Albanian – are fully different languages, creating two distinct language ecosystems. This affected the review process as the lead media researcher relied on a colleague for Albanian language support, and therefore did not have direct and personal engagement with those sources.

Second, and to a lesser extent, the election calendar in North Macedonia had a slight impact, as parliamentary elections originally planned for spring were postponed until July because of the pandemic, leading in turn to two bumps in pre-election media coverage to be filtered. Local elections planned for BiH for autumn 2020 were far enough away in the course of tracking that it didn't have an appreciable impact, though everyday, "normalized" politicking is certainly a constant.

---

[72] "Radicalization in Flux: Unpacking the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism (Bosnia and Herzegovina)." *Aktis Strategy Final Report prepared for USAID*. October 12, 2018.

[73] Marko, Davor. "(Non)violent Extremism Online: How Opinion Leaders Use Online Channels to Disseminate Radical Messages and Intolerance." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st-Cenury Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 139-181 ; Yanow, Dvora. *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis.* London: Sage Publications, 1999.

[74] The VOX-POL Network of Excellence is a very large EU-funded multiparticipant program focused on violent online political extremism, and responses to such extremism. For just a sample see their publications site at https://www.voxpol.eu/publications/

[75] "Is Serbo-Croatian a language?" *The Economist Explains*. April 17, 2020. Available at https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2017/04/10/is-serbo-croatian-a-language

Each country's media/social media review method is described in the chapters describing the media findings. While different, they each provide a different and complementary roadmap to understand the information environment in these case study countries.

The team relied on regular human review, as described further in the Findings. Traditional media presented online and the most content-driven portals were most difficult to review, as the amount of content and posts necessitated multiple daily checks, as information is constantly refreshed and can quickly move from top and center to low and buried. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were a bit easier to review, as they could be checked periodically and reviewed as a cohesive archive.

Exhibit 5: COVID-19 Impact

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Research and Research Environment

COVID-19 has affected many areas of life and work around the world, and it was inevitable that it would have an impact on this project. The environment in which this research project unfolded was itself affected in a number of ways:

- The substantial and at times overwhelming dominance of COVID-19 in the media sphere resulted in a flood of pandemic related reporting, analysis, and commentary, but also the marginalization or exclusion of reporting on non-COVID-19 issues. This was immediately evident in both traditional and new media, and it had an enormous impact on the media discourse.
- Politicians everywhere were forced to address COVID-19's immediate or potential future impact on their society. This has affected policies, budgets, election calendars, and rhetoric.
- In the case of the western Balkans the impact of COVID-19 in the EU has had an impact on EU engagement and the EU perspective in the region, both in terms of EU member state domestic priorities, and the EU's own working calendar.

As soon as the impact of COVID-19 in BiH and North Macedonia became clear the team developed contingency plans to address the impact on the project, including the following:

- Inability to travel to the targeted municipalities during the peak shutdown required a shift to more remote outreach via online tools
- To compensate for the inability to do Round 2 field travel an online survey was developed to integrate more respondents into the project

The addition of the online survey, while unplanned and by its nature unscientific, was in the end a useful exercise and provided an unanticipated additional layer of data. The inability to spend time in targeted communities in person, over a period of time, did have an impact on relationship-building, and on the planned expansion and networking of research participants. This was unavoidable in the period of social distancing, as people have been understandably reluctant to meet with large groups of people outside of their personal/professional clusters. However the team's continued outreach to communities through the pandemic was appreciated by interlocutors, who were pleased that there was continued interest in their community.

Primary Data Sources

The most time-intensive part of this research has been the original data collection through field work. A combination of interviews (usually with one respondent, but at times with two) and focus groups (generally 5-10 people) were held. A summary of the participants engaged is included in the Annex.

BiH Fieldwork

Round 1 was held in February, and was perhaps the most difficult as it was a new process and required a significant amount of time to find relevant and interested interlocutors willing to speak with the team. A snowball approach based on existing government, civil society, media, and general contacts was used. A semi-structured interview approach was developed to introduce respondents to the project and initiate conversation in a comfortable, accessible, conversational, and non-threatening way. Questions on a wide variety of community-relevant issues were asked, including on the main challenges and opportunities, the most followed information sources, satisfaction with governance,   economic prospects, youth activities and opportunities, signs of polarization or extremism, formal and informal power and influence, perceptions of corruption, signs of collection action, and others.

Round 2 was held nearly fully remotely due to COVID-19, using a variety of online tools. The team reached out to everyone contacted in Round 1. Some people were interested in speaking. and some people were either not responsive or were busy due to the extraordinary circumstances. One team member was able to conduct limited field work in her hometown (Bihać) when she was there at the very end of the shutdown. The nature of discussions was different, due to the methods and the situation. While a decent alternative, online communications are simply not as personal or as open as one-to-one, in person discussions, in general but in particular when discussing sensitive topics. Further the team was sensitive that COVID-19 was front and foremost in peoples' minds and adjusted questions to reflect this reality, using COVIID to tease out impressions of respondents' views on politics, corruption, conspiracy theories and social resilience/solidarity. A set of guidance questions provided loose structure.

Round 3 was held in late June, when people were again able to travel and were becoming accustomed to the new post-shutdown but still novel social environment. As intended, Round 3 included more small focus groups, aimed at fostering robust discussion and brainstorming. (Symbolic compensation and refreshments were provided for the participants.) However the team was not able to mix respondents from various different municipalities as initially planned, as both the lack of in-person Round 2 relationship building, and the continued requirements of social distancing made this unrealistic. However, as discussed below the remarkable consistency among respondents in all municipalities suggest that even had people been brought together, their interactions would have been one based on mutual agreement and reinforcement of messages.

In total 112 unique individuals were contacted, through 134 respondent interactions.

North Macedonia Fieldwork

Due to different geographic, contextual, and logistical reasons, the Macedonian research team was more able to make shorter and ad hoc visits to targeted communities based on respondent ability, rather than grouping visits into week-long trips as required in BiH. At the beginning of the project, for example, members of the research team conducted several field site visits in order to map potential interviewees and focus groups members, but also to grasp the main characteristics of the local environments that were subject to research. As this was possible, it was preferable over doing such preparatory work remotely.

In the first wave of data collection, researchers paid several visits to the municipalities of Tetovo, Shtip, and Veles. Due to the fact that these visits were conducted before the COVID-19 outbreak, three focus groups were also organized in the three respective municipalities. In parallel, the team reached out to other contacts in the remaining municipalities in order to initiate the process of sketching out a list of potential interviewees. When lacking already established personal contacts in these municipalities, the starting points for interviewees were either members of the police (preferably retired) or local journalists, who afterwards made further recommendations.

During the second round of data collection (the majority of interviews were conducted between March and May), researchers focused mainly on two municipalities in the City of Skopje – Chair and Gazi Baba, as well as the municipality of Struga. Taking into consideration the spread of COVID-19, many of the interviews were conducted remotely, online or via phone. Occasionally, the research team revisited some of the municipalities covered previously, but also reached out to interlocutors from the remaining ones.

Lastly, the researchers covered the outstanding municipalities of Kumanovo, Strumica, and Gostivar. This classification of rounds/waves of data collection should not be understood as fully rigid; at times, data collection across municipalities overlapped. In the last phase of the project, representatives of the research team met at least one more interlocutor per municipality in order to fill in some of the gaps regarding issues that had remained vague and not fully clarified.

The questionnaires prepared for each of the nine communities were semi-structured and open-ended, with the aim of enabling interviewees to provide longer narrative answers built around a set of topics relevant to this research, such as: main local concerns/grievances; central vs. local governance; the state of corruption on the local level; any concentration of money and power; possibilities for local businesses/local development; assessment of political/ethnic/religious radicalization/organized crime; sport fans groups; the existence/strength of "the commons," as well as local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.[76] As expected, the questionnaires were slightly amended and adapted to each local context, taking into account the main socio-political characteristics of each of the eight municipalities.

---

[76] The COVID-19 topic was explored following the spring peak and the two main religious holidays in North Macedonia: Easter and Ramadan, during which the state failed to take appropriate measures, providing concessions to the two main religious communities in the country – Orthodox Christians and Muslims.

The topic guides for the focus groups were drafted with the aim to appeal to ordinary citizens, make them comfortable to speak openly in front of unknown fellow citizens, and guaranteeing a relatively relaxed and friendly atmosphere for discussion. The focus groups were opened with general questions asking participants about life in their cities/municipalities, the most common daily problems they face and their main grievances. Furthermore, citizens were asked about their perceptions on the security situation in their cities, the level of perceptions of organized crime, as well as their thoughts on corruption - systemic and day-to-day. This section of the topic guide also tackled the concepts of injustice in the community, the participants' thoughts on how people in the community react to this injustice, as well as what they believe is the right/justified way in which people should react to injustice. The last part of the topic guide used projective techniques, by presenting pictures to the participants. The participants were asked to comment on some presented pictures/depicted situations: a man with a suitcase; a man attacking diaspora political activism; VMRO-DPMNE supporters at a rally; photograph of the Colorful Revolution protests; protests of ethnic Albanians; a picture from a Jihadist protest; as well as a picture of an armed Macedonian/Serbian right-wing extremist. The focus group participants were asked to comment whether they had seen, or know similar people from their community like those in the pictures, how they communicate with them, as well as what they think drives them to act/do what they are doing. This was aimed at helping the research team to uncover attitudes and perceptions that cannot always be discerned through regular conversations. [77] It was also useful in order to break some barriers, misconceptions, and fears that participants might have, when the word extremism is mentioned.

Focus groups participants were recruited through a targeted call published online using EUROTHINK's social media profiles and websites. Facebook's option for micro-targeting was used to reach out more systematically to ordinary people living in the municipalities of interest to the project. Symbolic compensation and refreshments were provided for the participants. (See Annex for focus group participant profile.)

Throughout the entire period of project implementation, both teams communicated and exchanged information in order to synchronize the questions as much as possible, taking into consideration some of the inevitable structural and local differences in the two countries. The result are two case studies that seek answers to the same questions using similar approaches appropriately tailored to each environment.

Online Poll

As COVID-19 made travel nearly impossible in March and April, the team early on recognized the need for a contingency plan, and a method of trying to capture information in this new environment. An online survey was developed. The overall aim of questionnaire development was to collect data from respondents on the following themes: general assessment of the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic; trust in institutions and civil society; sources of information/disinformation; and general reflections on the impact of the public health crisis on the country's short and medium-term future. These issues can all impact on individual and collective trust in or disgust for mainstream institutions. An initial list of 30 questions was

---

[77] This interesting technique was not possible for the BiH team at this time, but could be a useful exercise in future research.

substantially consolidated, as the team aimed to eliminate some questions, merge some through more careful wording and minimize the number of open-ended options (to facilitate both respondent completion and later team analysis). The poll was informally tested among colleagues. A refined version was sent to the Bosnia-Herzegovina Resilience Initiative (BHRI) for review and comment, and suggestions received were integrated. The English draft was translated into Latin and Cyrillic script versions for BiH distribution, and Albanian and Macedonian version for North Macedonia. The final version (in English) is in the Annex. Due to human error, there were some slight deviations among the script/language versions; these are described more in the Findings section. The survey promotion techniques is described in the table below.

Exhibit 6: Online Poll Promotion Techniques

BiH	North Macedonia
• Facebook distribution through both the DPC Facebook page and the Peacebuilding Network page • Paid targeted ads on Facebook to boost responses from BiH in general, and for the nine targeted municipalities • Emails with link to poll sent to all Round 1 and 2 interlocutors • Emails with link to poll sent to local portals in nine targeted municipalities • Individual team member snowballing	• Facebook distribution through EUROTHINK – Center for European Strategies Facebook page using paid ads in order to target North Macedonia audience in general, but also users in the targeted municipalities • Emails with link to poll were sent to recipients of EUROTHINK's mailing list • Individual team member snowballing

More information on the data cleansing conducted prior to polling results analysis is included in Findings: Online Poll.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Each country team reviewed the various data and findings and contributed to a process of qualitative analysis grounded in discourse analysis. This allowed for current observations to be compared to and placed in the context of a broader historical sweep. This was a human process; initial discussions on using a tool such as MaxQDA concluded that there would be little value added. Similar approaches used by other social scientists and historians were informative. Nike Wentholt's use of interpretative policy analysis in her study of historical and contemporary extremism linkages, inspired by Dvora Yanow, allowed for a focus on meaning, generated through a "back and forth" reading of texts.[78] In his extensive and pathbreaking study of 4Chan in Serbia, Milanović notes, "the practices of critical discourse analysis [CDA] are useful as CDA generally includes the understanding that texts are rarely

---

[78] Wentholt, Nike. "Using the Past to Extremes in Serbia: Narratives of Historical Violence in Right Wing Extremism and Islamism. *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st-Cenutry Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 69-108; Yanow, Dvora. *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis.* London: Sage Publications, 1999.

the product of a single person (Wodak, 2002, p. 11), and is suitable for comprehensively analyzing a vast number of authors contributing to a set of cohesive ideological positions."[79]

There was some deliberation put into determining the ordering of key topics – governance, corruption, extremism - throughout the Findings. On the one hand, the option of placing extremism findings first followed by corruption, and then governance was considered. However, as the analysis and models were developed, it was concluded that this would be putting the cart before the horse, for extremism is here framed as a result of weak or malgovernance and the corruption that is generated in such a governing environment. Therefore, through the Findings chapters, governance is discussed first, followed by corruption, and then extremism.

The data and analysis that follows the Conceptual Framework Chapters can be clustered into three main elements.

First, raw findings are presented for each of the three main primary data collection methods: media/social media review, field work, and the online poll. Each of these sections has findings presented for BiH, followed by North Macedonia. There is little analysis in these sections as the aim is to just present *findings*. However in some cases some slight preliminary analysis is included for ease of reading. Each of these sections had a lead author or authors, though many team members contributed in the review and revision process.

Next, 18 municipal/community narrative case studies "snapshots" are provided. These are based on the field work, but also broader reading and research on the targeted municipalities. These are aimed at being ethnographic and anthropological, painting a picture of the situation in each place today, while placing the present in an historical context. This approach allowed the team to capture and present the rich textures reveled in this work - something very often missing from policy research. It also provides a basis for a better understanding of the impact of higher level politics and policies on local communities. These were the result of a full-team development effort.

Finally, an Analysis section brings together all of the findings, enabling comparative analysis (within and between the case study countries). This section also weaves in the Chayes model, to determine what elements of her frameworks – or her model variations – might apply to BiH and NMK, and what innovations these two country studies can contribute as well. The two project political analysts had the lead in this effort, through extensive consultations were ongoing and impacted this final text, which was collaboratively agreed, defined, and articulated.

---

[79] Wodak, Ruth, ed. *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage, 2002, as cited in/by Milanović, Boris. "Mapping Extremist Discourse among Serbian 4Chan /po/ Users." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st-Cenutry Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 223 – 280.

Conceptual Framework: Dissecting the Chayes Model

Kurt Bassuener and Ljupcho Petkovski

Introduction

Both Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and North Macedonia, multiethnic former Yugoslav states which suffered violent interethnic conflicts which ended with internationally brokered peace agreements, are electoral democracies which have an EU "membership perspective." Yet systemic corruption and abuse of authority are common topics in public discussion – and have been for some time. Indeed, beginning with North Macedonia, Western Balkan countries have been found by the European Commission and others to be demonstrating characteristics of "state capture."

In her 2015 book *Thieves of State – Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*, Chayes made the contention, based on her deep and multifaceted experience on the ground in Afghanistan, that systemic corruption and self-dealing as practiced by governments (commonly referred to as state capture) fuels popular resentment that feeds into radicalization, including (but not limited to) violent extremism. Executive and administrative capriciousness also play into this equation. The deep sense of unfairness and injustice are critical elements in building up this resentment. And while in her typologies she employs examples in which popular opprobrium has been directed at governing elites and official targets, the perceived (and actual) partnership of said governing elites with external actors generates parallel resentment toward them as well – with potentially dire results. Afghanistan, where the simultaneously weak and effectively kleptocratic state never gained widespread and durable popular legitimacy, is correctly seen to be primarily reliant on US-led Western support. According to Chayes, the failure of US policymakers to understand that stabilization of Afghanistan is impossible without the fight against resentment-generating state capture transforms itself into a vicious circle. This was the motivating example that led her to write the book. The Taliban's resurgence – following general (but uneven) popular relief at their ouster from power in 2001/2 – has relied heavily on this calculus.

The major innovation of Chayes' argument is her attempt to problematize and challenge the deeply entrenched and, as it were, normalized belief in Western societies that Islamic terrorism and violent extremism are fueled by cultural backwardness and religious beliefs. This thinking, particularly following 9/11, has shaped Western foreign policy and radicalized Western societies along Us-Them lines. It is due to this thinking that Western policy has inevitably failed to understand the broader structural, socio-political factors that create the conditions for the possibility of the rise of radical ideologies – of *any* variant. Instead of the usual moralistic arguments about terrorism, Chayes offers a fairly simple structural model according to which political radicalization is a response to systemic corruption (state capture) which generates a deep sense of injustice among the populace, making it more susceptible to extremist ideologies and political movements which specifically send narratives about the unjust status quo – narratives that are relevant to people when they look around and see their lived reality. In so doing, Chayes normalizes our understanding of political violence,

moving it from one based on moral presumption to the register of usual political analysis. This makes her model more universally applicable.

This assessment will use Chayes' conceptualization of the interaction among these factors is the launchpad for analysis. However, the idea is developed further, with added details to go beyond the initial analytical framework as needed to explain the phenomena encountered in the two case countries under consideration. Investigation at both the state and local levels ensures a more focused, stereoscopic view of the phenomena in BiH and North Macedonia than applying the framework only at the top could deliver. This granular, integrated assessment is one of this effort's innovations.

Is Chayes' model relevant for the analysis of the political dynamics of the Western Balkan states? We argue that her fairly simple model, which foregrounds corruption/state capture (or possible party capture) as one of the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism, can be applied in both BiH and North Macedonia. The empirical material will demonstrate that the first part of the equation, systemic corruption, is endemic in the post-Yugoslav and post-violent conflict contexts of BiH and North Macedonia. State capture and kleptocratic partitocracies run by ethnic entrepreneurs, coupled with weak political economies, make wide swathes of the people in both countries feel that justice is *not* the guiding principle in the societies they live in. However, significant outbursts of violent extremism have been a rare exception, despite endemic institutional corruption and the pronounced perception of systemic injustice, which Chayes describes as forming a critical link in a causal chain which can precipitate radicalization and extremism leading to violence. The proper research question therefore ought to seek to explain this discontinuity. Why, given the socio-economic and political circumstances which might foster it, has there not been *more* political radicalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia? What makes the populations of both countries so resilient?

Both radicalization and resilience can have progressive and regressive manifestations, despite the popular connotation of the former as inherently negative, and the latter as an unalloyed positive. Social and political progress *require* popular radicalization, particularly when systems have institutionalized widely perceived injustice; nonviolent conflict typically entails radicalization and mobilization. This is hardly a novel observation; Chayes herself makes it early on in her book, in reference to the beginning of the Arab Spring.[80] And in the burgeoning recent scholarship on P/CVE it is extremely common to point to women's suffrage movements as an example of a development seen as radical (and even extremist) by some of the activists' contemporaries.[81] It is this report's contention that resilience has a dark side as well. That is, societies that for a variety of reasons have become accustomed or inured to systemic injustice, whose members conclude that it is an environmental reality which they cannot control, might be said to suffer from a surfeit of "survival resilience," subverting the development of a radical critical mass to push for systemic change. This is not "apathy" or "indifference," as one often hears from commentators local and foreign – the findings demonstrate that citizens in both countries feel and care passionately about their

---

[80] Chayes, pages 67-70.
[81] Neumann, Peter. *Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region*. OSCE. September 28, 2017. Available at https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/346841

situation. But they frequently conclude it cannot be fought (at least not by them), so must be endured. In such environments this is often a rational decision in the absence of readily available alternatives. But their absence also flows from the benefits of co-optation with established parties. It does not necessarily follow that radical democratic potential could not get traction, if mobilized.

Our thesis is that the political systems have developed built-in political mechanisms to pre-empt or divert any public contestation of corruption and meaningful engagement of broader popular subjectivities in the democratic processes. This closure of social and institutional space for initiative breeds both the resentment we document and the pronounced lack of genuine progressive political projects, which would provide vehicles for positive radicalism. In such systems, grievances related to living in fundamentally corrupt systems do not naturally develop into alternative, progressive political visions. These mechanisms make public articulation of grievances and demands socially undesirable and politically (and/or personally) costly, thereby deterring challenge. If progressive political visions and identities fail to articulate the need for a fairer system based on justice and accountability, then other, regressive movements such as extreme nationalism, xenophobic far-right extremism, or Islamic fundamentalism can monopolize the business of radical politics by default - making them potentially attractive outlets for expression of radicalism which might otherwise be directed at those in power – including violently. Yet these rightward leaning radicalizations (and they can be viewed as two sides of the same coin)[82] result in different expressions: the indigenous nationalist option has been baked in to the nationalist party machines and thereby both normalized and made to a large extent controllable, while the Islamist has been feared (quietist Salafism) or demonized (ISIS's militant jihadism).

An understanding the political structures of these countries is elemental to the political, social, and economic analysis. A brief overview of the internationally brokered power-sharing peace agreements which define the political allocation of power follows.

Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina

Under the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, brokered by the "Contact Group" led by the US, Bosnia's constitution is incorporated as Annex 4. Under the constitutional structure, BiH is composed of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH or "the Federation"), which was established the previous year though US mediation between the Republic of BiH and the separatist Croat forces (and their patron in Zagreb), and the Republika Srpska (RS) which had been proclaimed shortly before the onset of the war.[83] The BiH state constitution was essentially grafted on to the two existing entity-level constitutions (the FBiH one itself a new product of US diplomatic intervention). Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs were "constituent peoples," along with "Others." These were unified in a tripartite joint state Presidency, composed of a Serb elected from the territory of the RS, and a Croat and Bosniak, elected from the territory of the Federation. The state Parliament is bicameral, consisting of a 42-seat House of Representatives (28 from the FBiH, 14 from the RS) and the 15-seat House

---

[82] Abdel-Samad, Hamed (2016) *Islamic Fascism*. Prometheus Books.
[83] The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available at:
http://www.ohr.int/dayton-peace-agreement/

of Peoples (with 5 seats representing each of the constituent peoples, selected from "their" respective entities, and excluding the Others). The entities have their own legislatures – the Federation's bicameral (as per the state) and the RS' unicameral.

The northeastern municipality of Brčko – among those studied in this research – was put up to binding arbitration as to its final disposition, given the inability of the belligerents to agree on whether it should be incorporated into the FBiH or RS. The town was among the first to have been "cleansed" by Serb forces, and was vital for RS west-east communications lines, including to Belgrade. Severing the "Posavina corridor" was a war aim of both the Army of BiH and Croat forces for precisely this reason. That arbitration's Final Award in 1999 made it a self-governing District, a condominium of the entities, but possessing its own specified structure, giving it a more explicitly multiethnic character that stood in stark contrast to the ethnically defined entities.[84] It has been overseen by an international Supervisor with executive powers.

The Federation is composed of ten cantons, eight with an ethnic majority by design, and two mixed. The nature of the compromise in the 1994 Washington Agreement was that many of the powers of governance would be subordinated to the cantons; the original intent was for the territory constituting the RS to be subsumed into the cantonal structure (with the implication it too would be subdivided). But the Contact Group (composed at the time of the US, UK, France, Germany, and the Russian Federation) agreed in summer 1994 on a 51-49% division of territory between the entities as the basis for the peace talks which followed – at a time when the Bosnian Serb Army controlled a great deal more territory. The result in late 1995 was an asymmetrical structure of a centralized RS and a subdivided Federation, joined under the umbrella of a loose state. Many of the competences commonly centralized in European states of similar size – education, health care, policing, justice, pensions – fell under the ambit of these subordinate units; in the Federation's case, down to the cantonal level – as vital elements in the "art of the deal" for the signatories and prime beneficiaries: the erstwhile belligerents-cum-political elites. Unification of the militaries was not even broached conceptually; even the Federation's Army was still a loose coordinating mechanism for what were essentially armies for one-party polities. A bizarre, but essential, conflation of disarmament, demobilization, and training and equipping the FBiH Army to bring it to parity with the Army of the RS (VRS) was a corollary of Dayton. All told, the powers of governance were concentrated in the middle layers, with effectively derivative layers of state and local power.

The "international community" in BiH has a clearer connotation than in many other places, as it was built out from the Contact Group and manifest in the *ad hoc* Peace Implementation Council (PIC), which had the responsibility to oversee implementation of the peace agreement. Western-led external actors were woven directly into the governance fabric of Dayton BiH. NATO, with the US in a leadership role, held the responsibility to enforce the deal and maintain a "safe and secure environment" for BiH citizens (Annex 1A), including those who wished to return to their pre-war homes (Annex 7 addressed refugee return). Elections were to be held the following year under OSCE supervision (Annex 3). An international High

---

[84] Moore, Adam. *Peacebuilding in Practice: Local Experience in Two Bosnian Towns*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013

Representative was appointed by the PIC to oversee coordination of civilian implementation and enforcement as the "final authority in theater" for the interpretation of the agreement (Annex 10). The High Representative also possesses executive authority, articulated with clarity in December 1997 by the PIC meeting in Bonn, to ensure implementation, including imposing necessary legislation, annulling contradictory legislation, and removing or even banning from political life officials obstructing Dayton implementation.

Elections in 1996 helped entrench belligerent parties in power as legitimate political actors (a perverse equivalent of organized crime figures "going legit" by branching out of their traditional business into other sectors in the regulated economy); populations were actually more ethnically divided by 1997 than they had been at the time Dayton was signed, as people moved to be on the side of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (and cantonal borders) where "their" group predominated. This dynamic made all subsequent progress that much more difficult. But the international High Representative, supported by the Office of the High Representative, began to take an increasing – and increasingly strategic – lead for the implementing powers in retroactively addressing problems in Dayton's implementation and retroactively helping both state and municipal competences gain strength. Both the opening of the possibility of NATO and EU membership, first broached in the aftermath of NATO's war with Serbia in 1999, and then the transition from authoritarian hybrid regimes in Croatia and Serbia the following year – both predatory states whose leaders, Franjo Tuđman and Slobodan Milošević, were at the table at Dayton – cleared the path for a more strategic state-building effort. This was couched in terms of not only government functionality for citizens, but as a necessary prerequisite for EU membership. Several important external players helped steer BiH on this path, the most consequential being High Representative Paddy Ashdown (2002-2006). His basic philosophy might be summarized as "if you build it, they will come;" that is, BiH's political elites and general public alike would see the benefits in a functioning state able to join the Euro-Atlantic community as a contributing member. There was palpable optimism regarding this path through 2005 – and the tangible results were considerable. External imposition was a vital and necessary part of the formula, but hardly as frequent as many allege – most of the statebuilding was done through agreements among the political leaders, albeit with varying levels of sweeteners or coercion. Direct election of mayors is an oft-overlooked innovation introduced in this period (2004) followed by fiscal decentralization (never properly implemented). These had been heavily pushed by the US and others, against party opposition.

For reasons explored in greater detail elsewhere, the momentum which had developed in the statebuilding period came to a screeching halt in 2006, beginning the age of atrophy and decay which is documented herein.[85] One overarching reason was the widely presumed inevitability and automaticity with which progress was seen to have been locked in with the changes already achieved – the direction of travel seemed clear, only the velocity was seen to be in question. The failure of the "April Package" of constitutional reforms, assembled among many political parties, failed to garner the required two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives (by just two votes). The amendments in the package would have codified

---

[85] *Statebuilding and Democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Keil, Soeren and Valery Perry (Eds.). London: Ashgate, 2015; Lippman, Peter. *Surviving the Peace: The Struggle for Post-war Recovery in Bosnia-Herzegovina*.Vanderbilt University Press, 2020.

all the achieved reforms into the formal constitution, established two new ministries at the state level, and clarified divisions of competences. Its failure poisoned the political atmosphere in advance of general elections, the most divisive in the post-war period. The arrival of Milorad Dodik as RS Prime Minister in February 2006 was also crucial.

But perhaps the most decisive was the EU's presumption that enlargement alone would prove a strong enough incentive for established elites to conduct the necessary reforms, first and foremost to serve their citizens with accountability, but also to join the EU. The EU was more than happy to take on the leadership role in BiH from the US, wishing to demonstrate its normative "soft power." The collision with the ground reality in Bosnia in 2006-7 led to slight amendments of the timetable of "transition" – the plan to close OHR – but never to a fundamental reassessment of the policy, since this would amount to admission of failure. Therefore, support for BiH's alleged "democratic transition" remains the baseline assumption of EU-led Western policy in BiH, in spite of its manifest incongruence with reality. That reality has become one dictated by the nature of the Dayton deal, freed of the countervailing fetters of external and internal accountability: a pyramidal vertical of power in the RS, a hydra of diffused power in the Federation, legally joined in a state structure, but in practice governed through meetings among party leaders who make all the consequential decisions, regardless of their titular functions.

North Macedonia and the Ohrid Framework Agreement

In North Macedonia, the "international community" was also essential to resolving a violent conflict in 2001, albeit thankfully much less bloody than the war in BiH. An insurgency launched by the National Liberation Army (NLA), an ethnic Albanian insurgency with ties to the Kosovo Liberation Army, was launched in early 2001 with the aim of changing the constitutional structure of the country. The NLA's leadership decried the position of the Albanian community, including its exclusion from the public sector and the levers of institutional power. Previously portrayed as a multiethnic success, largely because of the absence of violent conflict, the country's government attempted to quell the rebellion, concentrated in the northwest of the country to the outskirts of Skopje, with force. This proved unsuccessful, and furthermore consolidated the Albanian population behind the NLA, though its overall numbers remained small. The conflict threatened an all-out civil war, finally drawing in concerted Western diplomacy, conducted by a tandem of US and EU envoys. The resulting brokered power-sharing peace deal, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was signed in August 2001, in the town of the same name, among the leading ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political parties – not including the NLA.[86] The agreement was far more welcomed among the ethnic Albanian population than among ethnic Macedonians, many of whom saw it as humiliating and the beginning of a feared binational or federal state – or even state dissolution.

There were several differences between Dayton and Ohrid. The conflicts and societies involved, despite being divided former component parts of Yugoslavia, had important differences. Most important is that North Macedonia's division is not just ethnic, but linguistic (and largely religious as well) making the division that much wider – and self-

---

[86] Ohrid Framework Agreement, available at: https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622

enforcing, via separated media spaces, etc. Despite the official reality of BiH's "languages," the reality is that BiH as a whole fits into a wider linguistic space of "the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian," comprising Croatia, BiH, Serbia, and Montenegro. This is in many ways a common media space. As noted above, the death tolls in the conflicts were vastly different. In BiH, roughly 100,000 were killed; in North Macedonia an estimated 200 or so. There was decidedly no will to repeat what was widely acknowledged as a weakness of Dayton – its ethnoterritorial division. OFA underscores that Macedonia would remain a unitary state. While constitutional amendments would be required to implement it, the existing constitution would remain.

Ohrid also was brokered jointly by a far more confident EU and a new US administration which wanted to minimize its Balkan peace enforcement obligations. At the time Dayton was signed, EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe was still in question; by 2001, it was well underway, with NATO having already taken in three new members in 1999. OFA reflects these realities, both in its preamble, which couches the country's raison d'etre as a joint platform for its peoples to join NATO and the EU, and in the fact that there was external enforcement mechanism built-in. There was no long-term international security presence (despite some disarmament oversight) or equivalent to the High Representative in BiH. Rather, there was an EU Special Representative, without executive power. Ohrid was the first institutional manifestation on the ground of the EU's growing belief in its own transformative power in the Western Balkans.

The provisions of OFA were designed to integrate ethnic Albanians into the country's body politic and give them tangible political power. Elections in 2002 saw a new ethnic Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) rise to become the preeminent ethnic Albanian party. Its leader was none other than former NLA commander Ali Ahmeti. Follow-on legislation included a decentralization to the municipalities, based on a new census. This proved controversial, as boundaries were changed to ensure some municipalities were majority-Albanian. Ensuring access to employment in public institutions was a key provision ("Non-Discrimination and Equitable Representation"). So was the making of Albanian an official language for interaction with the government (populations greater than 20 percent of the population, at the state and local level, would enjoy such language rights; in practice this was only Albanian). Local authorities could decide to accommodate non-Macedonian languages spoken under that threshold.

Legislative procedures were amended to ensure that the law on local self-governance and constitutional provisions required by OFA could not be changed except by a two-thirds parliamentary majority, including a majority of "communities not in the majority in Macedonia" (e.g., the Albanians, by far the largest such population statewide). This also included issues of education, use of languages, symbols, local elections, boundaries of municipalities, etc.

In its totality, Ohrid was less rigid in its power-sharing mechanics, in theory allowing for greater dynamism, efficiency, and accountability than Dayton in BiH. The dynamic which developed, however, was that of a majority ethnic Macedonian party needing a majority ethnic Albanian party partner to govern as a duopoly. Several permutations were tried, but to date the most durable was the 2008-2017 duopoly of VMRO-DPMNE with DUI. So while

Ohrid was to be more liberal a structure, in reality it developed, through its inherent incentives, into something rigid, built around this relationship between Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Ali Ahmeti. This relationship was replicated with Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and Ahmeti since mid-2017. The government formation process following the July 15, 2020 parliamentary election will probably reallocate the spoils, but the duopoly model will likely remain. If BiH is an odd complex organism of a pyramid and hydra feeding off the same prostrate host and filter feeding from external actors, North Macedonia is a much simpler organism of a large and considerably smaller pyramid, located side by side.

The Chayes Framework and Possible Paths of Application

Both Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia can be characterized as states containing various elements of state capture, whereby corrupt practices are vertically integrated throughout the political systems. *State capture* was coined by then-World Bank analyst Joel Hellman, now Dean of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, to describe the observable dynamic relationship between political leadership and dominant "oligarchs" in the economy in the post-Soviet space.[87] "We noticed that these firms were active players not just in lobbying, which goes on everywhere, but also in using private payments to public officials to shape the laws of institutions in their favor," he observed some years later.[88] "State capture is a form of corruption in which businesses and politicians conspire to influence a country's decision-making process to advance *their own interests.* As most democracies have laws to make sure this does not happen, state capture also involves weakening those laws, and neutralizing any agencies that enforce them."[89]

The term has been used to describe governments in the Western Balkans for some time, and for the first time officially in 2016 by the European Commission in relation to Macedonia (now North Macedonia) in its annual country report, reflecting the dominance over all branches of government, the economy, organized crime, and the media held by the government of Nikola Gruevski, then leader of the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity). "Democracy and rule of law have been constantly challenged, in particular due to state capture affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society," the report states in its introduction.[90] Just over a year later, the Commission applied the term more broadly throughout the Western Balkans in its 2018 communication to member states and the European Parliament, "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans."[91] The first point of the EC strategy (which is more declarative and aspirational than an actual strategic plan) is worth quoting in its entirety:

---

[87] Neil Arun, "State capture: Zuma, the Guptas, and the sale of South Africa," *BBC News*, July 15, 2019. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-48980964
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2016 Report," *European Commission*, November 9, 2016. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf Cited at page 4.
[91] "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans," Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions, European Commission, February 6, 2018. Cited on page

(T)he rule of law must be strengthened significantly. Today, the countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration, as well as a strong entanglement of public and private interests. All this feeds a sentiment of impunity and inequality. There is also extensive political interference in and control of the media. A visibly empowered and independent judiciary and accountable governments and administrations are essential for bringing about the lasting societal change that is needed.

North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are hardly exceptions to this rule, as this study shall demonstrate in detail – though each have their own specificities. While the case studies for this research, they are not the sole Western Balkan countries that exhibit such tendencies. And while the label was first applied to Macedonia's government in 2016 – during the governing crisis which had been ongoing for nearly two years at the time – it was hardly patient zero in the regional pandemic of state capture in the former Yugoslavia. All countries were infected during the early 1990s directly through the linkage of political power, "primitive accumulation" of public assets and private property by force (hastened by the wild west privatization then flourishing),[92] and lucrative smuggling, black market profiteering, and other organized crime.[93]

Economic "liberalization" in the absence of accountable governance and rule of law created a free-for-all asset stripping process. The prevailing presumption that the Baltic and Central European democratic and market transition model could be applied via Euro-Atlantic enlargement in such an ecosystem of accountable, rules-based interests and incentives – at least without significant adjustment – has proven to be a recipe for fraud and failure. The examples of Montenegro and Serbia are instructive of the paradoxical relationship between EU integration and the dynamics of state capture as there is a feeling that the more they advance in (purportedly) meeting the formal criteria for membership, the more they backslide in terms of genuine democratic development. But EU confidence after the "big bang" enlargement into Central and Eastern Europe in 2004, and an EU desire to showcase its "soft power," combined with an American desire to shift its focus to priorities further east in Iraq and Afghanistan, resulted in a policy which essentially simply applied this template to the region, finessing or ignoring the incongruencies, even after they became glaring.

3. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf. For a critical assessment of this strategy and its weaknesses in addressing state capture, see Toby Vogel, "Beyond Enlargement Why the EU's Western Balkans Policy Needs a Reset," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, April 2018. Available at: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/14368.pdf

[92] Bill Browder's *Red Notice: How I Became Putin's #1 Enemy* (Simon & Schuster, 2015), begins with a good and readable account of the way state assets were accumulated and held by a very view people, and how these connections quickly turned into political assets as well. See also Dallago, Bruno and Milica Uvalić. "The Distributive Consequences of Nationalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia." *Europe-Asia Studies.* Vol. 50, No. 1, January 1998, pp. 71-90.

[93] See Marko Hajdinjak, "Smuggling in Southeastern Europe – The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans," *Center for the Study of Democracy*, 2002. Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9ac2/13c5f9167a48fde67a044cfdd2b059d1d48a.pdf For a BiH-focused view, see Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets – The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2008.

Sarah Chayes' State Capture "Variations" in Brief

Having outlined the broad parameters of the state capture phenomenon, Chayes subsequently sets forth several "variations" on the model of state capture she developed for Afghanistan in her book. They are sketched in broad strokes below.

1) *"The (Overlooked) Military Kleptocratic Complex – Egypt, ca. 2010"*[94] – This model, also applicable to Pakistan and Burma/Myanmar, *inter alia*, effectively houses state capture in the senior ranks of the uniformed military, with commercial interests under that umbrella or attached. The dynamic which helped fuel Tahrir Square was the fear of dictatorial President Hosni Mubarak's son Gamal, never a soldier, succeeding his father and representing an *arriviste* globalized crony and criminal capitalist class, threatening the armed forces' grip and outraging an economically squeezed general population. The return to even more blatant effective military dictatorship under General (now civilian President) Abdel Fattah al-Sisi after a coup in 2013 against the elected Muslim Brotherhood-led government can be seen as a restoration of military dominance, with far greater violence and brutality than before. And Islamist extremist militancy has risen in its wake, particularly in the Sinai – returning to the long-standing perverse symbiosis of police state and Islamist terrorism. This model, along with American military aid, helped perpetuate the Mubarak regime from 1981 on – and helped seed what is now Al Qaeda.

2) *"The Bureaucratic Kleptocracy – Tunisia, ca. 2010"* – This model of kleptocracy, built by President Zine Abedine Ben Ali (former Minister of Interior and intelligence chief) and his wife, Leila Ben Ali (née Trebelsi), was a synthesis of family, the coercive power of the state, and its administrative/regulatory power. What's more, public funds from taxes were effectively expropriated by the President's brother-in-law, Belhacen Trabelsi, in loans from state banks that were never repaid – or expected to be repaid. This was described as a "feeding trough state" for the in-group, at the literal expense of the general population.[95] This came through both the disadvantage of citizens adhering to the law vis-à-vis businesses connected to the ruling family, as well as public debt. "Petty corruption" by officials and citizens was used to cement loyalty.[96] "Tunisian bureaucracy itself was placed in the service of corruption."[97] The administrative state functioned; its functionality was, however, in the private, not public interest. The accumulated humiliation and injustice provided ample tinder to ignite with the actual spark of street vendor Mohamad Bouazizi's self-immolation in the interior provincial town of Sidi Bouzid following his personal humiliation and impoverishment at the hands of brutal and corrupt police.[98] Tunisia at present is the only North African or Middle Eastern Arab country with a fully democratic government.[99]

---

[94] Chayes, page 78.
[95] Chayes, page 95.
[96] Ibid, page 97.
[97] Ibid, page 98.
[98] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Bouazizi
[99] A 2019 Freedom House report gave it a score of 70/100, which qualifies as "free." See https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2020

3) *"The Post-Soviet Kleptocratic Autocracy – Uzbekistan, ca. 2013"* – Islam Karimov, leader of the Soviet Communist Party in the Uzbek SSR, built a police state built on family enrichment, an economy on compelled labor to harvest the cotton crop, and foreign legitimation on portraying his regime as a bulwark against militant Islam (and resurgent Russian influence) including through providing a base for US/Western forces in Afghanistan from 2001 on. The brutality of his rule was infamous, marking the country as among the most repressive in the world.[100] The effect of this violent repression actually drove a fringe of hitherto nonviolent observant Muslims toward violence, especially after the Andijan massacre in 2005 by Uzbek troops, which left an estimated 500 dead.[101] Karimov's daughter, Gulnara, became a lightning rod for the injustice of the system, with her pervasive control in the commercial sphere (including muscling-in on any initiative and extracting concessions from would-be foreign investors) and "circumventing law by law."[102] Corrupt practice at the "retail level" – at the hands of police, etc. – was pyramidal, with proceeds shared out according to the hierarchy. Furthermore, agricultural land, owned by the state (and run by the Karimovs) made farmers effectively sharecroppers.[103] Civil society activist Elena Urlaeva summarized the interwoven nature of human rights violations in Uzbekistan thus: "We can talk about child labor, torture, and religious freedom. We can talk about them separately from corruption. But corruption is the reason for everything, the means of existence of the whole system."[104] This has correspondingly devastated popular belief in "democracy," even though it was never practiced in Uzbekistan (despite the formal veneer of elections). "Democracy and human rights are discredited," a human rights analyst notes in the book, "because they are connected in people's minds with the economic shock therapy after the fall of the Soviet Union." Furthermore, this leads to radicalization. "People are radicalizing because they are angry at the system." While Karimov died, the successor regime has done little to open governance or tackle institutional corruption. While there have been some positive steps related to transparency and justice sector reform,[105] it remains a captured state, under new management.

4) *"The Resource Kleptocracy – Nigeria, ca. 2014"* – Nigeria's legendary corruption is fueled by its great natural resource – oil – and the distribution of its proceeds. As such, it is an emblematic case of the "resource curse," a term coined by British economist Richard M. Auty to explain the disparity in growth and development between countries such as South Korea and Taiwan versus that of Latin American and African countries which were

---

[100] See "The Andijan Massacre – One Year Later, and Still No Justice," *Human Rights Watch*, May 2006. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/andijan/

[101] See Kurt Bassuener, "Islamism and Repression in the Post-Soviet Space: The Cases of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan – Threats, Mirages, and Alibis," Essay for Certificate in Islamic Studies, Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sarajevo, 2007. Cited at page 6. Available at:
https://www.academia.edu/6684297/Islamism_and_Repression_in_the_Post-Soviet_Space_The_Cases_of_Uzbekistan_and_Azerbaijan_-_Threats_Mirages_and_Alibis_2007_

[102] Chayes, pages 109-110

[103] Ibid, page 115.

[104] Ibid, page 101.

[105] Pikulicka-Wilczewski, Agnieszka. "On the Reform Path: Uzbekistan Opens up after Years of Isolation." *www.aljazeera.com*. Oct. 14, 2018. Available at https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/reform-path-uzbekistan-opens-years-isolation-181014092246543.html

at a similar level of development post-WWII.[106] He observed that, "countries with rich resources often develop more slowly, more corruptly, more violently and with more authoritarian governments than other" countries.[107] As Chayes observes, these resources, which bankroll government and (legendarily poor) public services,[108] "rupture any contract between rulers and ruled. Quality of life changes negligibly, or even negatively, for regular people, despite the bonanza."[109] Billions go unaccounted from oil revenue; governance – or connection to those in government – is the path to wealth. Politics is recognized as a for-profit enterprise. The uneven distribution of funds and services has fueled an insurgency in the Niger Delta, a culture of widespread looting of oil from pipelines ("bunkering") with attendant environmental damage, interethnic conflicts from the Biafra War in the late 1960s (which helped lock-in military rule for decades), and most recently and vividly an Islamist/nihilist insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden"). This dynamic has also driven a continuous flow of talent from Nigeria to the West.

In addition to describing these models, Chayes provides diagrams that demonstrated the dynamics and linkages. Two examples – that of "happy government" and of Tunisia – are noted below.[110] They are complex, but illustrative.

Exhibit 7: The "Happy Government" Model

Exhibit 8: The Tunisia Model
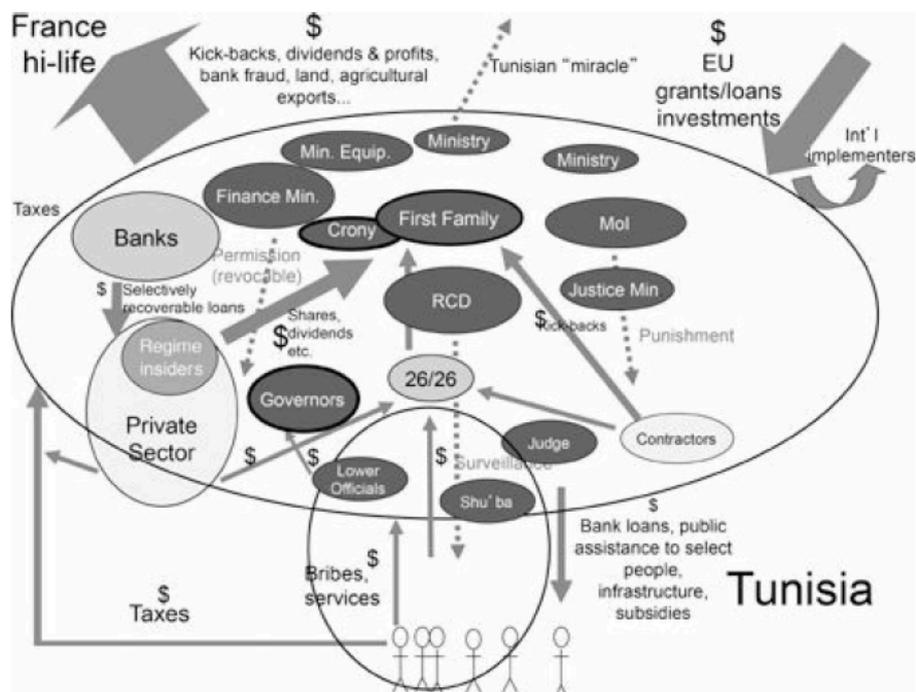
Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia's Variations of State Capture

While Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia exhibit many of the symptoms described above, the ingredients of state capture vary in proportion from any of Chayes' templates, yielding a distinct and different formula. This is primarily because the dominance of ruling kleptocratic networks can be challenged by competitors using institutionalized mechanisms such as relatively free elections. Unlike in Afghanistan, where elites rely on the support of around 10% of the population, political elites in the Western Balkans need to mobilize larger selectorates in order to be able to govern. Therefore, brute coercion is not the only game in town. BiH and North Macedonia themselves have significant differences in governance structure, ethnic composition, the nature of their respective violent conflicts, and the power-sharing settlements which ended them.

At a cursory level, variations 2 and 3, as described above, seem the closest to the BiH/ North Macedonia model of state capture. The administrative apparatus is in service of ruling parties, which themselves are steeply hierarchical and personalistic in terms of control (in BiH's case, even leading to balloting with party names officially including the leader; something that has also been seen in Serbia). This personalistic control extends to publicly owned enterprises, including highly lucrative power generation and distribution and telecoms.[111] Concessions also follow this chain of command, as does highlight sought-after employment in the civil service or publicly owned enterprises.

---

[111]Perry, Valery, Kurt Bassuener, Leila Bicakcic, and Michael Henning. "State-Owned/Public Enterprises in Bosnia and Herzegovina: An Overview and Assessment." Unpublished report prepared for USAID BiH. November 2015.

In both countries, to explore but one parallel, the apparatus of government is also in service to the for-profit agendas of ruling elites, à la Tunisia. The most infamous example from North Macedonia is Sašo Mijalkov, cousin of VMRO Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski, former head of the intelligence service and overall enforcer. His avoidance of being charged for crimes committed while in government – in exchange for support of the Prespa Agreement which ended the "name dispute with Greece" – was seen by many citizens as emblematic of a political elite which would never be held to legal account, however egregious the offense.[112] In BiH, party leaders and their families have profited from soft loans. For example, Milorad Dodik's son garnered a $2.2 million loan to open a juice company from the RS Investment-Development Bank in 2009.[113] More recently, SDA leader Bakir Izetbegović's wife, Dr. Sebija Izetbegović, has generated widespread public outrage in her will-to-power, as she is effectively privatizing the health sector for personal gain.[114] Similar examples are legion, across the ethnic and political spectrum.

There are elements of Variations 1 (Egypt) and 4 (Nigeria) which also apply – most importantly the role of exogenous inflows of capital and their distribution. Except in BiH and NMK's cases, these inflows are not military assistance or revenue from natural resources, but rather financial assistance from international financial institutions, EU pre-accession funds, and bilateral assistance, all of which confer legitimacy and enable the raising of funds on capital markets. In addition, there is some external investment – but usually politically connected sweetheart deals with minimal transparency. (The frenzy of Gulf State land purchases in BiH, particularly in and around Sarajevo, fit this latter bill.[115]) In both countries, foreign credits have gone into budgetary support – effectively fueling the corrupt patronage systems and inequalities on display. The rationale for maintaining this, candidly expressed by some Western diplomats, is fear of the alternative were these lines of support cut – social instability and potential renewed violent conflict.[116] In this equation, *the resource controlled by elites is the potential instability they can threaten to generate, thereby blackmailing the very same international community actors purportedly interested in reform.* The West's own funds have served as "the resource curse" in BiH and North Macedonia, coupled with indulgent policies toward political elites who are supposed to constitute "partners" in European and Atlantic integration. Chayes' recapitulation of Robert W. Komer's assessment of the US relationship to the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing* rings true: "the (Government of South Vietnam) used its

[112] Siniša Jakov Marušić, "Uncertainty Hangs Over Macedonia's Final 'Name' Vote," *Balkan Insight*, January 9, 2019. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2019/01/09/uncertainty-hangs-over-macedonia-s-final-name-vote-01-09-2019/

[113] "Banja Luka Bank, Controlled by PM, Hands Out Millions to Family, Allies." *Center for Investigative Reporting and RFE/RL*, August 26, 2009. Available at:
https://www.rferl.org/a/Banja_Luka_Bank_Controlled_By_PM_Hands_Out_Millions_To_Family_Allies/1807881.html

[114] See "State Capture: The Case Study of the Capture of Sarajevo Canton's Health Sector," *Transparency International*, March 2018. Available at: https://ti-bih.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/State-capture_-BH-Case_health-sector_Canton-Sarajevo.pdf

[115] "Arab Land in Sarajevo and Beyond." *Center for Investigative Journalism*. February 7, 2020. Available at https://www.cin.ba/en/arapski-grunt-u-sarajevu-i-okolini/

[116] See Kurt Bassuener, "The EU is Paying a Protection Racket in Bosnia," *BIRN*, March 27, 2015. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/BDaily_The%20Eu%20is%20paying%20a%20protection%20racket%20in%20Bosnia_p.12-13.12-13.pdf

weakness far more effectively as leverage on us than we used our strength to lever it."[117] As Chayes observes, the "almost instinctive reluctance to apply U.S. Government pressure may be due in part to a 'realist' – or legitimist – reflex… a deeper aversion seems to be conjured by the specific question of corruption."[118] This observation is particularly apropos for BiH and North Macedonia - perhaps more pronounced in the case of the EU - with its idealization of what sort of government it *wishes* it was dealing with, rather than with the reality of what its own reporting correctly identifies it to be.

This was underscored to one of the authors in March 2015 as the scandal unleashed by recordings of high-ranking government officials engaged in almost theatrical malfeasance and abuse of power, obtained by then-opposition Union of Social Democrats of Macedonia (SDSM) leader (and now Prime Minister) Zoran Zaev, was just beginning to unfold.[119] It is worth recounting this snapshot of the dynamics.

The centrality of public employment to the architecture of political power in Macedonia cannot be overstated. The ability to dispense – and withhold – public resources is the essence of the political life-support system. The very weakness of the overall economy magnifies the potency of this leverage. As a Macedonian economist explained in 2015, "this is moral hazard. Clients benefit *now* and have no concern for others or for the future. Our kids will suffer. It's a captured state. That's it. Who is the median voter in an environment with high unemployment and poverty?"[120] He continued, "[citizens] are all acting with rational expectations… It's like living in hyperinflation – you take what you can get *now*. There is a huge utility rate for taking the patronage now."[121] The lack of solid economic statistics made it difficult to get a solid grip on the scale of the problem – or even the number of citizens. "The last census was 2002. We don't even know the population, for example. So how can you have solid statistics? The minimum salary is €150. So people are willing to sell all that makes them human. 70-80% of unemployment is long-term – e.g., longer than one year… Political elites ate the GDP."[122] Another civil society figure said of then-VMRO governing partner (and now SDSM's), the ethnic Albanian DUI, "they only cared about the percentage (they could steal)."[123]

The dynamic in BiH is not fundamentally different. Though the architecture of political power is more asymmetric and fragmented, the fact that party leaders are the apex predators in the political and economic ecosystem is fully parallel between BiH and North Macedonia. And while it is beyond the scope of the present research, all indications are that this model is

---

[117] Komer, Robert W., Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam, *RAND/DARPA*, August 1972. Page vi. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R967.html Cited in Chayes, page 147.

[118] Chayes, page 147.

[119] See Andrew MacDowall, "Fear's for Macedonia's fragile democracy amid 'coup' and wiretap claims," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2015. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/fears-macedonias-fragile-democracy-amid-coup-wiretap-claims

[120] Interview with academic economist, Skopje, March 2015.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Interview with civil society leader, Skopje, November 2017.

common throughout the Western Balkans – a major driver in the protests seen regionwide a few years ago which led to hopes, soon dashed, that that they heralded a "Balkan Spring."[124]

The Observed Extremism Factor in BiH and NMK

A great deal of money has been spent in the past decade on "Countering Violent Extremism" and its variants, generated out of fear of locally-brewed terrorism; what might be termed "externally enriched violent extremism" among returnees from the war in Syria and Iraq, and feared spillover terrorism into Europe or beyond.[125] (As noted above, until recently, only Islamist/ISIS-inspired acts were considered to be "terrorist" in nature.) BiH has generated a few such incidents – the 2010 terrorist bombing in Bugojno, the shooting at the US Embassy by a lone gunman in 2011, and a shooting by a recently radicalized youth in Zvornik in 2015.[126] But these cases yielded no wider plots and exposed no deep reservoir of Islamist violent extremism in gestation, despite major attention and scaremongering by politicians in BiH (particularly Dodik and Čović), and in neighboring Croatia and Serbia, which largely conformed to past wartime narratives of an "Islamist threat."

In North Macedonia, there were two major outbursts of political violence in the last decade, neither of them related to Islamic extremism. The first one occurred in 2015, when a Kosovar Albanian militant group was engaged in a heavy armed clash with the Macedonian police in the town of Kumanovo, leaving 14 insurgents and 8 policemen dead.[127] The details remain murky and an independent investigation never followed. While Gruevski regime supporters – including in Serbia, BiH, and Russia – attempted to portray the motives of the terrorists as inspired by religious extremism, relevant evidence points to the fact that the clash was orchestrated by his clique in order to divert attention from the growing protest movement which had started posing a serious challenge to VMRO-DPMNE's hegemony.[128] If not state-sponsored, this terrorist act was tolerated by the state. The second event – the April 27, 2017

---

[124] Marc Santora, "'Balkan Spring' Turns to Summer, and hopes for Change Dim." *New York Times*, June 1, 2019.

[125] Perry, Valery. "Defining, Framing and Contextualizing Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: An Introduction to the Volume." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (Ed.) Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019 pp. 8-70; Perry, Valery. "Reflections on Efforts to Prevent and Counter Radicalization and Violent Extremism in the Balkans." *Democratization Policy Council Policy Note 15*. June 2017. Available at http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/DPCPolicyNote15_ReflectionsonP_CVE.pdf

[126] Even with these cases one should not discount other relevant factors. The Zvornik incident was alleged to also have possible links related to unpaid debts, while the perpetrator in the third had strong grounds for PTSD related to violence against his family in the war. Regarding Bugojno, see Daria Sito-Sučić, "Bosnian court jails Islamist for 45 years over bomb attack." *Reuters*, December 23, 2013. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-verdict-attack-idUSBRE9BJ14L20131220 On Zvornik, see Katarina Panić, "Terror Fears Leave Small Bosnian Town Subdued." *Balkan Insight*, May 1, 2015. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2015/05/01/small-bosnian-town-tries-to-cope-with-terrorist-scare/ On the US Embassy attack, see "Bosnia – US embassy gunman Mevlid Jasarevic jailed for 18 years." *BBC News*, December 6, 2012. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20629893

[127] "Violence between Macedonia police and 'terrorists' increases scrutiny of PM." *Reuters*, May 11, 2015. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/macedonia-violence-nikola-gruevski-government

[128] Arifi, Benjamin, "Smoke and Mirrors – a Macedonian Spy Mystery," *Balkan Insight*. May 9, 2018. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/09/smoke-and-mirrors-a-macedonian-spy-mystery-05-08-2018/; Bassuener, Kurt. "No Stability without Accountability: The West's Responsibility in Macedonia." *Democratization Policy Council*, June 2015.

storming of the parliament[129] – was an organized attempt by Gruevski to prevent a peaceful transfer of power by organizing a heterogenous tactical coalition of criminalized intelligence high officials, violent right-wing activists, rank-and-file nationalist activists, and high political figures.[130]

Nationalist extremism is a dominant logic in mainstream political life in both North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with ethnic Macedonian nationalist agitation against the Prespa Agreement being only the latest episode (and with Russian backing for it), drawing significant press attention.[131] In BiH, the most evident aspect of this is in Republika Srpska, where nationalist militias such as Srbska Čast and foreign groups (such as Russia's Night Wolves motorcycle gang) stand in visible alliance with the Dodik government.[132] Extremist right-wing groups in North Macedonia displaying far-right and even openly fascist insignia have been proliferating since 2014. While initially such movements were state/party sponsored, reaching a climax during the violent events in Parliament in April 2017, during the process of Prespa-required constitutional changes in 2018, many became aware how strong and independent far-right groups - and sympathetic political parties – in North Macedonia were.

In essence, nationalist radicalization is an integral part of the business model of politics in both North Macedonia and BiH. Yet with the dominant international focus being on overall "stability" and on suppression of potential (almost exclusively perceived Islamist) extremism, there has been an unwillingness to bring focus on the eternally fertile – and continually fertilized – soil for homegrown extremism and radicalization of all sorts.[133] Simply put, the political economy and lack of political and legal accountability long on display in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia creates a structure in which extremisms can germinate, and even make some rational sense in the environment of state/party capture. The public perception is that corruption is endemic; while about a third of Western Balkan citizens think it is acceptable, more than two-thirds are resigned to it being irreducible – at least under current structures and incentives.[134] In interviews in Bosnia one often hears, "every country has a mafia, but only here does the mafia have a country."

[129] Veselinović, Milena, "Angry Nationalists Storm Macedonian Parliament." *CNN,* April 27, 2017. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/27/europe/macedonia-parliament-violence/index.html

[130] Magleshov, Vasko, "Rampage in Parliament Remains and Open Wound in North Macedonia." *Balkan Insight*, April 27, 2020. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/27/rampage-in-parliament-remains-open-wound-in-north-macedonia/

[131] McLaughlin, Daniel, "West hails vote on Macedonia's name deal as nationalists and Russia fume." *Irish Times*, October 22, 2018. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/west-hails-vote-on-macedonia-s-name-deal-as-nationalists-and-russia-fume-1.3672002

[132] Brezar, Aleksandar, "Bosnia is close to the edge. We need Europe's help," *The Guardian*, May 29, 2019. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/29/bosnia-europe-econmy-ethnic-nationalist

[133] Bieber, Florian. "The Rise (and Fall) of Balkan Stabilitocracies." *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development.* No. 10, pp. 176-185.

[134] Cuckić, Nikola. "Corruption acceptable for a third of WB citizens, 70% don't believe it can be reduced." *European Western Balkans*. February 7, 2020. Available at: https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/07/corruption-acceptable-for-a-third-of-wb-citizens-70-dont-believe-it-can-be-reduced/

Discontent, Injustice, and Latent Potential for Radicalization

This popular discontent grounded in persistent and pronounced injustice has already generated a radicalization spurring broader action from the population that is not usually viewed as such: the *nonviolent civic radicalization* manifest in anti-Gruevski protests in 2015 and the "Colorful Revolution" 2016;[135] the JMBG protests in Sarajevo in 2013;[136] the initially destructive protests beginning in Tuzla and Sarajevo which were largely nonviolent elsewhere in the Federation in 2014;[137] and the Justice for David and Justice for Dženan protests beginning in 2018 and in Banja Luka (later brutally suppressed),[138] and continuing to date in Sarajevo (though slowed down, as with everything, by the pandemic).[139] In this sense, "radicalism" is more about the intensity of the attitudes than about the ideological signs therein. Radicalism is a formal category – it says much more about the energy behind political mobilizations, than about its ideological elements.[140] Both violent and non-violent groups, and both liberal and religious movements can be considered "radical." According to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, one of the reasons for the rise of regressive right-wing nativist populisms is the withdrawal of the left from radical politics.[141] The exceptionality and the values of the radical movements in BiH and North Macedonia was their focus on peaceful/nonviolent means toward widely recognized liberal/human dignity goals, against the backdrop of operating in deeply divided societies whereby political radicalism has been traditionally hijacked by nationalists.

---

[135] O'Sullivan, Feargus. "How Paint Became a Weapon in Macedonia's 'Colorful Revolution.'" *CityLab*, May 9, 2016. Available at: https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/05/macedonia-colorful-revolution-paint/481833/

[136] See Ioannis Armakolas and Maja Maksimović, "Babylution: A Civic Awakening in Bosnia and Herzegovina?," *ELIAMEP*, July 2013. Available at: http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/34_2013_-WORKING-PAPER-_Armakolas-12.pdf

[137] See Bodo Weber and Kurt Bassuener, "EU Policies Boomerang: Bosnia and Herzegovina's Social Unrest," *DPC Policy Paper*, February 2014. Available at:
https://www.academia.edu/6585529/EU_Policies_Boomerang_Bosnia_and_Herzegovinas_Social_Unrest_A_DPC_Policy_Brief_Feb_2014_

[138] Kovačević, Danijel, "Bosnian Serb Police Move to End 'Justice for David' Protests," *Balkan Insight*, December 25, 2018. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2018/12/25/bosnian-serb-police-move-to-end-justice-for-david-protests-12-25-2018/

[139] "Protesti / Arijana Memić: Uhapsite Alisu Mutap i natjerajte je da kaže ko je ubio Dženana," *Radio Sarajevo*, February 8, 2020. Available at:
https://www.radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/arijana-memic-jos-jednom-pitam-alisu-mutap-zasto-suti-o-tome-ko-ju-je-pretukao/366603

[140] For a detailed review of relevant terms and definitions see *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (Ed.) Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019.

[141] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy – Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London, 1985. See also Nasrullah Mambrol, "The Political Theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe," *Literary Theory and Criticism*, August 14, 2018. Available at: https://literariness.org/2018/08/14/the-political-theory-of-ernesto-laclau-and-chantal-mouffe/

As Chayes writes regarding Tunisia, the people "chose political revolution – a peaceful, civic, inclusive, and responsible form of revolt – directed squarely at their own leaderships, not Western countries, not even those seen as regime allies."[142] This is precisely what happened in North Macedonia in 2015-2017, despite efforts by the Gruevski regime to generate fear of wider interethnic violence. As a participant in the 2016 "Colorful Revolution," sparked by President Gjorge Ivanov's presumptive pardons of several of those implicated in the recording scandal (e.g., before they could be charged),[143] related the following year: "After the pardons there were protests and beatings. On the third day, we started to throw colors. This was a way to say 'we are mad. *We are radical, but not violent*.'… Someone did research; people were not ready for violence."[144] (emphasis added).

Without this popular assertiveness, it is doubtful that the Gruevski regime would have acceded to Western pressure to hold early elections, finally, in December 2016. As with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, extra-institutional civic action in service of liberal values, followed with external pressure, forced the captured state machinery to function as it was formally designed. This *deus ex machina* allowed for political evolution within the system.[145]

But as in Tunisia, the West effectively left the new, unconsolidated democracy – built with "off the shelf" existing human materials at its commanding heights – to fend for itself.[146] Many citizens of North Macedonia feel that particularly after the "deliverable" of the Prespa deal, the country has been left on its own – including to predation by the new government, which has not fundamentally changed the operating system – in another parallel with post-Orange Revolution Ukraine.[147] In both North Macedonia and BiH, particularly among those most active in civil society, there is wide popular resonance with the Tunisian activist who stated that "US policy is not in line with its values."[148]

In addition, given the geopolitical angst that has become dominant in the West regarding the Western Balkans, another factor is worthy of consideration. US and EU collaboration – and this is how it is viewed – with elites regularly dealing in unjust governance assists those illiberal challengers in pursuit of their unapologetically transactional agendas. It also feeds popular resentment which could lead to extremism – especially if the emigration exits are closed. "Radical groups will exploit grievances that go unaddressed," Chayes observes.[149] This also goes for external actors.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

---

[142] Chayes, page 77.

[143] Marušić, Siniša Jakov, "Macedonia President Revokes All controversial Pardons," *Balkan Insight*, June 6, 2016. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2016/06/06/macedonia-president-fully-withdraws-pardons-06-06-2016/

[144] Interview with Colorful Revolution participant, conducted on background, Skopje, October 2017.

[145] For a longer comparative analysis in the first year of the Zoran Zaev government, see Kurt Bassuener, "Macedonia: A Happy Ending is Still Possible," *Cable*, Glasgow, March 2018. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/38866030/Macedonia_A_Happy_Ending_is_Still_Possible_Cable_March_2018_

[146] Chayes, page 76.

[147] See Vlado Apostolov, "Database Reveals North Macedonia Ex-Prosecutor's Big Bonuses," *Balkan Insight*, November 22, 2019. See also Bassuener, 2018, op. cit.

[148] Chayes, page 76.

[149] Ibid.

This research initiative – including its theoretical, media/social media review, and field-level primary data collection components – will examine the applicability of this modification/adaptation of Chayes' model. Potential general and Western Balkans-specific variants will be further developed. While much focus on all of these trends in the two case study countries has been at the highest/state level of governance, study at the local/community level is essential to understand how regular people adapt to and operate within this environment, and how local and higher levels of government interact act to either strengthen or weaken accountable, rights-based democracy. In this sense, one could hypothesize that citizens in these countries are *remarkably* resilient: in the face of this unfavorable environment, they are either adapting to live as well as possible in their community/country, or are voting with their feet and leaving for the EU or more "normal" environments abroad. And as this human asset stripping continues, and as the most frustrated, the most progressive, those most yearning for good, clean accountable governance leave, then the remaining population will be more intensely in the thrall of kleptocratic elites.

Findings: Media and Social Media Review

The media review yielded so much information that it could stand as a report of its own. The number of sources (both traditional and online), the breadth of coverage and instances of items related to the main focus topics of this study, the general manic content storm of social media, and the arrival of a pandemic that both dominated the news ecosystem while also shining a light on related public policy issues, meant that the challenge was never one of finding enough relevant data points, but one of sifting through the massive amount of relevant information.

Finding the best way to approach this is not simple, nor is it unique to this project. Every research effort requires choices in methodology, sources, and timespan. The methods and choices described below provide an example of two different approaches to understanding the following: in each case study country, what did the media and social media space look like in 2020 with regard to the topics of extremism, corruption, and accountable governance?

The BiH country case study is considered first, followed by the North Macedonia findings. Each provides a summary of the methodology of selection and review, followed by key findings categorized according to the three main overarching themes (governance, corruption, extremism). A selection of quotes, examples, and images are provided for qualitative flavor, and quantitative elements provide a sense of the breadth and scope of trends.

Findings: Media and Social Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Saša Kulenović

<div>

Key Highlights

- The media review unveiled a surprisingly diverse and vibrant media landscape in BiH featuring numerous media outlets and initiatives, with 3020 news items systematically tracked.
- A tremendous peak in news items published on relevant topics was recorded in May, mostly due the full unfolding of affairs regarding corruption in public procurement.
- Media outlets more aligned as independent and non-nationalist have consistently reported about political corruption and were critical of misgovernment and its root causes. On the other hand, the openly politically connected media outlets represented the political interests of their patrons and relativized or under-reported such cases.
- Web portals such as *Žurnal*, known for investigative journalism, reported on corruption cases extensively and consistently, indicating that corruption is persistent and pervasive even when such relevant news does not reach the more mainstream media.
- Extremism, along with polarization, are themes generally more present in ethno-centric media outlets that both report and foster extremism, polarization, and ethnic division.
- News items tackling topics of state capture and corruption do not result in comments that might indicate extreme, radical, and illiberal reactions. Instead, topics about corruption/state capture seem to foster what might be considered positive and liberal radicalization, and grievance towards a corrupted political class; while extremism and radicalization are fueled and nurtured from above, with top-down polarization managed by political elites through their affiliated media outlets.

</div>

This part of the report is divided into two sections: traditional media, including that which is online, and purely social media, looking at Facebook and 4Chan. They are both, by necessity, selective and indicative. This is particularly the case with the social media survey, which presents the proverbial "drop in the bucket" from the firehose of discourse.

Methodology – "Traditional" Media

Media Monitoring and Selection of the Sample Group of Media Outlets

As noted in the Introduction, the media review methodology relied on human survey, selection, and review, informed by the basic tenets of discourse analysis, and aimed at placing data in a broader social and historical context. A total of 24 traditional media outlets (TV, radio, print) and 34 web news portals were systematically scrutinized and gauged, ultimately resulting in a set of nine that received prolonged review and attention. During the initial stages of the monitoring process, the list of news sources was progressively expanded and the research parameters gradually fine-tuned, the objective being the development of a sound and well-informed understanding of the complexity of the BiH media landscape.

The first phase findings (months 1 – 3) unveiled a surprisingly diverse and vibrant media environment featuring numerous media outlets and projects, differing in audience, content, style, communication strategy, ideology/goals, and political positioning. Following an initial monitoring period, the media outlets were categorized and clustered into groups based, *inter alia*, on their affinity in terms of type of media, journalistic style, political, and ethnic affiliation (the last two often being the same).

Given the sheer number of media outlets selected, and with a view to streamlining and improving the accuracy of the daily monitoring/tracking process, at the end of month 3 a general screening was conducted and the BiH team consulted to narrow down the daily media monitoring to a more targeted yet still representative sample.

Exhibit 9: Screenshot of Selection from Digital Tracker

Traditional Media News Item Inventory										
News Item Title	**Media outlet**	**Media type (Print,TV,Ra**	**Link**	**Date**	**Main Theme/s**	**Key words**	**Description**	**Elect. Camp. Related**	**N. of comment**	**Comments overview**
Zvizdić: Ne mogu da vjerujem da je Vlada FBIH usvojila ovako	SAFF	Printed	https://saff.ba/zvizdic-ne-mogu-da-vjerujem-da-je-	4-Apr-20	State Capture/Corruption	FBiH; Zvizdic; public monety; funds;	The article reports the reaction by Zvizdic after the FBiH govt. decided how to		N/A	N/A
Zaboravljeni krvavi Bajram u Bijeljini	SAFF	Printed	https://saff.ba/zaboravljeni-krvavi-bajram-u-	4-Apr-20	Extremism/Polarizatio n	war crime; Chetniks; extremism	The article reports about a crime committed by Chetniks during the 90's on		N/A	N/A
Policija Republike Srpske jedina je policija koja je osuđena za	SAFF	Printed	https://saff.ba/policija-republike-srpske-jedina-je-	4-Apr-20	Extremism/Polarizatio n	War crime; Republika Srpska police; genocide;	The article reports that today RS celebrates Police Day and 28 years of the		N/A	N/A
Novi napad na Partizansko spomen groblje u Mostaru	N1	TV	http://ba.n1info.com/Vije sti/a424393/Novi-napad-	10-Apr-20	Extremism	Extremism; vandalism; Mostar; Partisan	The article reports that last night the attack on the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar		4 (14/04/2020)	3 commentators condemned the attack and 1 said that the cemetary
Selo Lipa kod Petrovca: Migrantski centar nikao pored	RTRS	TV	https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vi jest.php?id=379462	15-Apr-20	Polarization	Lipa; migrant center; Serbian returnees;	The article claims that authorities in the Una-Sana Canton and the City of Bihac		N/A	N/A
Dodik uzurpirao nadležnosti, preuzima poslove Vlade,	N1	TV	http://ba.n1info.com/Vije sti/a426121/Ponasanje-	16-Apr-20	State Capture	Dodik; PDP; constitution; coronavirus	The article reports that the PDP asked Republika Srpska President Zeljko		5 (17/04/2020)	Some against Dodik, some against PDP statement.
Opozicija se obratila premijeru i Vladi KS, traže odgovore na	N1	TV	http://ba.n1info.com/Vije sti/a426077/Opozicija-se-	16-Apr-20	State capture/Corruption	Sarajevo Canton; horse trading; clietelism;	The article publishes the letter that opposition parties in the Sarajevo Canton		0 (17/04/2020)	N/A
Upućene zamjerke i prijedlozi Nenadiću i Vladi KS nakon	Oslobodjenje	Printed	https://www.oslobodjenje .ba/vijesti/upucene-	16-Apr-20	State capture/Corruption	Sarajevo Canton; horse trading; clietelism;	The article publishes the letter that opposition parties in the Sarajevo Canton		N/A	N/A
U Hodovu kod Stoca potpuno uništen spomenik borcima NOB-	Dnevni Avaz	Printed	https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih /563447/u-hodovu-kod-	16-Apr-20	Extremism	Hodovo; fascism; vandalism; antifascist	In the village of Hodovo, in the Stolac municipality, the monuments to NOB		4 (17/04/2020)	Commentators condemned the act but a small scuffle broke between
Tužilaštvo BiH: Podignuta optužnica protiv četiri osobe	Dnevni Avaz	Printed	https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih /563426/tuzilastvo-bih-	16-Apr-20	Corruption	money laundering; fraud; corruption	The article reports that the Prosecutor of the Special Department for Organized		0 (17/04/2020)	N/A
Pismo / Opozicija kritikuje Nenadića i Vladu: Niste	Radio Sarajevo	Radio	https://radiosarajevo.ba/v ijesti/bosna-i-	16-Apr	State capture/Corruption	Sarajevo Canton; horse trading; clietelism;	The article publishes the letter that opposition parties in the Sarajevo Canton		0 (17/04/2020)	N/A
SIPA istražuje sumnjive tokove novca za vrijeme pandemije	N1	Printed	http://ba.n1info.com/Vije sti/a426307/SIPA-	17-Apr-20	Corruption	cash flow; money laundering; SIPA;	The article briefly reports that SIPA is investigating suspicious cash flows during		3 (20/04/2020)	Commentators are critical of SIPA activities cause they only
Migrantski centar u Lipi novi	RTRS	TV	https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vi	21-Apr-20	Polarization	Lipa; migrant center;	The article reports that Mayor of Drvar		N/A	N/A

The initial sample group included 22 media outlets (out of the initial 58), which by month 5 subsequently led to the identification of an even more narrow and final group of 9 media outlets to be monitored and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively throughout the duration of the research period (from October 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020), in real-time and through review of the archives. The selection of this sample group in turn prioritized the preservation of a balance among media categories chosen (print, TV, radio, online), political and ideological stances, and regional distribution, while also taking into account the possibility of backtracking *past* content (e.g., presence of reliable archives and search tools), and the availability of comment sections, pivotal to assess the nature and level of engagement of the readership/viewership. This approach does mean that "parity" among the three main groups and their media was not sought; in other words we did not seek to monitor a TV, print, and portal source for each of the Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

Although we perused and became acquainted with the local media landscape as well, with a special focus being placed on the nine targeted municipalities, local media outlets didn't prove to be particularly relevant for the media review exercise. According to the experience garnered from the review, genuinely local media outlets do not tend to tackle controversial topics and mostly focus on local news issues. The distinction between reporting on local

events, and reporting on government actions, controversies, investigative journalism, etc., and explaining the consequences of these issues on the community, seems to be what is missing. Furthermore, local media outlets do not enjoy a substantial audience and readers mostly consume content published by large, dominant, state-wide media outlets.

The overall media monitoring process was carried out with the support of a comprehensive Excel document, where the daily monitoring/tracking activities have been regularly and progressively recorded, along with the resulting quantitative statistics.

Exhibit 10: Overview of the Final Media Outlets Sample Group

Name	Type	Description
Dnevni Avaz	Printed/web portal	*Dnevni Avaz* is one of the best-selling daily newspapers in BiH, and it belongs to the circle of politically connected media outlets. On average, *Dnevni Avaz* publishes around 90 news items daily on its web portal under the "BiH" tag. The newspaper gives ample space to news items reporting statements from politicians, where Fahrudin Radončić - the owner - enjoys a special focus. The newspaper rarely reports on scandals and corruption, though the fight against corruption as a prerogative of the government is often emphasized, with articles pointing to the intention of authorities to tackle the problem. In some cases, *Dnevni Avaz's* political bias is evident, while in most instances the reporting appears *super partes* and purely informative. The lack of coverage of the Asim affair was particularly staggering. On the other hand, the saga regarding the "ventilators" affair was widely covered.
HMS (Hrvatski Medijski Servis)	News Agency	Conceived as a news agency in the Croatian language intended for Bosnian Croats, HMS is a tendentious and ethno-centric media outlet that tangibly promotes the policy of HDZ BiH along with the stances of its leaders. Similar to other ethno-centric media outlets such as RTRS or SAFF, HMS publishes news items whose content and language foster polarization and inter-ethnic distance. Some articles, more nuanced in their approach, purport to prove the existence of a polarized and divided society, while other articles remain purely informative. HMS highlights and publicizes articles reporting about Bosniak and Serbian extremism and war crimes committed against Croats during the '90s. They maintain a more critical stance towards the Bosniak political class rather than that of the RS; in this way it mirrors the Dodik-Čović political alliance. Several news items revolve around local events from cantons, or municipalities with a Croat majority.
Glas Srpske	Printed/ web portal	*Glas Srpske* is a daily newspaper published in Banja Luka which represents the official position of the government in the RS and promotes its interests as well as a professional

		and positive public image of SNSD officials. It can be considered a "a paper of power," for while it is currently aligned politically with the SNSD, it previously played the same role for the then-ruling SDS. In that regard, Milorad Dodik is portrayed as a caring, reasonable, and institutional leader, while his more inflammatory and divisive comments are toned down. That being said, the language and the style used in the news items is more balanced and professional than the more inflammatory RTRS. The content is often provided in an apparently informative and objective fashion while the bias encoded in the text is more subtle. *Glas Srpske* builds its bias by carrying out arbitrary reporting and by omitting facts, details, and events that might harm the image of the governing authorities. The dearth of reporting on the Justice for David movement in the nine month-project period is noteworthy, as is the fact that the Priebe report has been addressed only through the statements of Milan Tegeltija.[150] The promotion of the RS governing authorities encompasses its satellite companies in the private sector. The controversial Prointer d.o.o.[151] company has been consistently presented in a positive light, with articles featuring its successes, donations during the pandemic, or financial support to small enterprises.
SAFF	Printed/ web portal	The SAFF magazine has been published since 1996, dealing mostly with socio-political and religious issues concerning the Bosniak and Islamic community in BiH. The magazine is very close to the SDA, whose public image benefits greatly from the portraits provided by SAFF. The Izetbegović family is particularly well represented and characterized. On the other hand, the opposition (mostly Naša Stranka, SDP) is often negatively portrayed. That said, SAFF published some articles critical of the BiH political class as a whole, while other news items inferred the existence of a captured state, although the blame was attributed to Dragan Čović and Milorad Dodik exclusively. SAFF avoids reporting about corruption cases within the SDA, and when it does do so, it shifts the focus towards SDA's origins, and its founder Alija Izetbegović, who is portrayed as a moral authority and intellectual father of the party. Some of SAFF's published content fosters ethnic polarization and nurtures resentment - mostly towards Serbs - thanks to the recurring publication of news items regarding

---

[150] For more on Priebe, see Senada Šelo Šabić, Valery Perry and Kurt Bassuener. "Burying the Lede: The Priebe Report's Surprisingly Clear Recommendation." *Democratization Policy Council blog*. December 20, 2019. Available at http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/counting-the-cost-of-delay-disruption-2/

[151] The company operates in the IT sector and has been consistently awarded lucrative tenders in Republika Srpska, allegedly due to its connection to Igor Dodik, the son of Milorad Dodik.

		war crimes and atrocities committed against Muslims during the 90s. There are several articles with explicitly negative connotations that revolve around Serbia proper, its government, and politicians. The image of the RS is generally very negative as well. The acrimony with Croats is present but not so pronounced.
Klix.ba	Web portal	Klix.ba is the most visited news web portal in BiH and its popularity is in part seen by the interest and engagement its articles create in the comments section, where the number of comments can easily surpass 100 units when the article tackles a controversial or politically compelling issue. Klix.ba publishes on average 45 news items daily under its BiH section, and all pieces tend to receive substantial feedback from the readers. In several instances, the comments section becomes a battleground for supporters of different ideologies and political views. The confrontation as well as the language used can be harsh as apparently there are no systematic filters in place. That said, there were cases of commentators complaining that their previous comments were deleted. Most articles under the BiH section report about the political developments of the country where statements and reactions from politicians, pundits, and other stakeholders in BiH's public life are highly featured. News items are mostly reported in an unbiased way although titles tend to direct readers towards a certain conclusion and prejudice. While the portal does not provide analytical pieces about BiH's most pressing issues, Klix.ba does not shy away from reporting extensively on cases of political corruption. In that regard, its coverage of the "ventilators" affair and other misconduct in public procurement procedures has been considerable.
N1 BiH	News channel/ web portal	N1 BiH is a cable news channel and local broadcast partner and affiliate of CNN International, launched in 2014 in Serbia, BiH, and Croatia. As an independent news channel, N1 BiH is not politically affiliated, but ideologically it leans towards the center-left. The web portal of N1 BiH publishes around 70 articles daily in the BiH section, and it has a lively comment section that attracts a decent amount of commentators. On a daily basis, the channel's web portal meticulously covers the developments of the political life of BiH. The political news very often features segments and excerpts from N1's socio-political talk shows such as *Novi Dan* or *Pressing*, where interviews with politicians, pundits, and various intellectuals are either summarized or transcribed in their entirety. Being a news channel, several news items on its web portal include both a written text and video reportage. N1 BiH provides extensive coverage of many compelling socio-economic issues, and reports broadly on cases of political corruption

		and misgovernment.
Inforadar	Web portal	Inforadar is a web portal established in early 2018 whose content mainly revolves around state capture in BiH, political corruption, polarization, and cases of misgovernment by the unaccountable political class. Inforadar was founded by the Association for Media Activism (UMA) "with the aim to contribute to the realization of the public's right to be informed on important issues from the socio-political life and to promote democratic values, critical thinking, freedom of speech, open and responsible communication."[152] Inforadar offers interesting and alternative investigative and critical journalism content which often covers corruption and misgovernment cases that are generally absent in the mainstream media, and would be otherwise highly under-reported. The web portal appears to be critical of the political elite as a whole without any specific party affiliation. Under the BiH section they publish on average 27 news items per month.
Žurnal	Online magazine	Žurnal is an award-winning, left-leaning online magazine providing extensive high-quality content on topics of political corruption, state capture, polarization, corporate wrongdoing, and misgovernment cases in BiH. Articles dealing with the aforementioned topics account for 90% of its published content. On its main "društvo" section, Žurnal publishes around 40 articles per month. Although not prolific in terms of numbers of news items issued, Žurnal's value lays in the depth and quality of its investigative pieces, which represent its main strength. Investigative journalism is the journalistic form employed in most of its articles, where authors delve deeply into controversial topics of public interest. They have received project funding from USAID and others to do this kind of work. Their investigative reports and documentary films have received several awards at the local and European level. Žurnal also offers valuable comment pieces regarding culture and society.
Federalna TV (RTV FBiH)	TV Channel/web portal	Federalna TV, is a public TV channel operated by RTVFBiH, and is one of the most watched television stations in the country. Being a public television owned by the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Federalna TV is far from being devoid of political supervision and influence.[153] In many instances, the news items appeared to report uncritically about the FBiH government, even when the topics tackled would be treated as controversial in more independent

---

[152] "O nama''. "About us''. Inforadar Portal. Available at: https://inforadar.ba/onama/
[153] As a public TV channel, Federalna TV has been exposed to party influence over the years, most notably exercised by the SDA.

		media outlets. Although their reportage of corruption cases has at times been lukewarm, the coverage of corruption in public procurement that emerged during the coronavirus pandemic has been sufficiently broad. Under its BiH section, Federalna TV publishes around 40-50 news items on a daily basis.

Criteria for the Selection and Categorization of News Items

The daily media monitoring/tracking process consisted of identifying, analyzing, and categorizing relevant news items. Given the magnitude of news items published on a daily basis, a set of criteria was developed to screen, select, store, and analyze items, with a view to making the daily review as well as the selection more targeted and more conducive to the project's key research questions. The identified criteria had to facilitate the categorization of relevant news items under one of the following four topic labels: *corruption*, *state capture*, *extremism,* or *polarization*. Furthermore, for crossover articles referring to more than one of the aforementioned topics, multiple labels were applied. In that regard, some articles were categorized as *corruption/state capture*, *extremism/polarization*, *state capture/polarization,* and so on. Given the strong apparent correlation of the project topics, crossover articles proved to be more the rule than the exception. The main objective of the monitoring/tracking process in turn was to understand how different media outlets dealt with such content and whether, how, and why the presence of such media content changed and fluctuated throughout the project timeline.

During the categorization process it was important to focus on how topics and facts relevant to the research were conveyed by different media outlets – or if they were ignored. Given that topics or events are treated and presented differently according to the political and ideological positioning of the media outlet, it was important to select only those news items that linked given facts and stories to one (or more) of the four identified labels.

For instance, if a given event or development in Source A was presented as a case of corruption, if presented in Source B without *any* corruptive connotation in a news item, that latter news item would *not* be classified under the "corruption" label, and would be simply discarded. A fitting case in point might be the acquisition by the Republika Srpska of a mobile hospital to fight the pandemic. Some news items provided details that pointed to potential malfeasance and breach of public procurement procedure in the acquisition of the hospital. On the other hand, other news items did not imply any irregularities and merely reported the news that a mobile hospital was purchased by the RS government. In the first scenario the news items in question were classified under the label "corruption," while in the second scenario those news items were not considered.

In order to accurately categorize news items, a tailored set of evaluation criteria was applied for each of the four categories to define whether a news item will fall under one of the categories or not. The selection of such criteria proved to be challenging, as very often ideas and latent purposes of a news items are encoded and camouflaged in the written text, which makes it difficult to draw a line and define the right category. Moreover, the definitions of

polarization and extremism were particularly challenging to deal with, as both terms are slippery and open to interpretation.

In addition, the clear bias in reporting in some of the sources, and the pervasive polarization, means that at times it might be possible for *any* reviewer to begin to fall into the habit of categorizing *everything*. The BiH team therefore aimed to be rigorous in selection and categorization, determining that it would be preferable to have a more reliable and finely combed set of articles and links than a vast set encompassing everything. The very fact that so much attention had to be paid to what to exclude shows how overwhelming the media environment can be.

Exhibit 11: Overview of the Four Categories

Labels	Criteria and explanations
Polarization	The "polarization" label includes the following cases: 1) articles reporting grassroots level polarizing episodes involving common citizens 2) articles reporting grassroots level episodes of extremism/radicalism with polarizing effects for the wider community 3) articles reporting extremely and blatantly polarizing nationalistic statements by political leaders 4) articles reporting about extraordinarily polarizing country-wide events 5) articles and analytical pieces/commentaries about polarization and division in BiH 6) Articles/commentaries purposefully fostering polarization, division and inter-ethnic hatred In order to simplify the categorization of news items for the "polarization" label, a distinction was not made between articles that simply report on polarizing events or discuss polarization/division in BiH, and those articles that purposefully fuel polarizing tendencies and promote division. When it comes to articles reporting extremely and blatantly polarizing nationalistic statements by political leaders, only those that can be considered very extreme in their connotations and scope, and exceptions to the continuous and unfading top-down polarization carried out by the political elites, were included. Polarization in BiH is indeed a mainly top-down, orchestrated *affaire,* and it stands as a pervasive and constant variable in the political, social, and media life of the country. Such ongoing polarization, directed from above and enshrined in the harsh and bitter confrontations of political leaders, their inflammatory and divisive statements, the politicized commemoration of (at times seemingly constant) war-related anniversaries, and the political manipulation of facts and events, current, recent, and past, is predominant in the media spectrum. Given the constancy of top-down polarization, news items related to it have not been selected for the purposes of this media review. Therefore, besides a few extraordinary exceptions, statements from politicians and war related news items (90s, WWII) have not all

	been included. Similarly, certain recurring events that have caused or have been used to stoke inter-ethnic friction and division, year after year, were considered constant variables and thus not logged. They have become a basic environmental element; like oxygen in the air. This category includes the annual (and increasingly aggrandized) celebration of Republika Srpska day in January, or the Herceg-Bosna celebrations in November. These events are in fact treated in the same manner as war commemorations. Furthermore, in order to narrow down the selection, articles about polarization not directly connected to BiH have been left out of the tracker. This includes polarizing stories reported by BiH media outlets regarding the wider Western Balkan region. For instance, a news item about offensive graffiti against Serbs in Croatia reported by a RS media outlet (Glas Srpske, RTRS, ATV) was not tracked, since the very event at the center of the article did not occur in BiH. Similarly, news items published by RS media outlets fostering hatred or anger towards Kosovo Albanians or Montenegro were not included.
Extremism	The "extremism" label includes the following: 1) articles reporting grassroots level episodes of extremism/radicalism 2) articles and analytical pieces/commentaries about extremism in BiH and its causes 3) articles about extremism related stories such as the ongoing prosecution of foreign fighters and ongoing trials 4) Articles/commentaries purposefully fostering extremism, employing extreme language and inter-ethnic hatred Furthermore, in order to narrow down the selection, articles about extremism not directly connected to BiH have been ignored. This includes cases of extreme or radical episodes reported by BiH media outlets regarding the wider Western Balkan region. For instance, a news item critical of a radical Islamophobic event in Serbia reported by a BiH media outlet (Slobodna Bosna, RTV FBiH) would not be considered, since the event that is the subject of the article did not occur in BiH.
Corruption	The "corruption" label includes the following cases: 1) articles reporting about any public or private sector corruption case, investigation, or allegation; the forms of corruption in a categorized news item might include tax evasion, influence peddling, money laundering, conflict of interest, bribery, embezzlement, abuse of power or authority, corruption in public procurement, forgery of documents, and all possible cases of political corruption 2) articles/commentaries and analytical pieces about corruption in BiH, its causes, and structure 3) articles about initiatives aimed at fighting and eradicating corruption in BiH Furthermore, articles reporting about unfounded accusations/allegations of corruption that result from the ongoing political bickering among BiH politicians and political parties are not included. Such statements/allegations are highly politicized which makes their veracity questionable.

State capture	The "state capture" label includes the following cases:
	1) articles reporting about any case, investigation; or allegation related to political corruption, involving BiH politicians and political parties 2) articles/commentaries and analytical pieces about state capture in BiH, its causes and structure 3) articles about political events/protests/stories about political privileges that infer the existence of a captured state in BiH 4) articles about corruption, mismanagement, and misconduct in private enterprises known for their political connections with centers of power in BiH. Furthermore, articles reporting about unfounded accusations/allegations of state capture/political control, or pressures on the judiciary that result from the ongoing political bickering among BiH politicians and political parties are not included.

Even with this filtering process, a total of 3020 news items were logged.

This considered approach has strengths and weaknesses. A key strength is the human element, of having a researcher personally comb through, consider, analyze, and categorize these sources on a regular and ongoing basis. This allowed for thoughtful contextualization, in the media but also in light of the other elements of the research effort. (The lead media researcher actively participated in all rounds of field research.) Additionally, the combination of review and logging over the research period was a substantial investment in time, but resulted in a spreadsheet archive that paints a complete picture of the dominant information ecosystem. Third, the rigorous selection process described above does serve to limit the findings; however the fact that so many sources on relevant themes were still identified in spite of this sorting process simply further indicates the nature of the information environment.

A weakness of this approach is that it is by nature selective, and does not aim to definitively state just how many times a word or name or topic came up in the media. This could be done through some sort of automated scraping and crawling, but in the absence of context would not provide deep insight. Second, the decision to exclude key stories or events that happened outside of BiH, but with strong regional relevance, does strip out an element of the information sphere that can be particularly toxic – rhetoric from Belgrade towards the RS, or from Serbia's Sandžak region about Bosniaks in Bosnia, do hit readership in BiH. Similarly, broader diaspora sources were not included. However, as described above these choices were deliberately made.

Finally, in a 21st information multiverse in which the problem is not the availability of information but the quality of and access to *good* information, one can fairly wonder how it is ever possible to understand the firehose of news that is naturally and intentionally streaming into the public space hour by hour, and minute by minute. One can only survey the trends and based upon deeper knowledge make an educated analysis of the impact. This is what this exercise aims to do.

Quantitative findings

Broad Content Review

The main objective of the quantitative monitoring/tracking process is understanding how different media outlets dealt with key issues (polarization, extremism, corruption, and state capture), and whether, how, and why the presence of such media content may have changed and fluctuated during the monitoring period in light of the broader timeline of events noted earlier in the volume.

The graph below aggregates the data, lumping together all relevant news items published by the sample group of 9 media outlets.

Exhibit 12: Relevant News Items Timeline.
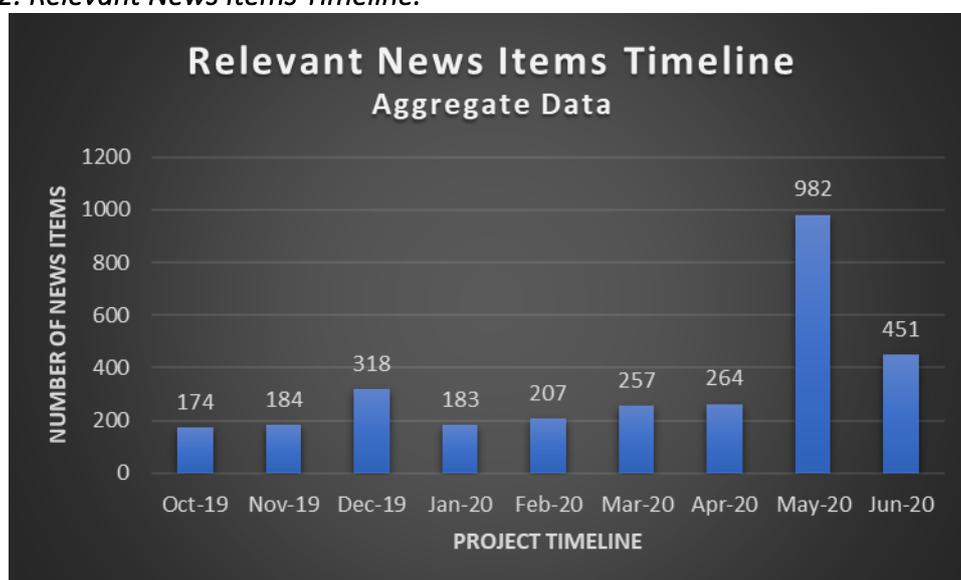
At a first glance, what immediately strikes the eye is the tremendous peak in news items published on relevant topics in May 2020. The explanation behind this spike is twofold. First, it accounts for the full unfolding of affairs regarding corruption in public procurement, which received exceptional media coverage, especially following the detention of the main suspects of the "ventilators" affair, most notably the PM of the FBiH, Fadil Novalić.[154]

Second, the mass for the Bleiburg victims in Sarajevo in May proved to be a polarizing event that led to the publication of a high number of divisive and highly politicized articles.[155] Other relevant news items from May covered the wiretapping innuendos made by Milorad

---

[154] ''Gdje su sporni respiratori?''. ''Where are the controversial ventilators?''. *N1 BiH*. June 06, 2020. Available at: http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a439188/Afera-respiratori.html

[155] "Mass for Nazi-allied 'victims' sparks protest in Sarajevo." *Deutsche Welle (DW).* May 16, 2020. Available at https://www.dw.com/en/mass-for-nazi-allied-victims-sparks-protest-in-sarajevo/a-53467010

Dodik,[156] which sparked a debate about state control in RS, and other minor episodes of corruption, extremism, and polarization.

Additional takeaways from Exhibit 12 include the high number of news items on relevant topics registered in June 2020 and also in December 2019. The protraction of a relatively high number of articles published in June 2020 resulted in part from the spill-over of May discussions surrounding public procurement affairs, and from a set of new developments, including the alleged ventilators affair in RS, new political corruption related cases, and minor nationalistic and divisive incidents. The relative peak in December 2019, on the other hand, is attributable to a plethora of topics including, *inter alia*, the coverage of the return of foreign fighters from the Syrian battlefield and their trials, Peter Handke's controversial Nobel Prize for literature, "Justice for David" movement related content, and a number of corruption cases.

Furthermore, the relatively low number of relevant news items registered in April might appear odd given that reports about corruption in COVID-related public procurement started to fully emerge already in April. This apparent anomaly is due to the monthly aggregate data represented in the graph. Since the unveiling of corruption in public procurement started around mid-April, the media coverage proved to be notably broad at the outset. Nonetheless, in the first half of April as well as in the second half of March the media coverage was monopolized by coronavirus-related news – perhaps to be expected as this was still the early period of the broad shut-down, initial cases, etc.. Therefore, the lack of publications on relevant topics in the first two weeks of April explains the relatively low number of identified monthly news items resulting in the graph.

Exhibit 13 goes beyond the initial aggregate data by dividing the total number of identified news items among the four labelled categories: polarization, extremism, corruption, and state capture. Now we can see in more detail how the media coverage changed individually for the four categories throughout the project timeline.

---

[156] Kovacevic, Danijel. "Bosnian Serb Chief Shrugs Off Illegal Wiretapping Charges." *Balkan Insight*. May 21, 2020. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/21/bosnian-serb-chief-shrugs-off-illegal-wiretapping-charges/

Exhibit 13: News Items Timeline by Category

Relevant News Items Timeline

	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20
Extremism	31	24	103	75	35	42	20	53	20
Polarization	37	20	69	65	36	27	23	330	17
Corruption	76	91	91	67	121	190	189	554	383
State Capture	63	66	89	53	99	137	203	549	353
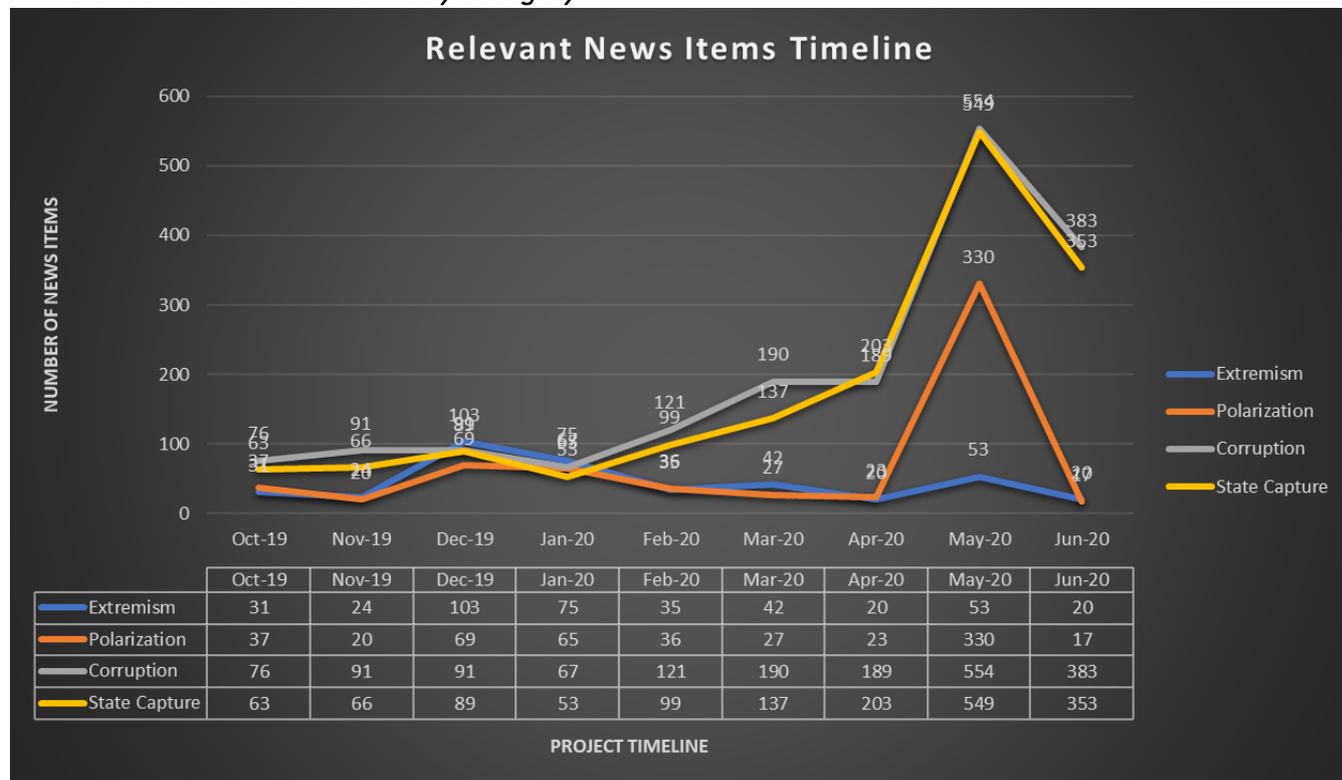
One of the first takeaways from Exhibit 13 is the presence of two strong correlations; one between the categories of state capture and corruption, and the other linking extremism and polarization, despite the noticeable divergence in May 2020 caused by the Bleiburg mass, classified during the media tracking as a polarizing event rather than an extreme one.

These two correlations can be explained by the fact that many news items referred to and tackled simultaneously, a) topics of corruption and state capture, and b) topics of extremism and polarization. As a result, a high number of identified news items was classified either under the label "corruption/state capture" or "polarization/extremism." Second, cases of political corruption covered by the media prompted the publication of articles reflecting on the captured state of the country during the same period. In a similar fashion, events categorizable as extreme often engendered the proliferation of articles either pointing to the existing polarization, or (more troubling) purposefully fueling it. Considering the similarities between these two thematic clusters, this correlation is to be expected.

A closer look at the lines indicating corruption and state capture shows that both started to gradually increase in the first quarter of 2020, then peaked in May, and subsequently retained part of that spike in June as well. The gradual increase in the first quarter of 2020 can be attributed to a plethora of unfolding events, ranging from political corruption cases to

bribery committed by border patrol officers.[157] The sharp increase in May was then mostly connected to the extensive coverage of corruption cases in public procurement during the on-set of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking at the second correlation, despite the strong divergence registered in May 2020, some additional characteristics are evident. Although the correlation between polarization and extremism was strong in October and November, extremism-related news items outnumbered polarization related articles in December, mostly due to several pieces covering the return of foreign fighters to BiH from Syria, and their trials. The nature of this topic reflects the relative aftermath of extremist developments from several years ago when these individuals first went to Syria; dealing with extremism in 2019/2020 should be viewed as distinct from observing the decision of some BiH citizens to travel to Syria back then.[158] That said, during December 2019 polarization related articles soared as well, mostly fostered by discussions over the controversial Nobel Prize bestowed on Peter Handke, an event that polarized the public debate and the media landscape alike.

Further, the number of news items classified under the "extreme" label proved to be higher than articles under the "polarization" label in January and March as well. In January, this can be explained by incidents provoked by Serb nationalists in Višegrad, Srebrenica, and Bratunac at the beginning of the year,[159] as well as a controversial picture posted by elementary school pupils in Srebrenica glorifying the Chetnik movement.[160] In March, the few extreme incidents reported didn't result in more polarizing debates and reactions as the coronavirus began to monopolize the media space, which might explain the discrepancy in numbers between polarization and extremism news items. That being said, as of January the polarization and the extremism lines kept generally falling as the media was saturated first with the coronavirus, and then with (related) corruption cases. Another explanation might be that with the coronavirus being suddenly the common threat to overcome, polarization became a less appealing and politically required topic as unity was needed to face the public health challenge – perhaps at least until the leaderships began to adjust to the new normal. In a similar fashion, the level of general ambient top-down political polarization dropped as well as a consequence of the coronavirus, while one month later BiH had entered another orchestrated political crisis with the intended blockage of state institutions by the RS.

---

[157] This was related to border officers taking bribes to let people into BiH without following COVID-19 preventive measure and quarantine.

[158] Not surprisingly, Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat media talked about jihadists returning the BiH, while SAFF reported on this less, and when it did cover it used the language "fighters from Syria."

[159] Katana, Gordana. ''Uz božić novi incidenti i četničke pjesme: Zašto svi u RS i dalje šute na zastrašivanje Bošnjaka?'' ''With Christmas, new incidents and Chetnik songs: Why is everyone in RS still silent about the intimidation of Bosniaks?''. *Inforadar Portal*. January 07, 2020. Available at: https://inforadar.ba/uz-bozic-novi-incidenti-i-cetnicke-pjesme-zasto-svi-u-rs-i-dalje-sute-na-zastrasivanje-bosnjaka/

[160] Muslimović, Admir. ''Učenici iz Srebrenice kažnjeni zbog nacionalističke fotografije''. ''Students from Srebrenica punished for nationalist photo''. *Balkan Insight*. January 30, 2020. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/30/ucenici-iz-srebrenice-kaznjeni-zbog-nacionalisticke-fotografije/?lang=sr

How and why the coverage of the 4 categories changed and differed across different media outlets

While aggregate data is important to provide a general sense of the media coverage of key topics, the four categories are treated differently according to the media outlet analyzed, and based on the political and ideological positioning of each. In order to better understand how different media outlets covered and represented the four categories, three specific examples are further examined.

Klix.ba

As noted above, *Klix.ba* is the most visited news web portal in BiH and enjoys an ample and avid readership. *Klix.ba* does not shy away from reporting extensively on cases of political corruption. In that regard, its coverage of the "ventilators" affair and other misconduct in public procurement procedures has been considerable.

Exhibit 14: Klix Coverage
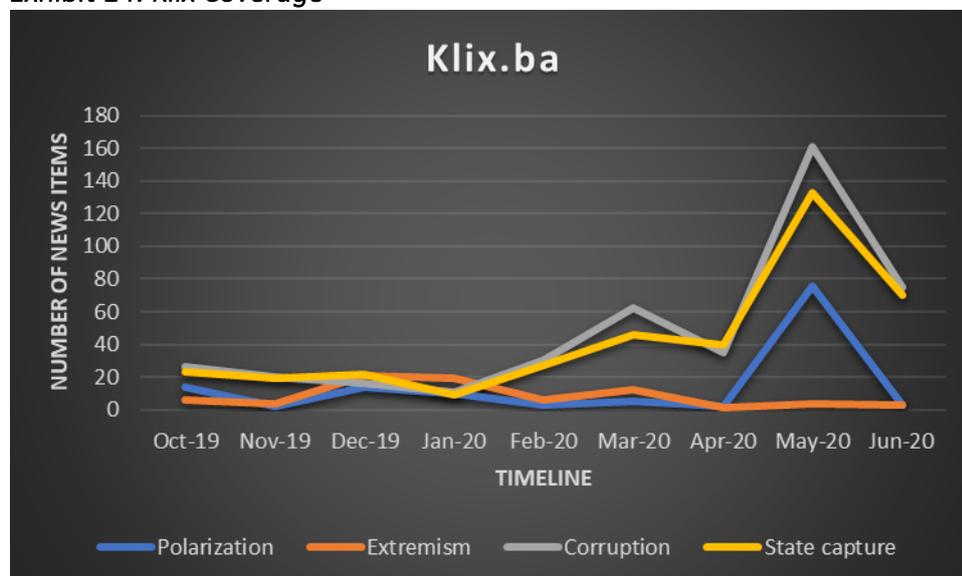
Exhibit 14 shows how during the first four months of the project timeline the four topics were similarly represented in numbers, despite divergences and fluctuations. As of February 2020, a divergence started to emerge between news items related to state capture and corruption, and those related to polarization and extremism, which in contrast began to fall, gradually. The initial surge of the corruption and state capture lines was mostly caused by the highly covered Asim affair.[161]

Subsequently, the spike in May was spearheaded by increasing reports of corruption and state capture, and, to a lesser extent, polarization, while extremism remained low. Comparing Graph 3 with Graph 2, one can notice that the way news stories were covered by

---

[161] Asim Sarajlić, the deputy leader of SDA, resigned following the leak of an audio file which allegedly recorded a corrupt party deal related to a promise of employment. Kovacevic, Danijel. "Corruption Scandal Shakes Bosnia's Largest Political Party." *Balkan Insight*. March 3, 2020. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/03/corruption-scandal-shakes-bosnias-largest-political-party/

Klix.ba represents a good approximation of how the aggregate data divided per category looked. That presumably puts Klix.ba somewhere in the middle of the targeted media spectrum.

Žurnal

Žurnal provides extensive coverage of topics of political corruption, state capture, corporate wrongdoing, and misgovernment cases in BiH, which makes up the bulk of its published content.

Exhibit 15: Žurnal Coverage
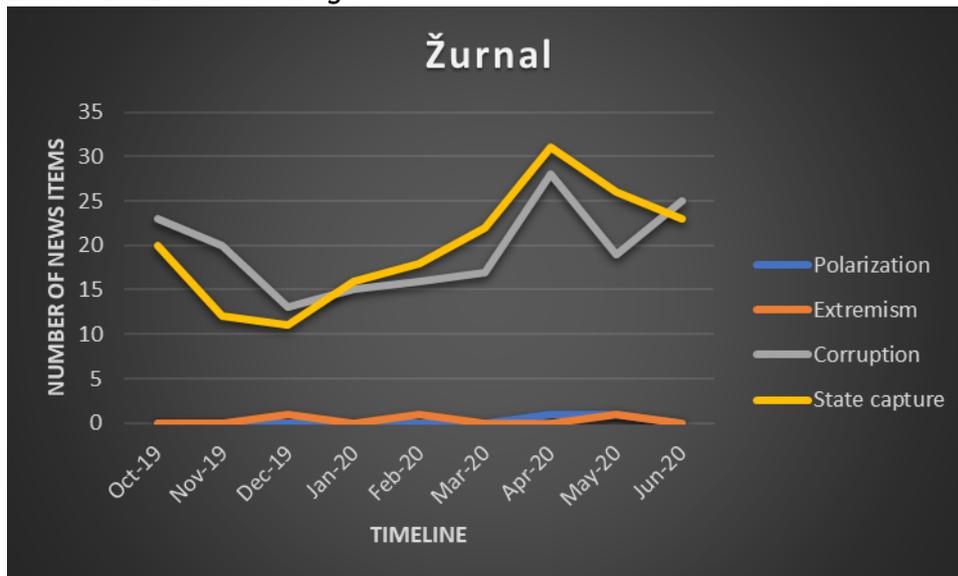
Exhibit 15 indicates how pervasive the topics of corruption and state capture are vis-a-vis other themes, including polarization and extremism. As a matter of fact, the average combined number of news items published on corruption and state capture every month is 25, which amounts to more than half of *Žurnal's* monthly content output.

If we compare Graph 4 with Graph 2 we can notice that lines representing the categories of corruption and state capture remained relatively high throughout the whole project timeline while the aggregated data showed a gradual increase starting only with the first quarter of 2020 and peaking in May. This could suggest that *Žurnal* has covered corruption cases and events that have been mostly neglected by other media outlets, tackling the reality of state capture quite evenly throughout time.

Some of the main topics covered by *Žurnal* during the project timeline include state capture, oppression, nepotism, patronage networks, the captured judiciary, fixed tenders, corporate corruption, and other unveiled cases of political corruption. It is worth mentioning that *Žurnal* was also among the first to report on irregularities in public procurement procedures during the pandemic. One possible explanation for this is their participation in projects that provide additional means of support; for example, a USAID-funded program (Balkan Media Assistance Program - BMAP).[162]

---

[162] For more on BMAP, see the Fact Sheet at https://www.usaid.gov/bosnia/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-balkan-media-assistance-program

SAFF

SAFF is an ideologically and politically tendentious magazine, very close to the SDA, whose public image receives very favorable coverage. Because of its links with one of the centers of power in BiH, *SAFF* avoids publishing articles about potentially harmful topics such as corruption or state capture which might jeopardize the interests of its political patron. On the other hand, in the few cases where corruption and state capture are tackled as issues, the resulting news items are generally devised to cause detriment to SDA's political foes. For instance, while the ventilators affair in the FBiH was very much underreported by *SAFF*, and the few existing articles were mostly aimed at relativizing the involvement of SDA officials, the allegations of a similar ventilators affair emerging in RS was duly addressed.

Exhibit 16: SAFF Coverage
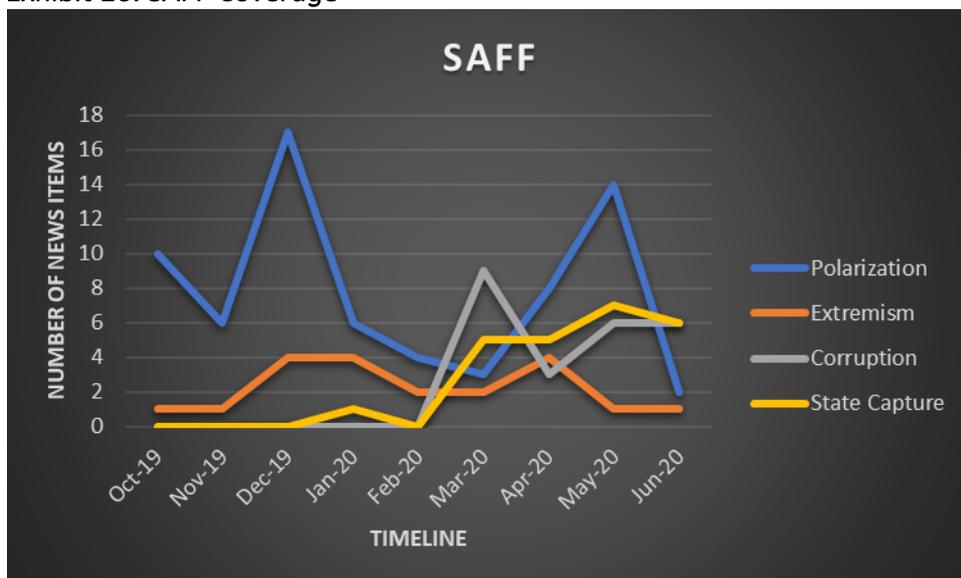
Exhibit 16 shows how articles regarding polarization were the most numerous of the four categories. Such articles either indicated the existence of societal polarization and division in BiH, or purposefully *fueled* such sentiments. Besides the news items categorized for the project's statistics, *SAFF* proliferates news items that bolster top-down polarization, similar to other ethno-centric media outlets.[163] Furthermore, a considerable amount of *SAFF's* content nurtures resentment towards Serbs and Croats by regularly publishing news items regarding

---

[163] Just two examples are illustrative. ''Bosanska Gradiška: Mogu li Bošnjaci biti spokojni pored ovakve srpske omladine?'' (Bosanska Gradiška: Can Bosniaks stay calm next to such Serbian youth?), published on June 19, reacts to a picture taken in Bosanska Gradiška and published on social media where a group of young men stands in front of a mural depicting the war criminal Ratko Mladić. The very title of the article implies that Bosniaks shouldn't feel safe around such Serbian youth and likewise links the general Serbian youth to such phenomena of extremism. Article available at: https://saff.ba/bosanska-gradiska-mogu-li-bosnjaci-biti-spokojni-pored-ovakve-srpske-omladine/ Another news item such is ''Skandalozno: Generali Oružanih snaga BiH učestvovali u obilježavanju neustavnog Dana RS-a'' (Scandalous: Generals of the Armed Forces of BiH participated in the celebration of the unconstitutional Day of RS), published on January 9 (RS Day), which points to the ideological and ethnic divisions present within the Armed Forces of BiH, despite its unification in 2005. Article available at https://saff.ba/skandalozno-generali-oruzanih-snaga-bih-ucestvovali-u-obiljezavanju-neustavnog-dana-rs-a/

war crimes and atrocities committed against the Muslim population during the 90s. The language, the titles, and the visual content used in these cases are very strong.

Qualitative findings

Governance

The representation of BiH politics and its supporting political/institutional structure changes according to the political and ideological positioning of each media outlet. Media outlets more aligned as independent, non-nationalist, or even civic, and therefore positioned against the main nationalist parties, such as *Oslobodjenje*, *Inforadar*, *Interview.ba*, *Tacno.net,* or those specializing in investigative journalism such as *Žurnal,* have been consistently critical of misgovernance cases and its root causes. While most of the news items published by these media revolved around cases of misgovernance, others, more analytical in nature, focused on the structural causes of bad governance in BiH and often inferred the existence of a captured state, where state institutions and the power therein become instruments of the ethno-centric political elites, used to pursue their narrow interests and prevent any structural change.

- In the Inforadar article, "The Little Jubilee of Dodik, Čović and Izetbegović: How did we go from being people and citizens to being sheep,"[164] the author mentions that the three ethnic leaders "have been convincing us for 15 years that we are in mortal danger from one another and that we must be Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks and only then citizens (…) and while they were doing that, we became poorer and poorer, and they became richer and more powerful.'' The caricature that features in the article (Image 1) is quite telling.

Exhibit 17: The Little Jubilee of Dodik, Čović and Izetbegović

---

[164] Šišić, Almedim. ''Uz mali jubilej Dodika, Čovića i Izetbegovića: Kako smo od naroda i građana postali ovce''. Along the little jubilee of Dodik, Čović and Izetbegović: how we became sheep from a nation and citizens.'' *Inforadar Portal*. November 12, 2020. Available at: https://inforadar.ba/uz-mali-jubilej-dodika-covica-i-izetbegovica-kako-smo-od-naroda-i-gradana-postali-ovce/

- In Žurnal's article, ''Six years since the workers' protests: Burning or not burning, in the end you will flee from here,''[165] the author ponders over the dilemma that young people are facing between staying in BiH or leaving the country to work abroad. He concludes the piece by asking the reader, "isn't it completely clear that the worst people already own everything in this country, actually, own this country?" and advises to, "Feed your son and send him to slavery (abroad), because this (the country) cannot be changed."
- In another's Inforadar analytical piece, ''Asim Mujkić: We are on the threshold of pure autocracy led by the three people's leaders,''[166] the author discusses the importance of the forthcoming local elections for BiH ethnic leaders and their aim to achieve domination in their municipalities of interest. The author notes that in BiH, "the rule of the dominant ethnonational oligarchy and its leaders must be total and thus they push for an authoritarian governing system (…) and funds won't be spared to achieve that goal."

Media outlets that are more informative and which demonstrate less overt political bias such as the web portal *Klix.ba* have extensively covered misgovernment cases. Nonetheless, they limit themselves to providing day to day news on such topics, while lacking authored analytical pieces or reported reactions from pundits that might offer a deeper insight into BiH politics. Within the domain of independent media outlets, the regional TV station *N1* has consistently provided interviews with guests on its talk shows, which delve more deeply into the structural causes of misgovernment in BiH. Some of the interviews provided by N1 that tackle the structural causes of misgovernment and hint to the existence of a captured state include "Denis Džidić: Their rule comes down to the division of functions,"[167] and "Latić Hulusić for N1: This is a criminal society, we are trapped."[168] Other articles by N1 such as "While politicians enjoy high salaries - the cultural temple of BiH is about to collapse,''[169] often imply the existence of a self-interested and privileged political class.

Finally, the openly politically connected media outlets represent mostly the political interests of their patrons and tend to relativize or not report on cases of bad governance. Such news items fail to identify culprits when reporting about misgovernment or, if the media outlet

[165] Nikolaidis, Andrej. ''Šest godina od radničkih protesta: Palio ne palio, na kraju ćeš zapaliti odavde.'' ''Six years since the workers' protests: burning or not, you will eventually get out of here.'' *Žurnal*. February 08, 2020. Available at: https://zurnal.info/novost/22755/palio-ne-palio-na-kraju-ces-zapaliti-odavde.-

[166] Mujkić, Asim. ''Asim Mujkić: Na pragu smo čiste autokratije predvođene trojicom narodnih poglavica''. ''Asim Mujkić: We are on the threshold of pure autocracy led by the three people's leaders''. *Inforadar Portal*. May 22, 2020. Available at: https://inforadar.ba/asim-mujkic-na-pragu-smo-ciste-autokratije-predvodene-trojicom-narodnih-poglavica/

[167] ''Denis Džidić u rubrici PRESS: Njihovo vladanje se svodi na podjelu funkcija''. ''Denis Džidić in the segment PRESS: Their rule comes down to the division of functions''. N1 BiH. November 07, 2020. Available at: http://ba.n1info.com/Video/Info/a389319/Denis-Dzidic-u-rubrici-PRESS-Njihovo-vladanje-se-svodi-na-podjelu-funkcija.html

[168] ''Latić Hulusić za N1: Ovo je kriminalno društvo, zarobljeni smo''. ''Latić Hulusić for N1: This is a criminal society, we are trapped''. N1 BiH. June 22, 2020. Available at: http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a442515/Latic-Hulusic-za-N1-Ovo-je-kriminalno-drustvo-zarobljeni-smo.html

[169] Mustafić, Semir. ''Dok političari uživaju u visokim platama - kulturni hram BiH pred kolapsom''. ''While politicians enjoy high salaries - the cultural temple of BiH is about to collapse''. N1 BiH. May 20, 2020. Available at: http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a435252/Dok-politicari-uzivaju-u-visokim-platama-kulturni-hram-BiH-pred-kolapsom.html

presents a strong ethnic bias, they focus entirely on the failures attributable to the political representatives of *other* ethnic groups. Media with a strong political and ethnic bias include *Glas Srpske, RTRS, HMS, SAFF, and Slobodna Bosna*, to mention a few. Other media outlets owned by the government or other political representatives can appear to be more nuanced in their bias such as *Federalna TV*, *BHTV,* or *Dnevni Avaz*, as they sometimes do manage to offer objective content with a critical flair.

- In SAFF's articles ''The Prosecutor's Office of BiH cannot investigate the crimes of Covic, Dodik and RS authorities,''[170] the author focuses on the immunity from prosecution enjoyed by Croat and Serb politicians while the issue of Bosniak political corruption is not mentioned.
- On the other hand, Federalna TV's piece ''Being a politician - the most lucrative job in BiH,''[171] tackles the issue of the cost of BiH politics and the benefits enjoyed by politicians. As mentioned above, despite being politically connected and influenced, its editorial team appears to enjoy a certain leeway in dealing with issues that does not exactly fit the interests of its political patrons.

Corruption

Throughout the media review, the following forms of corruption have been reported and covered by the selected media outlets: tax evasion, influence peddling, money laundering, conflict of interest, bribery, embezzlement, abuse of power or authority, corruption in public procurement, forgery of documents, nepotism, clientelism, and all other possible cases of political corruption.

The coverage of corruption across the BiH media spectrum follows the same lines that define how cases of bad governance and mismanagement of the public good are reported and portrayed. That being said, the overall coverage of corruption cases in public procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic, most notably the ventilators affair, turned out to be comprehensive and sustained. While in the three weeks preceding the full unfolding of the corruption affairs, coronavirus had monopolized the public discourse and the media space, the emerging scandals soon became the focal point of much media attention.

This changing of the guard at the top of the news chart, and the relevance given to the coverage of corruption affairs might be explained by the public outrage caused by the realization that "business as usual" continued in BiH politics even when public health was at stake and people were suffering the dire economic fallout of the pandemic along with the resulting widespread job losses.

By taking the entire project timeline into account, it becomes evident that non-nationalist media outlets have widely reported on corruption cases. In some cases, web portals such as *Žurnal*, known for its investigative journalism, reported on corruption cases extensively and

---

[170] 'IFIMES: Tužilaštvo BiH ne smije istraživati kriminal Čovića, Dodika i vlasti RS''. ''IFIMES: The Prosecutor's Office of BiH cannot investigate the crimes of Čović, Dodik and RS authorities''. SAFF. May 26, 2020. Available at: https://saff.ba/ifimes-tuzilastvo-bih-ne-smije-istrazivati-kriminal-covica-dodika-i-vlasti-rs/

[171] 'Biti političar - najunosniji posao u BiH''. "Being a politician - the most lucrative job in BiH". Federalna TV. December 03, 2019. Available at: http://www.federalna.ba/bhs/wap/vijest/296816

consistently throughout the nine-month period of the project. The fact that *Žurnal* constantly covers corruption cases indicates that corruption is indeed persistent and pervasive even when relevant news items do not reach the more mainstream media. At any rate, in *Žurnal* and other similar media, corruption, either private or political, is often being linked to the institutional and political framework of the country.

- As the "ventilators affair" started to emerge, *Žurnal* was quick to link the unfolding cases of corruption in public procurement with past corrupt behavior displayed by the main characters of the story with a view to emphasizing that the "ventilators affair" was more the rule than the exception. In that regard, the articles, ''The purchase of ventilators is just the continuation of a well-oiled practice: Fahrudin Solak spends millions on dubious purchases and useless equipment every year!''[172] and ''All the suspicious jobs of Solak and Novalić: Millions for the daughter, purchase of buildings, nepotism, illegal spending of public money ...''[173] can be noted.
- Inforadar in its article "Affairs are piling up, society is sinking deeper: Why is there no civil revolt in BiH?''[174] reflects on the lack of organized upheavals against the plunder of the country and links corruption with the political structure of BiH.

Finally, the more ethnically biased media outlets tend to omit links between political corruption and their political affiliation. Similarly, they do not ascribe political corruption to structural causes.

- *Glas Srpske* has mostly reported on political corruption cases in the FBiH. When it comes to the RS however, the newspaper focused on smaller cases of private corruption, while avoiding reports on any alleged political corruption. On the other hand, several articles dealt with initiatives to tackle corruption at the state or entity level, which tend to portray the RS as a responsible administrative unit, such as in the article, "The Ministry of the Interior of Srpska monitors public procurements during the epidemic."[175]

---

[172] Cviko, Dino. ''Kupovina respiratora je samo nastavak uhodane prakse: Fahrudin Solak godinama troši milione na sumnjive nabavke i beskorisnu opremu!''. ''The purchase of ventilators is just the continuation of a well-established practice: Fahrudin Solak has been spending millions on dubious purchases and useless equipment for years!''. *Žurnal*. April 30, 2020. Available at: https://zurnal.info/novost/23025/fahrudin-solak-godinama-trosi-milione-na-sumnjive-nabavke-i-beskorisnu-opremu

[173] Cviko, Dino. ''Svi sumnjivi poslovi Solaka i Novalića: Milioni za kćerku, kupovina zgrada, nepotizam, nezakonita trošenja javnog novca...''. ''All the suspicious jobs of Solak and Novalić: Millions for the daughter, purchase of buildings, nepotism, illegal spending of public money ...". *Žurnal*. April 29, 2020. Available at: https://zurnal.info/novost/23018/milioni-za-kcerku-kupovina-zgrada-nepotizam-nezakonita-trosenja-javnog-novca

[174] Tomić, Slađan. ''Afere se ređaju, društvo tone sve dublje: Zašto u BiH nema građanskog bunta?'' ''Affairs are mounting, society is sinking deeper and deeper: Why is there no civil revolt in BiH?". *Inforadar Portal*. May 21, 2020. Available at: https://inforadar.ba/afere-se-redaju-drustvo-tone-sve-dublje-zasto-u-bih-nema-gradanskog-bunta/

[175] ''MUP Srpske provjerava sve javne nabavke za vrijeme epidemije''. ''The Ministry of Interior of Republika Srpska examines all public procurements during the epidemic''. *Glas Srpske*. June 12, 2020. Available at: https://www.glassrpske.com/lat/novosti/vijesti_dana/mup-srpske-provjerava-sve-javne-nabavke-za-vrijeme-epidemije/321031

- HMS has focused on reporting on corruption cases unfolding in the RS or within the Bosniak political class, as shown in some articles reposted from Žurnal.[176] Any involvement of Bosnian Croat politicians in corruption cases goes unreported.
- When it comes to Bosniak media, *Slobodna Bosna*, politically close to the SDA, besides a focus on the RS, often targets the corruption allegedly committed by parties perceived as main opposition forces vying for Bosniak votes.[177] At the same time, the outlet staunchly defends the SDA from accusations and relativizes the corruption allegations regarding them.[178]

Extremism

Extremism, along with polarization, is a thematic category that is generally more present in ethno-centric media outlets that both report *and* foster extremism, polarization, and ethnic division. Such media outlets extensively cover extreme and radical events/acts committed by political foes, especially when the acts are (or are perceived to be) to the detriment of their own ethnic constituent group. In such media, extreme and polarizing content can be pervasive and consistent with a view to reinforcing certain sentiments among readers. In many instances, these outlets report about episodes of extremism that would be rarely found elsewhere, as they look for "news" to report that could serve their political purpose and exacerbate the ingroup/outgroup divide.

In that regard, when it comes to extremism, biased media outlets appear to be even more prone to use selective reporting, given the emotional weight and impact of such content on their audience. ***Extremism, nationalism, and hatred are thus exercised solely by the other side but never committed by your own group***.

For instance, *HMS* as well as other Croat ethno-centric media outlets reported extensively in April about a supposed ethnically motivated attempted murder against an ethnic Croat nearby Tuzla, perpetrated by an internally displaced Bosniak man whose supposed aim was to drive the Croat victim out of his home.[179] Other, less ethnically biased media outlets

---

[176] ''Svi sumnjivi poslovi Solaka i Novalića: Milioni za kćerku, kupovina zgrada, nepotizam, nezakonita trošenja javnog novca…''. ''All the suspicious jobs of Solak and Novalić: Millions for the daughter, purchase of buildings, nepotism, illegal spending of public money …". *Hrvatski Medijski Servis*. 29 April, 2020. Available at: https://hms.ba/milijuni-za-kcerku-kupovina-zgrada-nepotizam-nezakonito-trosenje-javnog-novca/

[177] ''SIPA podnijela izvještaj tužilaštvu: Oprano 300 hiljada eura pri nabavci medicinske opreme u Tuzlanskom i ZE-DO kantonu''. ''The State Investigation and Protection Agency submitted a report to the prosecutor's office: 300,000 EUR laundered during the procurement of medical equipment in Tuzla and ZE-DO cantons''. *Slobodna Bosna*. April 28, 2020. Available at: https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/152937/sipa_podnijela_izvjestaj_tuzilastvu_oprano_300_hiljada_eura_pri_nabavci_medicinske_opreme_u_tuzlanskom_i_ze_do_kantonu.html

[178] ''Igor Stojanović optužio SDA za stranačko zapošljavanje: On lično ima 0 dana radnog staža mimo državnog sektora!''. ''Igor Stojanović accused the SDA of party employment: He personally has 0 days of work experience outside the state sector!''. *Slobodna Bosna*. April 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/151634/igor_stojanovic_optuzio_sda_za_stranachko_zaposljavanje_on_lichno_ima_0_dana_radnog_staza_mimo_drzavnog_sektora.html

[179] ''Pokušaj ubojstva na nacionalnoj osnovi i premlaćivanje ženske osobe uz psovanje "ustaške majke".'' ''Attempted murder on national basis and beating of a woman with swearing at the '' ustasha mother''. *Hrvatski Medijski Servis*. April 23, 2020. Available at: https://hms.ba/pokusaj-ubojstva-na-nacionalnoj-osnovi-i-premlacivanje-zenske-osobe-uz-psovanje-ustaske-majke/

reported merely about a physical altercation, and the news items were mostly devoid of any ethnic connotations.

Similarly, media outlets from the RS highly manipulated news of the establishment of the migrant hosting center in Lipa (near Bihać), consistently referring to it as a planned policy by Bosniak politicians to drive Serb returnees out of the area, with some articles even comparing it to ethnic cleansing.[180]

SAFF, reported several times about the case of a Serbian man threatening an imam in Novi Grad (Sarajevo) and urinating in front of a mosque, while elsewhere this piece of news was either marginally reported or unreported.[181]

Politically non-affiliated and more independent mainstream media tend to report any major radical event that has wider repercussions on the country. Some of the extreme/radical events that received widespread coverage throughout the project timeline were:

- Episodes of glorification of the Chetnik movement and other displays of Serbian nationalism. This category includes the Christmas convoy of cars blaring nationalistic/Chetnik songs in Višegrad, Srebrenica, and Bratunac; the controversial picture posted by elementary school pupils in Srebrenica glorifying the chetnik movement; the video showing BiH Armed Forces soldiers singing a nationalistic anti-Bosniak song; nationalistic graffiti and murals; and provocative Chetnik related statement by public figures.
- Vandalism and nationalistic graffiti targeting the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar and the monument to fallen partisans/anti-fascism in Stolac.
- Content regarding the return of ISIS fighters and their families from the Syrian battlefield, their reintegration, trials, and verdicts. It is worth noting that besides news items covering the return of foreign fighters there haven't been reported cases of new radical Islamic activity during the project timeline.

That BiH is dominated by nationalist and one-sided media outlets is no surprise; much has been written about this, and many efforts made to offer alternatives, dating to the very first years after the war.[182] However, this study's added value is to target the four main themes over an extended time, to have a basis to identify systemic dynamics. The timing, with the COVID pandemic having an impact on political dynamics, citizen expectations, and media coverage, was in some ways fortuitous as it provided an opportunity to see how the information ecosystem responds in a crisis that does not know ethno-national or political party boundaries. While the review to this point has focused on the supply of media and information, the next section considers the demand side – the readers.

---

[180] "Muslimani u BiH koriste situaciju da podstaknu etničke tenzije". "Muslims in BiH exploit the situation to incite ethnic tensions". *RTRS*. April 18, 2020. Available at: https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=379913

[181] ''Rajković priznao krivicu: Predložena godina dana zatvora za gadosti koje je učinio ispred džamije i uvrede imamu''. ''Rajković pleaded guilty: Proposed one year in prison for the abominations he committed in front of the mosque and for insulting the imam.'' *SAFF*. February 26, 2020. Available at: https://saff.ba/rajkovic-priznao-krivicu-predlozena-godina-dana-zatvora-za-gadosti-koje-je-ucinio-ispred-dzamije-i-uvrede-imamu/

[182] See for example, *Assessment of the Media Sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. USAID IMPAQ Measure Project. August 2016. Available at http://www.measurebih.com/assessment-of-the-media-sector-in-bandh

Comment sections: reactions and interaction of readers

Comments sections provided by media outlets on their web portals proved to be of great use and interest for a number of reasons:

1) To gauge the level of engagement enjoyed by various media outlets, which in turn provided an approximation/indication of the size and engagement of their audience/readership.

2) To gauge the level of engagement/attention generated by specific topics and news items.

3) To analyze the reactions of commentators to news items dealing with compelling and thorny topics such as misgovernment, corruption, and extremism. In this regard, comment sections played the role of social thermometers measuring citizens' responses to controversial and debated topics. More specifically, comment sections reflected the levels of grievance, frustration, anger, or compliance showed by citizens towards specific themes and events.

4) To see how the nature of comments on the same issue change across comments sections from media outlets with opposing political and ideological views.

5) Based on the emergence of confrontational stances by different commentators in the same comments section, some insight into the level of political and ethnic acrimony/animosity existing between different groups of commentators was possible. In those cases, comments sections transmuted into ideological/political battlefields.

It is important to note that comment sections provide users with great leeway to express their true stances and thoughts on a given topic, as commentators may use pseudonyms when posting and interacting with other unknown users. This makes them less susceptible to self-censorship and moral brakes.[183]

When it comes to analyzing readers' reactions to themes and events, it is important to keep in mind that most of the comments made to specific news items have been transferred to the forum of the social media sphere (rather than simply or solely on news portals), where interaction is *promoted* by the very nature of such platforms and the algorithms that generate users (and revenue). In that regard, news items from media outlets that do not offer comments sections are often highly commented upon and discussed when reposted on social media channels. Therefore, comment sections directly provided by media outlets account only for a part of the overall media attention/interaction/response that a news item generates. This study focused on the comment sections provided by the media outlets analyzed, and not by their spin off Facebook pages.

Out of the nine media outlets selected in the final sample group, only *Federalna TV* and *SAFF* do not provide comment sections for users on their web portals. *Inforadar.ba*, *Žurnal*, *HMS,*

---

[183] Milanović, Boris. "Mapping Extremist Discourse among Serbian 4Chan/pol/Users." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 238-298.

and *Glas Srpske* do not attract a high number of commentators; comment sections are rarely busy, with most articles attracting no comment. *Dnevni Avaz* attracts more commentators but not as many as one might imagine considering the popularity of the newspaper – BiH's largest circulation daily. In that regard, it has to be noted that *Dnevni Avaz, Žurnal,* and *Glas Srpske* require users to sign in from their Facebook profiles in order to leave a comment on their web portals. This could discourage users to leave comments, given that their anonymity is not safeguarded and anyone can view their Facebook profiles. That might be the cause of the low number of commentators engaging on these media outlets, especially the overtly political *Dnevni Avaz*.

On the other hand, *N1 BiH* and, most notably, *Klix.ba,* tend to attract a much higher number of commentators. It is rare that an article passes without attracting public reaction in the comment section on either portals.

Of all the media outlets monitored in this project, *Klix.ba* by far attracts the most commentators, and proved to be a major catalyst for political/ideological confrontation. As elaborated below, in several instances, comment sections become battlegrounds for supporters of different ideologies and political views. The confrontation – as well as the language used – was very harsh at times, as apparently there are no filters in place.

One of the main takeaways from this analysis is that the link between corruption/state capture and polarization/extremism does not appear to be strong. News items tackling topics of state capture and corruption do not result in comments that might indicate extreme, radical, and illiberal reactions and behavior. Topics about corruption/state capture seem instead to foster what might be considered positive and liberal radicalization, as the grievance towards a corrupted and self-interested political class appears to unite people who demand rule of law, justice and accountability *across the ethnic spectrum*. Therefore, it is not corruption or state capture that fuels extremism/illiberal radicalization. On the contrary, those phenomena and sentiments are encouraged and nurtured from above, with top-down polarization managed by political elites.

Reaction of commentators to news items tackling political corruption

When it comes to news items reporting cases of political corruption and injustice, the great majority of commentators showed a strong aversion towards a self-interested political class and mostly demanded justice and accountability. Commentators consistently refer to political representatives as thieves and criminals. Screenshots taken from comment sections provide some fitting examples. Commentators on the *N1 BiH* web portal proved to be particularly condemnatory, frequently offering highly critical comments. One can get a sense of the audience for such comments by in turn viewing the number of people who indicate they support (+) or disagree with (-) these comments.

On March 11, 2020, a commentator on N1 described to the political class of BiH as the cancer of the country.

Exhibit 18: N1 Commentator on Corruption

User 1: These politicians that want to put the judiciary under their paw are the cancer of the country. A couple of days ago we saw a display of political corruption, the buying of votes of delegates and why politicians do not seek the prosecution of those responsible. That's because they are the cancer of the society. An MP with confirmed corruption charges is the most vocal critic. Disgusting.

User 2: The judiciary in BiH is much more dangerous than the coronavirus. That's the cancer of this country.

On June 2, 2020, a commentator remarks that there is no place for honest business in BiH.

Exhibit 19: N1 Commentator on Corruption

Screenshot 2.

User 1: there's no chance for honest business in this country. Now the real robbery begins. 300 million is coming from the IMF and 550 million from the EU. From the excises already 8 billion KM disappeared. Go ahead, hungry thieves... the buffet is ready.

In other instances, a commentator called for people to take matters into their own hands as a consequence of the unfolding "ventilators affair." The two ensuing screenshots are quite telling.

Exhibit 20: N1 Commentator on Corruption

User 1: People, take matters into your own hands
User 3: We should suspend completely the government.

Exhibit 21: N1 Commentator on Corruption

User 1: without revolution there's no change here. The other option is packing for a life-time excursion.

Display of Fatalism and Lack of Belief in Change

Very often news items reporting on cases of political corruption and state capture lead to comments where users express their disbelief about any possible change and lament the fact that that the widespread corruption and the capture of the state is too rooted to be changed. These comments display high levels of hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism.

In the screenshot below, we can see how a news item on corruption in Bosnia prompted some fatalistic reflections, underscoring how BiH citizens have become accustomed to corruption.

User 1: in BiH we got used to corruption, nothing can surprise us, someone will get rich thanks to the virus the way they did during the war.

In the comment section of an article published by *Klix.ba* in May 2020 dealing with the "ventilators" affair, we can read comments that show skepticism that those responsible will be eventually held accountable. This represents another perennial reaction, as people have no faith in the work and independence of the judiciary.

Exhibit 23: Klix Commentator on Corruption

User 1: in China they would have been executed in some stadium by now with tickets being sold to those who want to watch to fill up the stadium till the roof. But in the parts of the FBiH where the SDA keeps citizens under its boot, there won't be any punishment, confiscation of property or jail obviously, because everything is corrupt, from the local politician to the very top of the federal and cantonal governments. And of course that's why on the boxes there's a caption from some church in Ireland.

Examples of polarization/confrontation in the comment sections

In some instances, comment sections showed confrontational exchanges among users that displayed and fostered polarization, extremism, hate speech, and calls for violence. This behavior proved to be common in news items featuring controversial topics with strong ethnic or nationalist connotations.

In the image below, we can read the reactions of commentators to an article published by *Slobodna Bosna* on the fascist graffiti that appeared at the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar. By reading the ensuing comments, we can see how a divisive and provocative display of nationalism fosters strong sentiments and reactions among commentators.

Exhibit 24: Violent Speech Online

User 1: Big Taliban hero, go ahead, we're waiting for you.
User 2: it is known that the ustasha have always been fascists. Nothing surprises me from them. With them as with the chetniks, a final showdown is needed. Once and for all!

Exhibit 25 below shows some comments posted in response to an article dealing with the long-running controversy of the Orthodox church built in the courtyard of Fata Orlović, whose hard-won court ordered removal was further postponed due to the coronavirus. Such topics bring about strong sentiments and resentment for injustices committed during and after the war. This in turn results in provocative comments that display strong nationalistic overtones, as seen in the screenshot below.

Exhibit 25: Violent Speech Online

User 1: Now the easiest thing to do is to mine the church but also call the Mauzerovi,[184] they have experience in mining mosques and minarets for four years
User 2: Many genocidaires gathered on Kliks. It stinks…

In Exhibit 26 below, we can read quite heavy comments in response to another article published in May 2020 by *Slobodna Bosna* reporting the aggression of RS policemen against an ethnic Bosniak. As we can read in the comments, such events trigger polarization, inter-ethnic tension, and calls for violence and vendettas.

Exhibit 26: Violent Speech Online
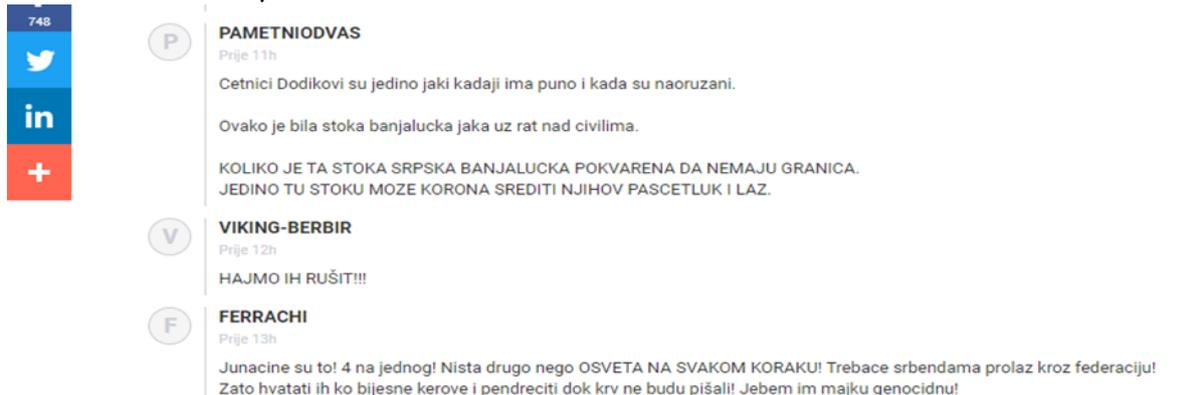
User 1: Dodik's chetniks are only strong when they are armed and there are many of them. That's how the animals from Banjaluka were strong against civilians during the war. These\ Serb Banjalukan animals are bad beyond any expectation. Only the coronavirus can stop these animals and their lies.
User 2: Let's tear them down!
User 3: They are real heroes, four against one. Nothing less than revenge on any step. These big Serbs will have to pass through the FBiH. That's why we have to take them like angry dogs beat them until they will piss blood. F*** them, genocidaires!

A dedicated socio-linguistic review of the tone and content of exchange in comments sections would in itself be an interesting exercise in understanding the potentially cathartic role – or (re)radicalizing role that these fora play. For the purposes of this research, this selection offers a sample of the discourse seen in the formal media, and the informal environment that surrounds it. Media does seem to be a reflection of the society in which it operates. However, the question of whether politicians are responding to the expressed needs and interests of people, or are creating and driving the kind of environment in which they prefer to operate, is explored more in the Analysis.

Social Media Review

Methodology

Daily online news and breaking stories are highly shared and discussed on social media platforms, to the point that social media has become the main source of news and

---

[184] Mauzerovi is a nickname of the Garda Panteri, which was a para-military unit of the Army of Republika Srpska during the Bosnian war, and named after its leader and post-war RS interior minister, Ljubiša Savić-Mauzer.

information for an increasing number of people. Therefore, besides the review of traditional media outlets, it was critical to see how topics relevant to this research fared on social media platforms.

Different social media platforms were analyzed throughout the research timeframe, with a special focus being placed on Facebook and 4Chan, which turned out to be particularly relevant. They all differ in style, purpose, and primary features. Furthermore, this social media review targeted specific groups of users, that might tend to express or support radical and extreme political views and ideologies. The behavior of such groups of users was followed and analyzed with a view to identifying the recurring themes/narratives discussed and promoted. Along with topics that might be characterized as radical and extreme, we strived to find existing links, in the main narratives promoted by these groups, between radicalization/extremism and corruption or state capture, where the latter might be used as societal phenomena to justify or bolster radical behavior.

Given the very nature of social media platforms, it was particularly interesting to see what kind of imagery, language, and strategic communication methods social media users/groups employed. The visual element proved to be a common and efficient vehicle used to convey views and underlying messages, thanks to its easy consumption and processing by the viewer. In that regard, recurring and viral memes and videos play an important role in the dissemination and reinforcement of given sentiments, ideas, and perceptions. For the purposes of the project, we kept track of some such visual content, especially when it resonated across different groups and platforms, as it was indicative of its level of popularity and communications success.

The first phase of the social media review revolved around understanding the broader social media landscape and identifying the relevant social media groups, profiles, and accounts to ultimately target during the tracking. The research focused on groups of users that are more likely to promote radical views, such as ethno-centric nationalistic groups promoting division, hatred, and violence. Some of these groups were theme-centered, existing only in the online sphere, while others were the social media sprouts of existing radical groups with an established offline presence. Furthermore, more focus was given to groups recognized as more relevant and influential in terms of audience numbers and level of engagement by users, in order to narrow and streamline the review process.

This initial screening likewise proved to be useful to understand which social media platforms are used the most by the various targeted groups. From an initial analysis it became clear that there is an age differential in the way people use social media, as for instance, older users seem to prefer Facebook, while Twitter and 4Chan attract a younger audience. Throughout the initial screening phase, it also became clear that a quantitative analysis would be hard to carry out. The social media landscape is a very dynamic and ever-changing one, with posts being often deleted and edited and profiles closed or banned. Moreover, in the case of 4Chan the flow of information was extremely hectic and difficult to track in numerical terms; a thorough look at this medium would require a distinct dedicated study.[185]

---

[185] Boris Milanović analyzed /pol/ in Serbia, which can be viewed as the definitive exploration of this forum in the region as of 2020. Milanovic, Boris. "Mapping Extremist Discourse among Serbian 4Chan/pol/Users."

With all that in mind, the review process consisted of regularly monitoring selected platforms and groups with a view to tracking recurring themes, without focusing on quantitative information. It should be viewed as indicative rather than comprehensive.

Throughout the review process, the links between traditional media and social media appeared to be strong and worth exploring more deeply, as is the general question of how (or, more likely, if and whether) social media groups source information. On social media, news can be generated *ex novo*, with an original post, or shared by publishing another social media post or the link of a news item published generally by a media outlet. In the latter case, the link between given social media groups and favored traditional media outlets is strong and sustained. For instance, while studying the discourse/narrative/themes that prevail in various Facebook nationalistic groups, it became clear that such groups, while promoting their own views, also tend to share news items from specific sources. For instance, a number of Bosniak nationalist groups seem to resort consistently to media outlets such as STAV, SAFF and BH Vijesti to procure information and share articles that fit their purpose. Similarly, Serb nationalistic groups consistently resort to news published from RTRS and *Glas Srpske*. Therefore, special attention was given to the identification of traditional media outlets that feed the narrative of extreme/nationalistic social media groups which then operate as echo-chambers where such news and content is repeatedly consumed.

Due to the sheer volume of content, the summary below focusses on issues related to extremism and polarization, not corruption and state capture. Further, the review process did not reveal a strong and explicit tendency for corruption to be used to foster radicalization among users. The following is a summary of the Facebook groups and pages reviewed.

Exhibit 27: Facebook Groups and Pages Reviewed

Name	Name	Type	Link
Bošnjaci reagujte	Bosniaks react	Page	https://www.facebook.com/Bo%C5%A1njaci-reagujte-1846712602317369/
Bosanski Patriota	Bosniak Patriot	Page	https://www.facebook.com/Kakanjskipatriota/?__tn__=kCH-R&eid=ARAcFJQuJGcb_BVV0x_AYs6Ji9q1KK-ybwAc476K8nrK7gwsD77-GIx085USKtwtXna49cHdfACDyWVj&hc_ref=ARScmPHIZGYKYZd2PgzUes8yWYgREDRZGoLwMDPSlkoqGPV-u4YkO_M_F-a1jDqiwMA&fref=nf
Bošnjački Patriotski Front	Bosniak Patriotic Front	Page	https://www.facebook.com/Bosnjacki-Patriotski-Front-597344434106441/
Bošnjački pokret slobode	Bosniak Freedom Movement	Group	https://www.facebook.com/groups/1223514571103315/?ref=br_rs
Bošnjački Rahilizam	Bosniak rahilizam	Page	https://www.facebook.com/pg/bosnjackirahilizam/posts/?ref=page_internal
Srpski Četnici-Odred Cvijetin Todić-Doboj	Serbian Chetniks-Unit Cvijetin Todić-Doboj	Page	https://www.facebook.com/%D0%A1%D1%80%D0%BF%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%A7%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8-%D0%9E%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4-%D0%A6%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD-%D0%A2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%9B-%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%98-1142985989143120/?eid=ARAJxxu36kw1zAE3_PoQg9dGh_eMLDi0WckBmC4wW8_M46CTOhbVU2f0hrSEaXDS_-Bc00PRGnLo0mcT
Ravnogorski Pokret Višegrad	The Ravna Gora Movement Višegrad	Page	https://www.facebook.com/ravnogoracvgd/?eid=ARD-eMDhx0ss7Af_FaQ99JH4hTo5lOsnc1S0u29ODDUIqYEmu4DRBRng0hPn2tptqzOzG4lvSCzNuLc2
Srpska ČAST	Serbian HONOR	Page	https://www.facebook.com/SrpskaCast.rs/
Republika Srpska	Republika Srpska	Group	https://www.facebook.com/groups/republikosrpska.srbinusiraj/
Republika Srpska (Moja Republika)	Republika Srpska (My Republic)	Page	https://www.facebook.com/mojarepublika/
Republika	Republika	Group	https://www.facebook.com/groups/208247936193746/?ref=br_rs

Srpska, nezavisna država	Srpska, independent country		
Moja Republika Srpska	My Republika Srpska	Group	https://www.facebook.com/groups/republikosrpskavolimte/?ref=br_rs
Erepublik Herceg Bosna	E-republic Herceg Bosnia	Page	https://www.facebook.com/erepublikHB/
Neovisni za Hrvatsku NHR - Herceg-Bosna	Independents for Croatia NHR – Herceg Bosnia	Group	https://www.facebook.com/groups/524703721458538/?ref=br_rs
Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane	Croatian Defence Council	Page	https://www.facebook.com/hrvijeceobrane/
Udruga dragovoljaca i veterana domovinskog rata HVO TK[186]	Association of Volunteers and Homeland War Veterans HVO Tuzla Canton	Page	https://www.facebook.com/Udruga-dragovoljaca-i-veterana-domovinskog-rata-HVO-Tuzlanskog-kantona-1764339347135249/?ref=py_c&eid=ARBpdoRb4iVOEOxLoSw2CBZW_87uNUfEpcduQtCzl4fcQ_de8gYmVXDeCtJF8SDjsBpxxhaHo_MZ_URj

---

[186] Croat nationalist/extreme groups were not found on Facebook, other than this veterans' association. It was easier to find Bosniak and Serb nationalist Facebook groups, and therefore veteran groups did not need to be included.

4 Chan/pol/

4Chan is an anonymous online forum dedicated to the discussion of various topics, featuring 65 thematic boards. One of the most active boards is /pol/, which stands for "politically incorrect" and has been identified throughout the years as a hub for the dissemination of extreme views and associated with right-wing radicalization and calls for violent actions.[187] The 4Chan /pol/ board provides 10 active pages, each featuring 15 thematic threads allowed at a time. 4Chan, as a whole, offers a set of appealing features such as the anonymity of users and easy access to posting and interaction on the boards; private communication between two users is not possible. The easy access to posting creates a hectic environment where posts are constantly published. Although 4Chan foresees moderators, their power is very limited and posts are removed mostly in case of spam.

During the review of 4Chan, the methodology presented by Boris Milanović in his chapter, "Mapping Extremist Discourse among Serbian 4Chan /pol/ Users," provided a valuable starting point from which an initial analytical blueprint was created, although with a much more limited scope. Provided that 4Chan /pol/ allows the public identification of the IP source country, relevant threads and posts from BiH IPs were identified and analyzed, the main objective being the outlining of extremist narratives among users in BiH. A total of 25,000 posts were made by users with a BiH IP on 4Chan/pol/ from October 2019 to June 2020.

Preliminary monitoring was sufficient to grasp the nature of 4Chan along with the main narratives that consistently dominate threads and posts published by users with BiH IPs, which turned out to be fairly in line with topics dominating the general public discourse on the platform. In fact, given the international user base of 4Chan /pol/, most users post in English and discuss general topics, peculiar to the alt-right and other radical right-wing groups, that mostly transcend the political developments of individual countries.

Consequently, racist, antisemitic, homophobic, and misogynous remarks and reactions abound in threads and posts published by BiH users in 4Chan /pol/ - similar to most users of /pol/. Derogatory terms and ethnic slurs are widespread, the use of the n-word is very common as well as references to Jews as enemies along with some popular antisemitic conspiracy theories. Roma are also the target of racial slurs and offensive posts, although to a lesser extent. Memes as imagery are often used with certain ubiquitous themes and stereotypes evident (e.g., Pepe the Frog), as illustrated by two selected below. The one on the left combines anti-Semitism with a reaffirmation for the echo chamber that Jews are complicit in any major world event. The second merges the alt-right mascot Pepe with a fox, both winking, suggesting a tacit and conspiratorial link between the right and Fox media, all against the backdrop of a racially motivated lynching. (These interpretations are based on the educated judgements of the team.) The "beauty" of such memes is that they trigger such thinking and connections among viewers, while offering plausible deniability to those who

---

[187] 4chan began to gain more popular attention following revelations of its use by the Christchurch shooter. See Mike Wendling, "Christchurch shootings: The rising new threat of far-right violence." *BBC Trending*. March 18, 2019. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-47596446

post or share them. ("What? You see that? That's not what it means.") Yet at the same time they speak to their "knowing viewership," who can feel validated and that they are "in" on the message.

Exhibit 28: Violent 4Chan Memes

Some users in BiH actively discuss US racial and political issues, or openly show support for like-minded groups in other countries – including consolidated democracies - with whom they feel an affinity. Support for Putin is not uncommon, as well as a general *dislike* towards the more liberal "western" lifestyle, vis a vis more "Slavic traditional values."

Racial topics are extremely common and are intertwined with the popular narrative dreading the "extinction" of the white man. In many instances, the superiority of the Slavic white man is emphasized.

Exhibit 29: White Supremacy Online

Anonymous ID:8S6p/Cfn Tue 30 Jun 2020 01:17:32 No.265528483 View Report

South Slavs are one of the most physically superior, violent, warlike and strongest people yet known to mankind. You can omit technology, tactics, mass and all other aspects of military logistics, but by sheer strength of manforce, in a fight between equals, we are unpreceded.
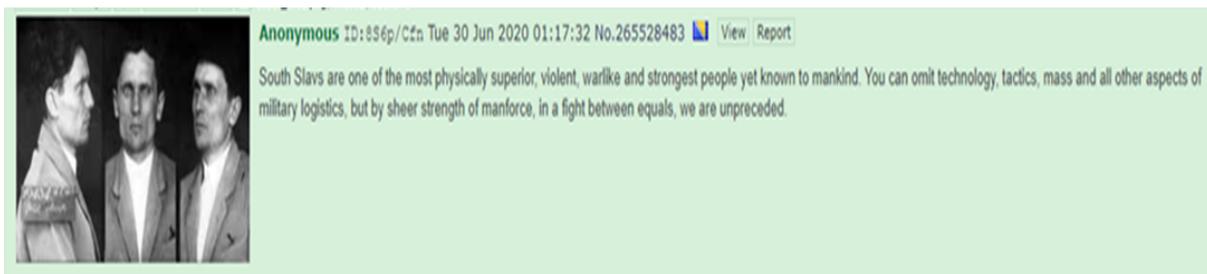
The preservation of the purity of the race has been featured in numerous topics by BiH users.

Anonymous ID:qWIvNhBm Fri 01 May 2020 13:32:43 No.255784105 View Report

>>255783746
Come here to Serbia Russian bro, bring your Russian waifu and have many kids. Protect the last bastion together with us.

Anonymous ID:2KblAubz Fri 21 Feb 2020 14:11:04 No.244681805 View Report

>>244681702
No, race mixing is wrong no matter how people try to spin it. The result is a mutt race that is easily controllable, just like the people of Brazil and the USA.

Topics of race are often linked with misogynistic remarks blaming white women for "breeding" with other races, thus endangering the survival of their own kind. Other misogynous posts promote gender-based stereotypes and models of how an exemplary wife should behave.[188]

The imagery used in 4Chan is deeply offensive and disturbing. Political foes are often depicted in cartoon sketches as sub-humans, with accentuated physical features that can be traced back to racial mixing. The usage of words such as "retard," "subhuman," or "mutt" (a slur for mixed races) is extremely common among BiH users. It bears repeating that the visual content is particularly relevant in 4Chan as each thread starts with a pic/gif or similar.

Exhibit 30: A Picture is Worth 1000 Words

Some threads and posts feature opposing/antagonistic radical users from BiH competing against each other and seeding polarization and ethnic distance. 4Chan offers an ideal setting for ideological "battlefields" as users can argue freely, given that the anonymous nature of the accounts allows them to be openly confrontational and aggressive. That said, although the intra-BiH ethnic confrontation is quite common, the dominant themes remain those with a more global breadth.

Exhibit 31: Hate Speech
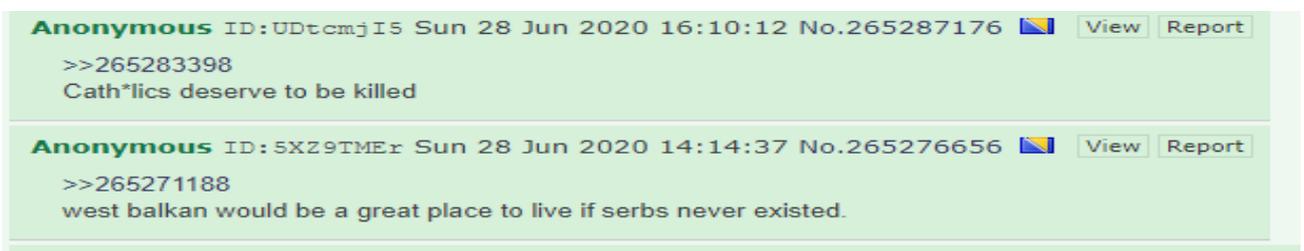
Visual content becomes an easy and quick vehicle to promote hatred and seed division among the various groups of BiH. In the first included below, the alt-right, armed Pepe the Frog combined with the flag of the wartime Army of the Republic of BiH suggests a Bosniak

---

[188] In a forthcoming article to be published in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Milanovic further explores 4chan /pol/ in Serbia, this time looking at representations of women.

nationalist message. The second image is of a widely known meme of the "kebab remover," or the individual who purges Muslims, juxtaposed with an image of Srebrenica coffins.

Exhibit 32: War Memory Memes

Discussions concerning history, eugenics, and identity issues regarding BiH's ethno-national groups are very common and popular among users. The history discussed mostly revolves around WWII, while fewer posts dealing with the most recent wars were found.

Exhibit 33: Hate and History

Islamophobic remarks or posts targeting radical Islam are common given that 4Chan users find themselves ideologically aligned with the alt-right. More generally, many threads display a general dislike and sometimes hatred towards religion, as a category.

Some BiH users strive consistently to distance themselves from the idea of BiH being an Islamic country, and often blame external/Saudi influences and investments. These users defend the secular nature of BiH in response to posts from users with different IPs depicting BiH as a Muslim fundamentalist country or a terrorists' haven. We suspect that those defending secularism in BiH are Bosniak nationalists, users given that Croat and Serb nationalists often promote the narrative of an Islamic Bosnia.

Exhibit 34: Online Identity Building

That being said, an interesting post published by a BiH user portrayed Islam in positive terms vis a vis Western liberal values. This indicates that on 4Chan there is at least some presence of some form of radical Islam.[189]

Exhibit 35: Against Western Values
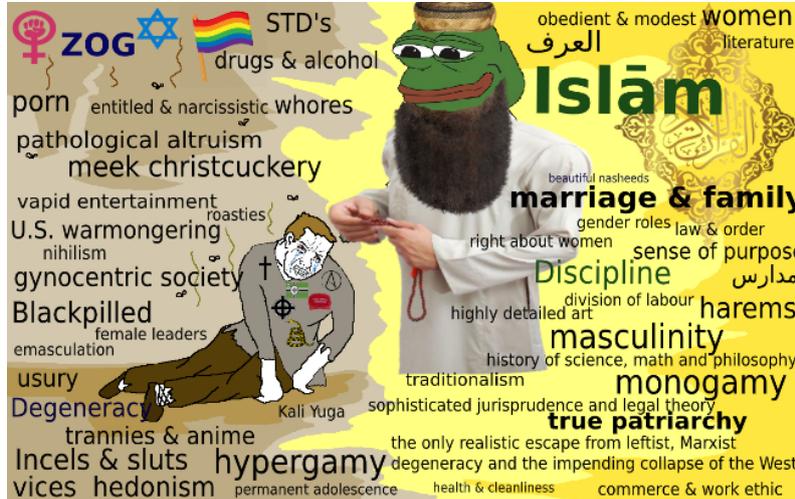
When 4Chan threads tackle questions such as the functioning mechanisms of a state, some replies from BiH IPs referred to the country either as a fake state or a mafia state.

Exhibit 36: A Fake Country?

Anonymous ID:Nd59nHEJ Wed 22 Jan 2020 01:21:15 No.240373944 View Report

>>240372293
Does it count If you live in a country which is made out of 2 entities and one district ? One of the two entities is consequently divided into cantons which. Ultimately, this doesn't even matter since this is a fake country used only by politicians (mafia and crooks) to get rich of off peoples back.

As a whole, while BiH users often engage in discussions pertaining to their own particular ethnic and political issues, they're mostly engaged in discussions dealing with broader racial and political topics, common to most radical far-right groups operating on the platform. BiH users seem to be also well acquainted with 4Chan symbols, imagery, language, and references (red pilling, anons vs. normies, The God Kek, Pepe the Frog, etc.), which underlines the level of their engagement on the forum, and the global reach and shared in-group glossary. Posts in English are much more common than those in BiH as most users interact with the international user base present on 4Chan.

To conclude, while 4Chan remains a deeply toxic environment, not all topics are radical and extreme and BiH users engage in lighter and more balanced political debates as well.

---

[189] These themes are similar to some of Nike Wentholt's observations in her study of extreme historical narratives in Serbia, seeing nationalist and Islamist message as two sides of the same coin. "Using the Past to Extremes in Serbia: Narratives of Historical Violence in Right-Wing Extremism and Islamism." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 71-114.

Facebook has been one of the most popular social media and social networking services in BiH, and in time has become a main source of information for many users. On Facebook, users mainly see and read posts published by other users within their own personal network (Facebook friends). These posts can be original, shared, or hybrids, where a shared link or post is accompanied by an introductory comment which gives a qualitative bias or spin to it. Other content might come from Facebook pages and groups that users follow, or from sponsored posts, namely posts promoted and boosted by existing Facebook pages, mostly aimed at achieving a commercial goal. However, sponsored posts have been increasingly used by political parties, especially during election campaigns, to reach more Facebook profiles with targeted political messages.

On Facebook, it is impossible to peruse and analyze all the posts published by BiH users on a relevant topic, due to privacy rules and the impressive volume of data at stake. Nonetheless, relevant content can be found on theme-oriented Facebook groups and pages, which gather users with similar views, interests, and passions. Facebook *groups* can be closed, where published content cannot be accessed unless you are a member of the group, or open, where every visitor can view the content regardless of his/her status vis a vis the group. Facebook *pages*, on the other hand, are open by default to all users and managed by one or more administrators. On Facebook pages, instead of members there are followers, who "liked" the page and follow it without managing the content published, but are allowed to react to, comment, and share posts.

For the purposes of the project, Facebook pages and groups that represent nationalistic and extremist groups or promote nationalistic themes and narratives across the BiH ethnic spectrum were identified and followed during the project timeline. Facebook pages featuring high numbers of likes (which determines the number of followers) and higher levels of engagement (reactions, comments, shares per post) became the focal point of the social media review. Similarly, the review focused on open Facebook groups featuring a high number of members and levels of interaction. Closed Facebook groups were not considered, as that would have required a group membership and would have associated the personal Facebook profile of the media researcher with extremist and nationalistic groups. Therefore, only content publicly available on Facebook was analyzed.

Several Facebook groups with nationalistic content were identified and most displayed very similar characteristics in terms of purpose, style, language, and strategic communication. On Facebook, the main goal of the various nationalistic groups and pages is to offer a safe space to likeminded users that want to share, discuss and consume content that reflects their political/ideological/ethnic views. The absence of differing views or counterarguments to the themes and ideas promoted allows users to constantly reinforce and strengthen their believes in these echo-chambers.

Besides that, such Facebook groups and pages strive to expand their online presence and attract new members in order to counterbalance the perceived or actual strengthening of hostile forces and ideas on the net. As one Bosniak nationalist Facebook group called "Bošnjaci reagujte" mentions in its self-description: "the cyber war against Bosniaks is in full

swing and we are turning our heads. This is a community of people that retaliates against hostile Serbian, Croat and Jugo-fascist propaganda.''[190]

Such statements indicate that cyber space is often regarded as something that needs to be defended or conquered, a world comprised of antagonistic factions vying to prevail over each other and dominate the main online discourse. The style, the language, and the narratives used by most of these groups are very similar, regardless of their ethnic or political positioning. Three features in particular appear to be common in the posting strategy adopted:

1. the selective reporting on ongoing thorny, ethnically/politically sensitive, and controversial topics
2. the use of selective historical memory and a divisive and unilateral interpretation of war related events
3. The persistent self-victimization, where each party regards itself as the sole victim and target of war crimes, atrocities, and injustice

The three aforementioned features are consistently present in the posting strategy of such groups, and unilateral and personalized narratives about the war in the 1990s are cyclically the subject of posts. The constant repetition of these themes makes them appear as dogmas, undeniable truths that cannot be refuted. The language used in conveying such truths is strong and aims at awakening targeted sentiments and nurture resentment towards the "other" among Facebook followers.

Besides the presence of common features, posts tackle topics specific to the ethnic affiliation of each group or page.

Bosniak nationalistic groups and pages, tend to often publish posts expressing support for the SDA, represented as the only party that truly pursues the Bosniak national interest. Other topics might include Serbian hegemonic designs, critics to RS policies and its political leadership, and the negative representation of the political opposition within the Bosniak constituency, mostly targeting SDP, Naša Stranka, and Narod i Pravda.

---

[190] ''Bošnjaci reagujte (Facebook page).'' ''Bosniaks react.'' Facebook. Available at:
https://www.facebook.com/Bo%C5%A1njaci-reagujte-1846712602317369/

Exhibit 37: Bosniaks React

An interesting trait of the well-followed Facebook page "Bosanski Patriota" is the periodic dissemination of positive messages calling for honesty, goodness, virtuous action, and speaking out against materialism.[191] This content is in stark contrast with the numerous gruesome posts about war crimes committed against the Muslim population in the 1990s. The antithesis created by this contrast, coupled with a positive representation of Islam, promotes the idea of the purity of the Bosniak people vis a vis the violence and evil perpetrated by the "other." On the other hand, other Facebook pages display a less pacifistic approach along calls for violent actions to defend the Bosniak interest and avenge past crimes.

Exhibit 38: Visualizing the Memory of Srebrenica

---

[191] Goran Davidović, a Serbian nationalist exiled to Italy and owning a vibrant Twitter account, used as similar tactic, interspersing pleas for humanitarian actions with nationalist rhetoric that explicitly or implicitly others. See Marko, Davor. "(Non)violent Extremism Online: How Opinion Leaders Use Online Channels to Disseminate Radical Messages and Intolerance." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 147-194.

Nationalistic Bosnian Serb Facebook groups and pages consistently promote and emphasize the national interest of their entity against those who want to deprive the RS of its right to exist. Published posts often refer to the statehood of the RS, and several openly support secession, where the hashtag RSEXIT is widely used. The RSEXIT topic is in turn very often accompanied by images of the Bosnian Serb army showing its supposed might and hinting at a/the method (e.g., force) that would lead to independence. It has to be said that these groups do not necessarily align themselves with the RS government, but mainly look at the statehood of the RS as a common national interest that goes beyond RS politics.

Exhibit 39: Hashtag RSEXIT

Other topics that find space on nationalistic Bosnian Serb pages and groups include the notion of Serb returnees being discriminated against in the FBiH, and several posts regarding discrimination of Serbs in Kosovo or Montenegro.

Bosnian Croat Facebook pages and groups promote the national interest of Bosnian Croats, where the idea of an independent Herceg-Bosna is highly featured, with implicit calls for military action. Such posts are often linked to a positive depiction of the HVO, presented as a peoples' liberation army.

Exhibit 40: HVO Imagery

Finally, a topic that is highly used and manipulated by all ethnic groups on Facebook concerns news about acts of vandalism against religious sites and graveyards. That appears to have a strong emotional impact on readers and is thus highly employed as a vehicle of division and resentment.[192]

---

[192] It is useful to note the OSCE Mission to BiH supports a project in which the four members of the Inter-Religious Council – representing the four traditional faiths in BiH – jointly condemn such acts of vandalism, committed against any of the groups' sites. The team is not aware of similar effort in the region; in Serbia, for example this type of engagement would not be possible as there is not equivalent to the Inter-Religious Council.

Exhibit 41: Real World Vandalism Online
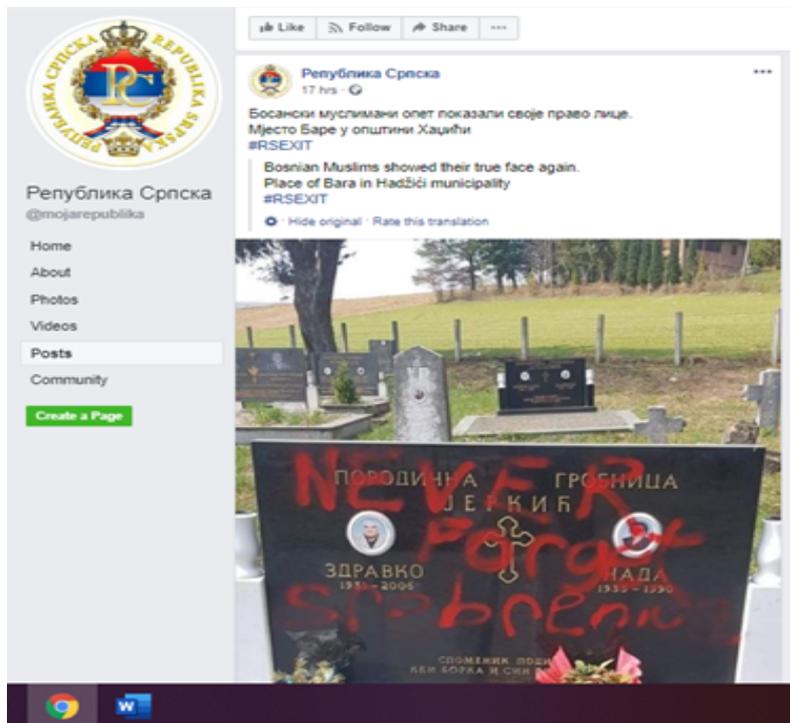
To conclude, on Facebook, the links between groups/pages and traditional media outlets is reinforced. Nationalistic Facebook pages and groups tend to rely on specific traditional media outlets representing their political affiliation and often share their content on a continuous basis throughout the project timeline. Most Bosniak nationalist FB pages and groups share news items from SAFF, STAV, and BH Vijesti. Most Bosnian-Serb nationalist pages and groups share content from ATV, RTRS, Sputnik RS, and *Glas Srpska*. Similarly, Bosnian Croat nationalistic pages and groups share content from media outlets representing the national interest of Bosnian-Croats (HMS, RTV Herceg-Bosna) or from Croat right-wing websites such as priznajem.hr. In that regard, on Bosnian Serb and Croat groups and pages it is also common to find posts sharing content from Serbian and Croatian media outlets.

Other social media platforms

Other social media platforms were also followed and analyzed during the duration of the project. However, their contribution to the project goals appeared to be limited and less valuable than the more thoroughly analyzed Facebook and 4Chan.

On Twitter, nationalistic accounts were widely present, however it was difficult to identify with certainty accounts pertaining to BiH as few users provided that information. Furthermore, almost all accounts used pseudonyms and were devoid of any personal information which further complicated the identification of relevant accounts. Finally, provided that Facebook is much more common in BiH, and because content in Twitter fairly replicates that published on Facebook, further analysis of Twitter was considered redundant.

YouTube was analyzed and perused but the number of YouTube channels purposefully targeting nationalistic topics remains limited and mostly linked to private accounts. Furthermore, most YouTube videos shared by nationalistic groups on other social media platforms were uploaded on YouTube years before the project timeline. As a matter of fact, the publishing of new relevant video content on YouTube is sluggish as it is much easier and less time consuming to create new written or simpler visual content. Other social media platforms, such as Instagram, Tumblr, or Pinterest were not examined, due to the marginal presence of content considered relevant to the project.

While a more thorough analysis is provided later in the report, one can easily see that there is a reinforcing mechanism that exists among social media fora, formal/traditional media, and some of the more polarizing statements coming out from leaders generally. It therefore further contributes to creating an information ecosystem in which information and language is easily weaponized.

Findings: Media and Social Media in North Macedonia

Magdalena Lembovska and Ajshe Mehmeti

<div style="border:1px solid; background:#b8cce4; padding:1em;">

Key Findings

- While there are quite vibrant discussions on corruption in the Macedonian language Info sphere, there is little to no such debate in the Albanian language environment.
- Far right and nationalist Macedonian patriotic pages range from openly political to more generally cultural/heritage oriented; nostalgia is a theme that can be found or inferred in both, though the former seem to more intentionally stoke such sentiment.
- The online presence of violent jihadists has dropped considerably, though a re-energized online presence of one Albanian speaking imam from North Macedonia was identified in the reporting period.
- Traditional and online media environments reveal a strong lack of trust and faith in governance and politics.
- While traditional and online spaces often mirror one another, social media activity on some topics, such as foreign affairs, suggests that traditional media is leaving a vacuum on some issues of interest to citizens.

</div>

While the fieldwork findings that follow this chapter demonstrate that citizens throughout North Macedonia share many of the same concerns and prioritize many of the same issues, the information and media spaces occupied by the two largest groups – Macedonian speakers and Albanian speakers – are highly distinct. Monitoring of the Albanian media space was more difficult for two reasons. First, many ethnic Albanians read media in Albanian coming from Albania or Kosovo, and follow that social media. Second, there is simply less content and activity on the topics of interest to this research in the Albanian information environment in North Macedonia. The Albanian language data is therefore simply not as extensive as the Macedonian language data.[193]

The media review was completed by two separate researchers who coordinated, but worked separately. (The Macedonian language researcher was the lead, spending more time and reviewing more data. She could also rely on other Macedonian speaking colleagues for assistance.) This was different than the media monitoring process in BiH which was done by one lead researcher covering everything from start to finish. In addition, the reviews of the media space(s) in North Macedonia were aimed at being primarily qualitative in nature. However, in spite of the methodological differences, the portraits provide a good overview of the information environments in 2020 that shape politics and society in the country.

---

[193] A dedicated Albanian language media review would be interesting, and, if conducted, should consist of bilingual (Albanian/Macedonian) citizens of North Macedonia, and include a strong component of seeking to discern what media and information ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia consume from Macedonian sources, vs. from sources in Albania or Kosovo.

It was difficult at times to make the determination of whether certain examples should be included in the "governance" section or the "extremism" section; this again reflects the core challenges not only facing this research initiative, but the country and society.

Overview of Media Landscape

Traditional media

Traditionally, television has been the most popular media in North Macedonia. Around 70.5% of the population watches TV daily, with news and informative programs the most popular items. Local TV stations are less popular, with only 11% of citizens watching them daily, so these were not included in this research. Local TV stations are slightly more popular among ethnic Albanians (15% of ethnic Albanians watch local TV, compared to 10% of ethnic Macedonians).[194]

Macedonian citizens listen to the radio mostly for music and entertainment,[195] so radio content was not part of this research.

The Excel spreadsheet in the digital annex provides details on the sources that were formally tracked. The following provides a brief summary of the types of media surveyed:

Exhibit 42: News Sources Surveyed[196]

	Total	*Macedonian*	*Albanian*
TV/Traditional	9	8	1
Portals and Traditional Newspapers	14	10	4
Facebook Groups	26	26	0
Twitter	11	11	0
YouTube Channels	4	4	0
Blogs	4	4	0
Forums	1	1	0

---

[194] „Годишен извештај 2019: Податоци за досегот на радиостаниците и уделот во вкупната гледаност на телевизиските станици" (Annual report 2019: Data on the reach of radio stations and the ratings of TV stations) Agency for Audio-Visual Media Services (AVMU). Available at:
https://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Годишен-извештај-за-2019-година-за-податоците-за-досегот-на-радиостаниците-и-за-уделот-во-вкупната-гледаност-на-телевизиските-станици.pdf
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

Exhibit 43: What did you watch on TV yesterday?

WHAT DO PEOPLE WATCH ON TV

Category	Percentage
Kids program	0.9%
Morning program	4.3%
Sports	5.3%
Educational/documentary program	7.6%
Movie	8.0%
TV Series	8.3%
Entertainement/music program	12.4%
Informative program	21.0%
News	32.1%
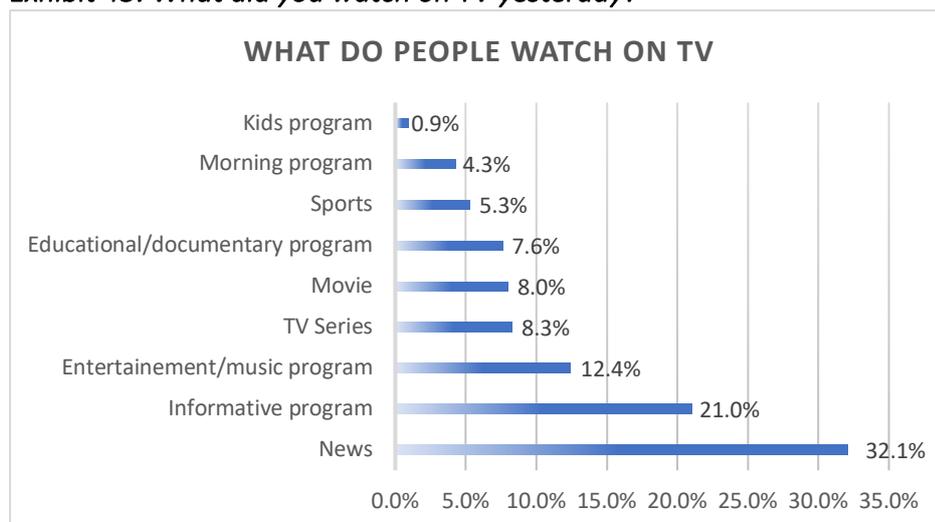
For information purposes, news portals are very popular in North Macedonia. They function as "online newspapers," especially as traditional printed newspapers have declined in popularity. There is a variety of pro-opposition, pro-government, and independent online portals, and each has its own audience. It is not uncommon for two or more portals to be owned by the same people or companies, and to publish identical articles, creating the perception that the same news is coming from different sources. For the purpose of this paper, the top 15 portals were reviewed.[197]

Over time, the number was reduced to the top 9, while an additional news website (Republika.mk) was added as a portal attracting a specific target group, and serving as a counterpart to Fokus.mk.

Exhibit 44: Descriptions of Surveyed media

Portal	Characterization/Comment
Vecer MK	VMRO-DPMNE leaning
Press 24	Neutral with VMRO-DPMNE leaning
Sakam da kazam	Objective
Netpress	VMRO-DPMNE leaning
Kurir	VMRO-DPMNE leaning
A1 On	Neutral
Plusinfo	Neutral
360 stepeni	Objective
Fokus	Objective, with SDSM-leaning
Republica	Objective with VMRO-leaning
Koha	Objective
Almakos	Objective, with AA leaning
Telegrafi	Neutral, objective
Portalb	Neutral, objective
Vecer Press	VMRO-leaning

---

[197] As ranked by www.alexa.com

A total of 202 articles (152 in Macedonian and 50 in Albanian) from the traditional media (TV, print, and their portals) were formally analyzed.

The websites of 9 TV stations, where they publish full content of what has been aired on TV, were reviewed once a week. Each day, the Facebook page of one of the TV stations was in addition reviewed, in order to get an overview of how Facebook users are reacting to certain news. The researcher rotated the review process to enable a chance to survey more sites, more frequently, and therefore understand the various audiences better.

Exhibit 45: Descriptions of Surveyed TV

TV Outlet	Characterization/Comment
MTV 1	Neutral, government-leaning
Telma	Neutral with SDSM-leaning
TV 24	Objective
Sitel	VMRO-leaning
Alfa	Objective with VMRO-leaning
Kanal 5	Neutral with SDSM leaning
Alsat	Objective, with DUI leaning
TV21	DUI leaning
TV Shenja	Alternativa leaning

Social media

Citizens of North Macedonia are active on the Internet, with 1,652,056 Internet users registered according to data in December 2019.[198] Social media life predominantly happens on Facebook, as this network has over 96.3% of the social media market.[199] The remaining percentages are negligible, divided between Pinterest (1.22%), Instagram (0.78%), Twitter (0.6%), YouTube (0.55%), and Tumblr (0.12%).[200] In numbers, other studies have shown 1,124,000 Facebook users in February 2020,[201] compared to 129,000 Twitter users.[202] Therefore, the majority of this research was focused on Facebook, where there is an abundance of groups and pages relevant to this project. This research confirmed that Facebook is the dominant social media force in the country.

Facebook

During the review period, the team observed different types of Facebook spaces, which, while not completely distinct, do provide some insight into the various info spheres on Facebook. More details are included in the attached tracked spreadsheet. As Facebook

---

[198] Internet World Stats, Usage and Population Statistics. Europe:
https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#mk
[199] Statcounter Global Stats: Social Media Stats Macedonia, North June 2019 – June 2020. Available at:
https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/macedonia
[200] Ibid.
[201] Internet World Stats, Usage and Population Statistics. Europe:
https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#mk
[202] Kemp, Simon: "Digital 2020: North Macedonia", DATAREPORTAL. 18.02.2020. Available at:
https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-north-macedonia

allows for group moderators to change names of pages, or even to sell a group/page to other Facebook users, there is potential for these fora to be fluid in a way that is different than traditional print or broadcast outlets.

Political patriotic groups and pages: Groups and pages are created using the names "Macedonia," "Macedonian interests," or various specific patriotic names. They tend to share content exclusively from some single portal which is a mixture of fake news/false interpretations of actual news, and sometimes entertaining content that attracts a larger audience.[203] In this category, one can also include groups and pages that intensively promote some single political party.[204] These groups are often strongly assumed to be VMRO-DPMNE-related.

Genuine Patriotic groups with questionable symbolism: Another option is the patriotic groups and channels that promote Macedonian folklore (traditional and modern songs, photography, traditional clothes, etc.), using the Sun of Vergina and other symbols throughout their content.[205] In that sense, such symbolism is accepted as an integral part of the Macedonian identity, but is not overtly political.

Groups (and to a lesser extent, pages), with patriotic names, but mixed content: The most vivid discussions appear within groups with patriotic names, where group members share content related to identity, statehood, relations with neighboring states, and daily news. The comment sections of the Facebook pages of traditional media and news portals also serve as an online forum for discussion, but also for hate speech and insults.[206]

Facebook pages of traditional media: The team also came to appreciate an important intersection between traditional and social media. All of the main TV stations post their news and other content on Facebook Live, or share their digital content through other sites, and many readers leave comments and share the news via these online sites. This also applies to news portals. In addition, many people follow press conferences and leave comments on the official social media channels/Facebook profiles of the Ministries and the Government. These comments are useful in order to understand the sentiments of the general public. Most importantly, while the various explicit patriotic groups serve as "echo chambers" for their members with little disagreement, the more "neutral" Facebook pages offer space for arguments and disagreements, representing various groups.

---

[203] For instance, the group "МАКЕДОНИЈА – MACEDONIA", followed by more than 210,000 users (https://www.facebook.com/RepublicMacedonia/?ref=page_internal), has a description stating, "We are Macedonia, we are Macedonians, everything that is Macedonian belongs only to us, that's the only thing we accept. 131 countries in the world have recognized us as Macedonia;" the dominant content in this group is from the portal Markukule.mk

[204] For instance, the group "Македонија," with 18,000 followers, was promoting the "Macedonian concept" during the pre-electoral period. See https://www.facebook.com/%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-501489146931227/

[205] See: Македонија Macedonia Macédoine at: https://www.facebook.com/macedoniamacedonianmacedonia/?ref=page_internal

[206] One is the private group "Viva Macedonia Да живее Македонија" with 11,800 members. The research team joined the group in order to be able to monitor their activity. This group was chosen due to the high number of members and the variety of content. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/VivaMacedonia

Political entertainment: Groups and pages using humor, satire, caricatures, and other entertaining content in order to express dissatisfaction with the political elites and political processes.[207] Interestingly, in the course of this research one of these pages "disappeared," as it was probably reported for hate speech;[208] yet soon enough, three new pages with similar content appeared.[209]

Twitter

Twitter is used by a significantly smaller number of people than Facebook. However, as shown by the 2019 Bojkotiram ("I am boycotting") campaign during the referendum, Twitter was effectively used[210] in the social media campaign against the Prespa Agreement. Therefore, the Twitter accounts behind this movement were also interesting to follow, in addition to a few popular Twitter users and specialized accounts.

Other online sources
Forums

Despite the advantage of anonymity that online forums bring, they are not massively used in North Macedonia. Forums were more popular several years ago; however, it seems that Facebook has become a more convenient space for online discussions. The team did not look at 4Chan in this study as such a study would require significant time to ensure coverage of Macedonian and Albanian origin posts. (This could merit dedicated separate study.)

Forum "Kajgana" is the oldest forum still in use, and is the most popular. It includes relevant sub-forums, the most relevant being "Politics and news,"[211] with vivid discussions on current political affairs, corruption, and political parties; sub-forums on concrete corruption cases such as "Racket,"[212] or "the work of mayor Marin;"[213] and sub-forums on violent inter-ethnic incidents, such as "Monstrum,"[214] and "Kumanovo attack."[215] Also, there is a space for discussion of "destroyed Macedonian cemeteries,"[216] which has discussions focused on

[207] Please see: 99% Macedonia https://www.facebook.com/99macedonia

[208] The NGO Civil wrote an article about hate speech against the leader of the Albanian political party Alliance of the Albanians. Please see: "The Facebook page "Nalet da se storite" has hate speech and life threats against Sela." *Frontline*, June 2, 2020. Available at: https://frontline.mk/2020/07/02/fe-sbuk-stranicata-nalet-da-se-storite-so-govor-na-omraza-i-zakani-po-zhivotot-na-ziadin-sela/

[209] The pages "Baba lazi trap ne lazi", "Macedonia for the Macedonians" and "Cicki.mk". The last one's branding is a parody of the logo of the NGO Civil.

[210] Zafeiropoulos, Kostas. "Alexander the Bot: The Twitter War for the Macedonian Soul", *Balkan Insight* 18.12.2019. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2019/12/18/alexander-the-bot-the-twitter-war-for-the-macedonian-soul/

[211] Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/forums/Политика-и-вести.21/

[212] Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/threads/Случај-Рекет.109165/

[213] Zlatko Marin is the mayor of a municipality in the Skopje urban area. Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/threads/Златко-Марин-градоначалник-на-Општина-Аеродром.109164/

[214] Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/threads/Масакрот-кај-Смиљковско-езеро-Осудените-пуштени-да-се-бранат-од-слобода.59808/page-1342

[215] Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/threads/ОБНОВЕНО-По-нападот-во-Гошинце-пукање-во-Куманово.78009/page-397

[216] Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/threads/Уништени-Македонски-гробишта-кај-Камник.109470/

Albanian nationalism and violence. The discussion "Criminals and crime groups in MK"[217] contains (alleged) information on criminal cases, and relations between criminals and political figures, including Albanian criminals and their relations to DUI. There are also discussions concerning history, including regarding the "Macedonian question" and Macedonian-Albanian relations.

Blogs and online sites

There is a limited use of blogs; again, their usefulness has likely been overtaken by Facebook. There is one nationalistic blog "Nacionalna borba" (National Struggle), which has not been updated since August 2018. However, the blog content is still present online, and includes links to more current Facebook pages with extreme right-wing and fascist content. Another active blog "Revolucionerot" (The Revolutionary) resembles "Nacionalna borba," discussing similar issues and linking the same extreme right wing and fascist pages. This blog is regularly updated with new content and has its own Facebook page with 425 followers.

The research team was able to identify a few online sites that can be described as a mixture between online news portals and blogs, and which include radical content and/or conspiracy theories. These include Kolozeg.info and freeglobe.mk.[218] "Macedonian nation"[219] is a sort of online magazine, describing itself as working for the "Macedonian cause." The website contains patriotic content, but also more overtly nationalist content. The site is clearly linked to the diaspora, having a separate section focused on the Macedonian diaspora, and to certain wings within VMRO DPMNE. There is also a Facebook page with 50,000 likes, and a private Facebook group with 550 members (around 580 posts per month).

YouTube is used by various groups airing different content. YouTube is also used by conventional media to post TV debates and TV political shows online. The "Dvizenje Bojkotiram"[220] channel (I'm Boycotting Movement) advocates for "abolishing the Prespa Agreement, the Agreement with Bulgaria and Tirana platform,"[221] and has been active since September 2019, with 461 subscribers and 46,862 views.[222] Their YouTube channel became especially active in April 2020, using the "stay at home" COVID-19 situation and digital opportunities to invite various guests from North Macedonia and the diaspora to take part in live sessions, talking on topics related to daily politics, COVID-19, the Prespa Agreement, etc. It offers diverse content (interviews, debates, video-telecasts), posting several videos per month. Guests comment on ongoing political topics, historical issues, social issues, philosophy, inter-ethnic relations, etc.

---

[217] Available at: https://forum.kajgana.com/threads/Криминалци-и-криминални-групи-во-МК.78505/page-370

[218] The topics include: daily politics, international politics, history, entertainment etc. As for the name, *kolozeg* is the old Macedonian name for the month of January. Please see the sections on conspiracy theories and extremism for more information on their content.

[219] Available at: www.mn.mk

[220] Available at: https://www.YouTube.com/channel/UC59xnvK8Yg1MMmPbEuUr-yg/about

[221] Stated on their YouTube cover

[222] Движење Бојкотирам (I'm Boycotting Movement) YouTube Channel. Available at:
https://www.YouTube.com/channel/UC59xnvK8Yg1MMmPbEuUr-yg/about

Another YouTube channel is "Duboko desnicarenje"[223] (Deep Right), a personal (not institutionally affiliated) far right-wing channel committed to promoting conservative values and nationalist content. As a relatively new channel (starting in September 2019) its audience has grown over the last months, though it is still quite small.[224] The videos (usually 4-6 per month) do attract comments, both supportive and opposing. The speaker uses nationalistic rhetoric, and at the same time refers to historical literature, philosophy, and political science, often misinterpreting stated points. This kind of approach can be used to impose a certain "false authority" over an average interested viewer who may not be in a position to detect inaccuracies or fact check the referenced sources. The YouTube channel of Dvizenje Bojkotiram promotes these videos, and vice versa. As for the production quality, they seem to be using basic equipment/mobile phones to produce the content, demonstrating how anyone can now produce and post material.

There are also several figures followed by right-wing supporters, who have shows online. One of the most popular has been the Milenko Nedelkovski Show, with 12,000 subscribers and a very active comment section.[225] Often, the host conducts interviews and takes comments.

Ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia inform themselves through a variety of sources. Younger people usually use social media, primarily Facebook, as their main source of information, while middle aged and elderly people rely more on traditional media such as TV. Among the national TV stations, the most popular among ethnic Albanians is Alsat-M TV, followed by Channel 2 by the public broadcaster service which broadcasts in Albanian. TV 21, KLAN TV, and TV Shenja are less popular.[226] During this research, Alsat-M TV and the news portal Koha were the primary media of interest and were reviewed weekly. However, other news portals were occasionally (2 times per month) checked, to provide a more comprehensive overview of the topics covered within the Albanian-language media space.

Similar to ethnic Macedonians, Facebook is the main social media used. Ethnic Albanians use Twitter even less than ethnic Macedonians. The news generator www.time.mk is not available in Albanian and does not systematically generate news as it does in Macedonian.

A notable difference between the media reporting in Macedonian and in Albanian is the almost totally different coverage of stories, as if they are reporting in two different countries. Apart from reporting on different areas of the country, Albanian media report extensively on events happening in Kosovo and Albania. For example, when the LDK and AAK reached a deal in April to form the government in Kosovo, this was immediately reported on Alsat-M TV.[227] The same TV station also reported intensively on the period in January 2020 when LDK

---

[223] Ibid.
[224] From 78 subscribers in April 2020 to 121 subscribers in July 2020
[225] Like Milenko Nedelkovski https://www.YouTube.com/channel/UCOaYKzP6i0fXNR5MLuuIHFw/videos
[226] For more details, see:
"Годишен извештај 2019: Податоци за досегот на радиостаниците и уделот во вкупната гледаност на телевизиските станици" (Annual report 2019: Data on the reach of radio stations and the ratings of TV stations) Agency for Audio-Visual Media Services (AVMU). Available at:
https://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Годишен-извештај-за-2019-година-за-податоците-за-досегот-на-радиостаниците-и-за-уделот-во-вкупната-гледаност-на-телевизиските-станици.pdf
[227] "LDK dhe AAK arrijnë marrëveshje për bashkëqeverisje." (LDK and AAK reach agreement on co-government), *Alsat - TV*. 29.04.2020, available at: https://alsat-m.tv/ldk-dhe-aak-arrijne-marreveshje-per-bashkeqeverisje/

invited LVV to jointly form a government.[228] One can also see other examples of the same TV station reporting on other issues related to the daily politics of Kosovo.[229] This is not the case with media in Macedonian, which predominantly devote their coverage to North Macedonia.

Monitoring and Review Process

The news aggregator time.mk - one of the most visited sites in the country - was reviewed daily and determined the methodological approach of focusing on topics. Time.mk is a popular online news portal that brings together news stories from a variety of media sources.

The research of the Albanian media started with monitoring of Alsat-MK and Koha, as the most popular source of information among ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia. These websites were reviewed weekly. Due to the limited coverage of topics of interest, the spectrum was further extended to several other news portals.

Next, the other traditional media were predominantly reviewed in order to establish "how" they reported the key news stories, instead of only which news items have been reported. There was a strong focus on issues related to governance (including political developments), corruption/state capture, and extremism. While certain key words were prioritized (e.g., corruption, misuse/abuse, extremism, etc.) a simple key word scan would not have accounted for the broader context of reporting. Therefore the lead Macedonian media researcher determined which articles to formally add to the spreadsheet and track.

The analysis of the media content is qualitative. A database of media articles covering the topics of interest was gathered in order to keep track of the topics covered throughout the month, but it did not include all media articles covering the same issue because of substantial reposting and repetition. The selection was based on the originality and comprehensiveness of the coverage. However, the researchers regularly read the media articles covering the same issue on all monitored media outlets, for the purpose of the qualitative analysis. A separate database on the numbers of articles on time.mk covering specific events was created through an automated research process which was based on keywords.

The research team discussed the methodology and the findings approximately twice per month, in person or through electronic communications.

---

[228] "LDK i ka paraqitur ofertën LVV për bashkëqeverisje" (LDK has submitted the offer to LVV for co-government), *Alsat – TV*. 09.01.2020,. Available at: https://alsat-m.tv/ldk-i-ka-paraqitur-oferten-lvv-per-bashkeqeverisje/

[229] "Haradinaj: Gjatë qeverisjes sime, Kosovës i ka ardhur era Kosovë" (Haradinaj: During my rule, Kosovo smelled of Kosovo). *Alsat – TV*. 28.11.2019. Available at:
https://alsat-m.tv/haradinaj-gjate-qeverisjes-sime-kosoves-i-ka-ardhur-era-kosove/

Governance

Macedonian Media Space

General Satisfaction

Satisfaction in governance is very low, something particularly evident during the summer election campaign period when people were discussing which political party is the "lesser evil," rather than which one might bring better governance.

Exhibit 46: Public Administration: Theater of the Absurd

The examples below show two absurd personal situations shared by Facebook users. One of them, shared in the comment section of an open Facebook profile of a university professor criticizing the public administration, states that she went to request a death certificate for her late father, but when requesting a birth certificate as part of the necessary documentation, she was advised that her late father's birth certificate can be issued only in person, to him. The other one similarly refers to a labyrinth of necessary documents which leads to a deadlock.[230]

сум ти кажала дека за да извадам умреница за татко ми ми бараа извод на родени. немав. побарав да извадам ми рекоа лично да дошол. и викам: а бе умрен е чоекот! она: не ме занима, следниот

Еден од многуте бисери сега ми текна. Ве молам би сакал во имотниот лист да ми се промени адресата според личната карта, повелете лична карта. А господине извинете личната карта во случајов не важи т.е. не е доволна! Молам? Господине не да молиш туку ќе одите во МВР и ќе извадите потврда дека сте ја промениле адресата на живеење. Ме заебаваш? Ало, новата адреса е веќе впишана во личната карта!

_____ има и втор дел, за да ви ја внесеме во лична карта новата адреса треба да имате имотен лист со вашата нова адреса а за да имате имотен лист со вашата нова адреса треба таа да ви биде впишана во личната карта. Во информатиката ова се вика дедлок.

---

[230] A) I told you that I needed to get a copy of my father's death certificate and they asked for his birth certificate. I told them I don't have it. Then, I asked to get a copy of his birth certificate and they told me that my father should come in person. I told them: "He passed away!" The clerk told me: "I don't care, next."
B) I just remembered one of the many gems like this – "I would like to change my address in the property list according to my identity card." I hand over my ID card. They respond: "Excuse me sir, your ID is insufficient to prove a change of address. You have to go to the Ministry of Interior and get a written confirmation that you changed your address". Are you kidding me? Hello, my new address is already written down in the ID card
C) There is a second part. For us to enter your new address into your ID card, you have to have a property list with your new address, and to have a property list with your new address, the address needs to be listed in your ID card. In informatics this is known as a deadlock.

The following two examples are from the comment sections of Facebook pages of news portals. The example on the left refers to a case when the institutions and the inspectorates put a blind eye on illegal diggers who destroyed a natural site. The one on the right discusses how in a small state, whatever you try to do, you will come across someone "untouchable."[231]

Се работело со багери , со тешки камиони , а гомнарите од Македонски шуми, како и шумската полиција задолжена за контрола , никаде ја нема. Ништо не приметиле. Као да береле шумски јагоди и печурки криминалците, а НЕ дека ја донеле цела градежна оператива на ГП Бетон. Дали сме толку ненормални, неможам да разберам

Like · 4w · Edited   9

Работата е ми се чини поширока и подлабока. Во мала држава како нас кај да чепнеш ќе наидеш на некого кој му е нешто на еден кој пак не "смееш" да го чепнеш заради нешто. Нели затоа нашиве бладаат за почеток на преговори , демек тоа ќе им даде грб или некакво "алиби" да се соочат со аждајата. Не сум баш сигурен како ќе биде таа работа.

One important element of governance is satisfaction with the work of public administration – a practical manifestation of governance regularly experienced by citizens seeking services. On social media, people seem frustrated with the public administration, describing it as "partisan" or "incompetent." Some of them share personal experiences, while others comment in general terms.

COVID-19 further exposed the poor functionality and inability of the system to undertake effective measures and policies, especially when coming under pressures from the religious communities, businessmen, politicians, and powerful figures related to ethnic groups. People regularly comment in the news sections regarding concrete cases of some institution's malfunction, where prevailing sentiments can be described as "disappointed but not surprised." However, at the same time, one can note frustration and anger. Moreover, there was disappointment in the lack of broad solidarity, especially among judges, who had abolished a Government decree establishing that various state officials would receive only minimum wage for two months, as a measure to reduce the costs during the pandemic.[232] Mixed messages were mocked online. A popular tweet (below) stated, "Proclaiming a curfew from tomorrow until Tuesday, and then you open the bars and restaurants on Tuesday. Who is the crazy one here?"

---

[231] A) There was work being done with excavators, heavy trucks, while the assholes from Macedonian Forests and the forest police responsible for control, was nowhere to be found. They didn't notice anything. As if the criminals picked forest strawberries and mushrooms, and NOT like they brought the whole building machinery of GP Beton. Are we that crazy, I cannot understand; B) The issue seems wider and deeper. In a small country like ours, where ever you poke around, you will come across someone who is related to another person who you simply cannot touch.

[232] The disappointment was evident across all social media. In addition, the Government issued a reaction stating that "The Government is disappointed from this scandalous decision that jeopardizes the fight against coronavirus." Please see „Влада: Поведената постапка на Уставниот суд за поништување на кратењето на платите на функционерите, судиите и обвинителите ја поткопува солидарноста во земјата и директно штети на обезбедувањето средства за справување со КОВИД-19" (The initiated procedure of the Constitutional Court for annulment of the salary cuts of the officials, judges and prosecutors undermines the solidarity in the country and directly damages the provision of funds for dealing with COVID-19) : Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. 28 April 2020. Available at: https://vlada.mk/node/21201

Exhibit 47: Who's Crazy?

Зоран Мијалков @Zoran_Mijalkov · May 20
Да прогласиш полициски час од утре до Вторник, а во Вторник да
отвориш кафичите и кафаните

Па добро бе

Кој е овде луд

💬 27   🔁 99   ♡ 368

The tweet was posted within the context that the Government decided on a strict three-day curfew, in order to prevent people from gathering for Labor Day/May Day, but at the same time decided to open bars and restaurants. Some people on social media were also commenting that the decision was made in order to satisfy bar and restaurant owners, without taking into consideration public health.

Exhibit 48: Mixed Messages

Мартиан @MartianfromMKD · May 12
Како @VFilipche со препорака да не се скратува полицискиот час,
безпотребно ни го ограничуваш движењето после 19ч а
препорачуваш отворање на џамии, казина, кладилници и
поддржуваш брзи избори во јуни ?

Уствари да, изборите одат заедно со поддршка од ИВЗ и парите од
казината.

МАКЕДОНИЈА
Засега не се планира скратување на полицискиот час
360степени | 12 мај, 2020 13:06

...че: Периодот пред...
...ирен и може да и...

МАКЕДОНИЈА
ИВЗ денеска ги отвори џамиите
360степени | 12 мај, 2020 09:41

КАЗИНАТА НАЈВАЖНИ: Предлагаме отв...
обложувалниците оваа недела, а од друг...
Филипче
May 12, 2020
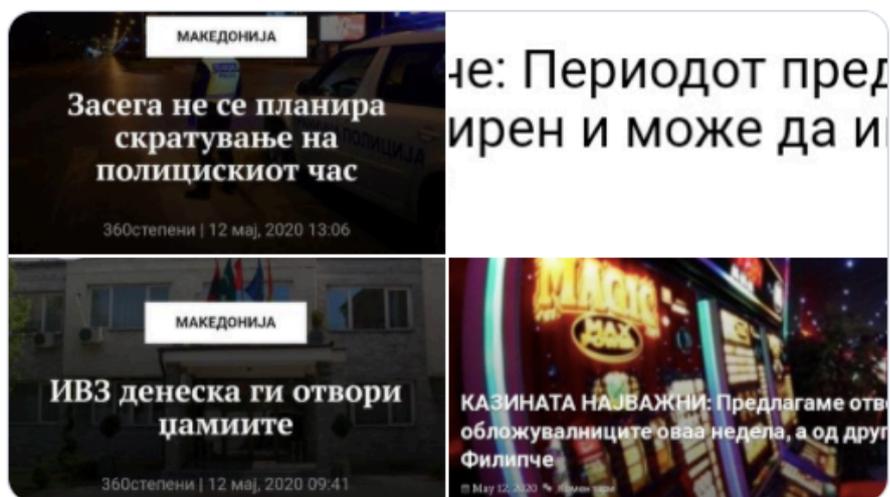
💬 2   🔁 22   ♡ 56   [233]

---

[233] Translation: How is it that @VFilipche (Minister of Health) recommends not to remove curfew, restricts our movement unnecessarily after 19:00h, but recommends opening of mosques, casinos, betting shops and supports fast elections in June? In fact yes, elections go side by side with the support of the casinos and the Islamic Religious Community.

A tweet containing a collage of news on opening mosques, casinos, and the possible elections, yet also continuation of the curfew. The user summarized this situation: "Elections are performed with support from the Islamic Religious Community and the money from the casinos."

Exhibit 49: Enforcing Enforcement?

A ednas nekoj da prezemese odgovornost a? Narodot ne gi pocitival merkite? A sto ne kaze deka vlasta i instituciite potfrlile vo sproveduvanjeto na istite tie merki? Kaj bile nadleznite da kaznuvaat, apsat, pa pendrekot, pa tie bolnicite bedni kakvi sto se, sto nemaat kapaciteti, narodot bil kriv! Bre bre, ne znaete vie sto e narod, 2 nedeli vo USA karantin brz policiski cas bez nisto, i izlegoa masa narod po ulici so oruzje, tuku kazete vie fala sto imate glup narod, ovci, da prefrlate vina kako vi e kejf. Deka virusot samo noke i za praznici raboti, pa aj ke zatvarame, redici guzvi nekontrolirani preku den sekade, narodot bil kriv. Narodot si e toj, i so i bez merki, toj sto e sovesen ke se grizi, koj ne e, gajle nema. Bruka,totalno fijasko

Like · Reply · 10w · Edited   👍 50

A Facebook comment showing frustration that citizens are blamed for the lack of respect of measures, while the institutions and the Government are the ones that failed to enforce the measures.[234]

Exhibit 50: Calling out for Responsibility

Срам ова е Срам за сите за судии за владини функционери за министри СРАМ ДА ВИ Е .Тие што земаат стотици илјади плата и мито пак да земаат а НАРОДОТ ОД ЧИВА ПОТ ЈАДЕТЕ И КРАДЕТЕ Е ТОЈ НЕКА ЗЕМЕ ПО 8000ДЕН ПЛАТА И ДА ПЛАТИ СМЕТКИ И ЦЕЛ МЕСЕЦ НЕКА ЖИВЕЕ.

Like · Reply · 13w   👍 36 [235]

---

[234] How about for once someone claimed responsibility? The people did not respect the measures? Why don't you say that the government and the institutions failed in implementing those measures? Where were the authorities to punish, arrest, then the baton, and the hospitals are miserable, they don't have the capacity, the people are guilty. You don't know what people are, 2 weeks in the USA without quarantine and without a curfew – with nothing, and people came out on the streets with weapons, then go on say thank you for having stupid people (sheep), to place blame as you suit it. It seems that the virus is only on in night time and for holidays, so then we will close up, there are lines and crowd everywhere, the people are guilty. The people are what they are, with and without measures, those that are responsible will take care of themselves, while those that aren't don't care. An embarrassment, a total fiasco.

[235] This is an embarrassment. An embarrassment for the judges and government officials and ministers. You should be embarrassed. Those who receive hundreds of thousands in salary and still take bribes, while the people who sweat to bring you food takes in 8000 denars in salary and pays bills and lives for the whole month.

Политичари и партиски административци, каде ви е бре солидарноста со која што ви е полна устата. Уставниот суд никаде го немаше за преспанскиот договор. Но, кога станува збор за нивниот џеб, веднаш се јавија. Да живејт социјализмот, и неговото мото, твоите пари се и мои, а моите се само мои.

Не се научи лекцијата со пропаста на комунизмот, ајде сега да ја повториме. За работните луѓе, во финансиско/економскиот колапс, гневот не вадете го на партиска, етничка, религиска основа, баш тоа и го сакаат политичарите. За да ја тргнат одговорноста од себе.

Like · Reply · 13w · Edited   👍 21   236

In May, the Director of the public enterprise responsible for the water supply, Dushko Veskovski from SDSM, made a statement regarding an employee who was infected with Covid-19, stating that "the employee in question is an ethnic Albanian and got infected during iftar. He did not have contacts with other employees." In an article in the Albanian media entitled "SCANDAL: The Director on Water Supply and Sewers Dushko Veskovski divided the employees with Covid-19 on ethnic grounds."[237] The news portal criticizes the statement, making clear political references, arguing that such sentiments are in contradiction with Zaev's concept of "An inclusive society/A society for all."

Reflecting global confusion and skepticism, the media space illustrated doubts, but also anger and rage, among citizens in North Macedonia. This can combine to create a highly toxic environment.[238]

---

[236] Second comment/translation: Politicians and party administrators, where is your solidarity of which you speak with your mouth full. The Constitutional Court was nowhere to be found for the Prespa Agreement. But, when it comes down to their pocket, they responded immediately. Long live socialism and the motto that: "Your money is my money, but my money is just mine." We didn't learn the lesson when communism fell, so let's reenact. For the working people, in the financial/economic collapse, do not release your anger on a party, ethnic or religious grounds, that's what the politicians want. To remove responsibility from themselves.

[237]: "SKANDAL: Drejtori i 'Ujësjellësit dhe Kanalizimit' Dushko, i ndanë të punësuarit me Kovid 19 në baza etnike!" (SCANDAL: The Director of 'Water Supply and Sewerage' Dusko, divided the employees with Covid-10 on ethnic grounds), *Almakos*. 30 May .2020, available at:
https://www.almakos.com/skandal-drejtori-i-ujesjellesit-dhe-kanalizimit-dushko-i-ndane-te-punesuarit-me-kovid-19-ne-baza-etnike/

[238] 1) Nothing alarming in the village of Tearce, 100% I'm telling you live from Tearce; 2) You have taken a lot of money, this is not a deadly virus, you are telling lies, like the Turkish series copy-paste; 3) A lot of these people which are commenting are not from the village of Tearce they don't even know the village, as for the dead people they are from Sllatine 4) I'll f*** you [stream of obscenities] and will close this page cause you are causing panic [obscenities continue]; 5) Alsat, aren't you embarrassed to write lies, 51 the number from the beginning of the pandemic and it's the same number now, Boycott Alsat; 6 and 7) [stream of homophobic obscenities]

Exhibit 51: Facebook Skeptics

Arben Saliu
Asgjë alarmante ne Fshatin Tearcë info 100 % drejtperdrejt nga Tearca e keni .

Like · Reply · 8w   👍😆 27

Nadir Ebibi
Shume para paski marqepo trilloni kaq shume rrena per virusin jovdekjeprures,vec shpifje po beni,njejt si serialet turqisht qe po i shfaqni ne programin tuaj,njejt jeni be,copy-paste

Like · Reply · 8w

Asim Sulejmani
Shumica që konentojnë as që janë të fshatit tearcë e disa as që e dijnë se ku është e sa për të vdekurit janë nga fshati sllatinë.

Like · Reply · 8w · Edited

Izy Flex Pershefc
Oooo ti pichk gruee boll rejte be taa chifshaa familjenn o grue chim juve duhet tva mshelin ket faqen se krijus t panikes ini MOTREN CAUCEN NPICHK TA CHIFSHA TAJJ G E KE CHIT CHKET

Like · Reply · 8w   👍 3

Arben Memeti
O alsat a sju vjen turp te beni shpifje....51 nurni qe nga fillimi i pandemis jo vetem ne tearce por ne komunen e Tearces....Bojkot Alsatit...!!!!

Like · Reply · 8w   👍😆 8

Musa Musliu
A va chifsha analfabetat e nones sdini as tshkruni be Pederasta

Like · Reply · 8w

Emra Shabani
Bollni be mo se nae kini ojjjt●●.ncncn🔔

Like · Reply · 8w   😆 1

These comments don't just demonstrate doubt. They also demonstrate the presumption of financial malfeasance and self-interest among the political class, for, not only do commentators claim that the virus does not exist, but they go further, saying everything is a lie and that the country benefits from this by getting additional assistance based on the number of people infected.

These two Facebook comments refer to the lack of solidarity by the politicians, judges, and other officials.

Exhibit 52: Calling for Better Policing

Под хитно прави рокади од еден во друг град на полицајците барем во Тиквешијата . Иако поголем дел од нив совесно си ја извршуваат задачата , одредени припадници си се однесуваат " алагурно " .Додека се патролира по по главните улици , во по застранетите маала се прават седенки .Оние пак граѓани што имаат познанства со полицијата се понашаат надмено и си се рашетуваат од една куќа во друга . Треба исто така да проверат вашите соработници кои лица имаат добиено дозвола за слободно движење и под кои услови . Се надевам дека за доброто на сите , овој мој апел ќе допре и до вас .[239]

---

[239] He urgently rotates police officers from one city to another, especially in the Tikvesh area. Despite a large number of them responsibly doing their task, certain members are acting irregularly. When they patrol the main streets, they have a sit down in some neighborhoods. The citizens that know members of the police act

A comment by a Facebook user addressing the Minister of Interior Nake Chulev. The commenter proposes "urgent rotation of police officers in different cities," especially in the region of Tikves (near Kavadarci).[240] He says that the police are mainly professional, but there are misuses by some police officers and people close related to them, like breaking curfew and misuse of permissions for free movement during curfew.

The traditional media show frequent interest in public opinion surveys measuring public trust in institutions. For instance, the political magazine *Detector*, broadcast on Sitel TV, conducted a survey on citizens' opinions on corruption and the fight against crime, which showed worrying results on trust in the judiciary.[241] The majority of the population is not satisfied with the country's fight against corruption and crime, believing that the fight against corruption and crime is backsliding. 71.4% support re-selection of judges, and 75.5% support vetting of judges by foreign experts. Another public opinion survey reported in the media, conducted by NDI, showed that a lack of justice, high levels of corruption, and crime are the main concerns of citizens, followed by the economy and unemployment. It also indicated that young people would stay in North Macedonia if they could get better education, employment without nepotism and party membership, and an appropriate salary.[242]

There is an evident lack of trust in institutions and authorities across social media and forums. Lack of trust does not only refer to the ruling SDSM party, but also towards VMRO-DPMNE, which some social media users also consider to have betrayed the Macedonian interest. Moreover, SDSM is perceived as controlled by "the big powers," and as "too permissive" towards the Albanians. There are hundreds of comments across social media on the "political mafia," the lack of opportunities, and pessimism regarding the future of the country. The ones below are only a few indicative examples, found on Facebook pages of news portals.

---

conceited and move from one house to another. There is also a need to check your coworkers who got a permit to move freely and under which conditions. I hope that for everyone's sake my plea will reach you.

[240] This is a wine-growing region about 30-40 km from Veles.

[241]: „Детектор: Граѓаните сметаат дека назадува борбата со криминалот и корупцијата – во државата има помалку правда" (Detektor: Citizens believe that the country is backsliding in its fight against crime and corruption – there is less justice in the country), *Sitel TV*. 15 March 2020, available at: https://sitel.com.mk/detektor-gragjanite-smetaat-deka-nazaduva-borbata-so-kriminalot-i-korupcijata-vo-drzhavata-ima

[242] "Само 12 отсто доверба има судството, а обвинителството 13 во најновото истражување на НДИ, направено пред да се побунат за платите" (Trust in judiciary is only 12%, while trust in the public prosecution is 13%, as seen in the NDI public opinion poll, conducted before they complained about their salaries). *SDK*. May 4, 2020. Available at: https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/samo-12-otsto-doverba-ima-sudstvoto-a-obvinitelstvoto-13-vo-najnovoto-istrazhuvane-na-ndi-napraveno-pred-da-se-pobunat-za-platite/

Exhibit 53: Facebook comments speaking about the lack of perspective in the country and immigration[243]

Exhibit 54: Frustrated by Corruption

A picture of a skull showing the three main political parties (SDSM, VMRO, and DUI) accompanied by rant by a businessmen, who has been politically active, observing that there is no political conflict, but just a cheap fight in the "corporation" (meaning the country). He mentions everyone and everything: including politicians, coronavirus, Americans, etc. The expression "Kurto and Murto" is used to describe the sentiment that everyone is the same and there are no differences between the options; the "they're all the same" sentiment that can make it easier for people to check out of engagement.[244]

---

[244] After 9 months of arrests by Interpol, I see a state where there is no real political conflict, but a cheap quarrel in the corporation of fakers who will be on the executive board of North "whore" AD. The coronavirus became a "ridicule", for Micov I see a state of a missing Bulgarian, Bachev is persistent to become a Russian… Zajeb (Zaev) is constantly being a Yankee, Micicka (Mickovski) whatever he is, only to be a president of the executive board (the government) so that his father can say bravo. DonMijale (Mijalkov) is still a kafana mafioso in decay, whoever comes his way gets racketeered and there is no way to get to Trump. Takes lots of insulin. If there was no corona, we were going to riot over the name, but f*** it, it is what it is, CORONA and NORTH mutated. PS: BC (Branko Crvenkovski) the retiree is building buildings in Belgrade, he has to reach Kamcev the ATM machine of DonMijale (MIjalkov), has to return Natasha who is parked by Kamcev. The supervisory board of this northern corporation located at the Kale fortress (Americans) are looking at a farce of the political swingers, for them not to make a mistake the orgy (the elections) must be good, the swingers will sell democracy, a great American product for our market.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of trust in national and international institutions was fertile ground for spreading conspiracy theories and fake news. The lack of trust in authorities was clear in postings reflecting the, "why should I believe that this is true?" dilemma, implying that the institutions or politicians do not represent trustful authorities. A Facebook page entitled "TV off, brain on,"[245] followed by 11,500 people and described as "a place for all conscious and sane people, who do not serve the hysteria of the paid portals and the political elites," has constantly encouraged people to resist anti-COVID measures. The page description might even feel empowering for those who do not trust the political elites and "the establishment," and may finally feel understood among like-minded individuals. This sense of seeking belonging is common among people who feel disenfranchised, and can be prey to conspiracy theories within which they suddenly feel "on the inside."[246]

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most common conspiracy theories are related to the origins and existence of the virus, and the belief that it has been invented to control the population. Some of them further develop the story, claiming that it is an excuse for a vaccine that would inject microchips in everyone worldwide (as a way to control them), and to get DNA samples. On 31 May 2020, there was even a protest "Against 5G, coronavirus and compulsory vaccination," in person, in front of the government building.[247] Online information can trickle into the real world easily.

Conspiracy theories can be also found on sites such as Kolozeg.info which contains a blog where conspiracy theories prevail, mainly concerning the global world order, the war against the "deep state," and neoliberalism in general.[248] The website's section on news is titled "anti-fake news," once again promoting the idea that they are the "real news" to be read.

---

[245] In Macedonian: Исклучи тв, уклучи мозок https://www.facebook.com/isklucitvuklucimozok
[246] Grohol, John M. "A psychologist explains why people believe conspiracy theories more readily during uncertain times." *Business Insider*. August 18, 2020. Available at https://www.businessinsider.com/psychologist-explains-why-people-believe-conspiracy-theories-during-uncertain-times-2020-4
[247] More information on the protest can be found at:
 „(ВИДЕО) Теории на заговор, лажни наративи, патриотски симболи – сторија од протестот против 5Г, мерките за коронавирусот, вакцините..." ((Video) Conspiracy theories, false narratives, patriotic symbols – a story from the protest against 5G, anti-coronavirus measures, vaccines...) *360 stepeni*. 2 June 2020 https://360stepeni.mk/video-teorii-na-zagovor-lazhni-narativi-patriotski-simboli-storija-od-protestot-protiv-5g-merkite-za-koronavirusot-vaktsinite/
[248] Available at: https://kolozeg.info/category/%d0%b1%d0%bb%d0%be%d0%b3/

Exhibit 55: A sample of blog posts titles by kolozeg.info
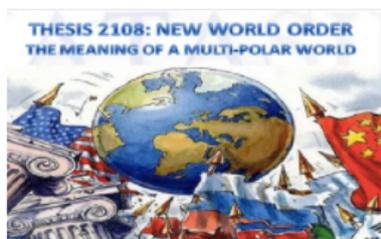
Euro-Atlantic Perspective

During the monitored period, there was some positive news regarding the country's Euro-Atlantic perspective, as the country became a member of NATO, and there was a positive decision of the Council towards starting EU accession negotiations. [250] Unfortunately, these long-awaited successes often languished in the shadows of COVID-19.

Among the general public, news regarding EU integration progress was met with skepticism. In many online/Facebook groups, people referred to previous announcements from the government that the country had received a date for starting negotiations, which ultimately

---

[249] Top left/translation: The world needs multipolarity instead of the current monopolar world – Livrinski blog
Bottom left/translation: Putin and Trup against the global plan for a new world order: The final battle – Silvain LaForest
Top right/translation: Macedoniagate, Obamagate, Crime, Investigation, Punishment – Livrinski blog
Bottom right/translation: Coronafascism aims to destroy the world economy to pillage the resources – Livrinski blog

[250] „Заклучоци за Македонија од ЕУ за отворање пристапни преговори"(Conclusions of EU on starting accession negotiations with Macedonia), *Telma TV*. 24 March 2020 Available at: https://arhiva.telma.com.mk/zakluchotsi-za-makedonija-od-eu-za-otvorane-pristapni-pregovori/

proved to be incorrect or false. Moreover, while NATO membership can be considered as a "tangible result," critics of the Government on social media were questioning the price that was paid for that success – changing the name of the country. Showing the politicization of everything - even the positive - VMRO DPMNE held a press conference, saying, "Welcome the EU decision, but do not congratulate Zoran Zaev, because the country has widespread corruption."[251] They went on to use the opportunity to criticize the government's approach in dealing with the pandemic, and made a commitment to make progress on the EU agenda themselves, after the elections. There was a real discrepancy between traditional and social media in terms of coverage of these issues: traditional media were constantly interested in reporting on EU-related affairs, while people on social media did not seem very interested in discussing this topic.

Macedonian political parties are not the only ones who have lost trust among many in the population. Mistrust can be also noticed against foreign governments, the EU, and NATO, as they are perceived by some to be working against national Macedonian interests; this is particularly the case among those who most strongly oppose the name change and the Prespa Agreement. On the other side, trust in the EU and NATO is especially high among ethnic Albanians. Two Albanian political parties (Alliance of the Albanians and Alternativa) organized a protest against the July 2020 election results, in which the protestors marched towards the EU delegation office. The fact that they wanted to send their message to the EU delegation, and not the State Electoral Commission or another national institution, demonstrates their lack of trust in those institutions. Moreover, the protest included Albanian and American flags, while the Macedonian flag was nowhere to be seen, which further sparked strong reactions among ethnic Macedonians. These dynamics played out in the media information sphere as well.

Exhibit 56: Photos that "other"

---

[251] „ВМРО ДПМНЕ: Одлуката на ЕУ ја поздравуваме, а на Заев не му честитаме, корупцијата околу него и натаму блеска" (VMRO DPMNE: We welcome the EU's decision, we don't congratulate Zaev, corruption around him continue to shine), *Plusinfo.* 25 March 2020, available at:
https://plusinfo.mk/vmro-dpmne-odlukata-na-eu-a-pozdravivme-a-na-zaev-ne-mu-chestitame-korupci-ata-okolu-nego-i-natamu-bleska/

A picture in the "Viva Macedonia Да живее Македонија" group shows alligators circling around people in deep waters, sarcastically stating: "…Don't be afraid, they are tame…dolphins from EU and NATO…they came to save us…" The picture is now the cover photo of the group.

Exhibit 57: NMK's Relationship with the EU and NATO

Identity and Identity Politics

There is deep division and strong polarization among ethnic Macedonians related to the Prespa Agreement and the change of the country's name. Opponents of the Prespa Agreement are calling the others "Северџани" ("severdjani," a pejorative term for people from the North, like "northies"), implying that they do not really belong to the Macedonian ethnic group and lack a sense of the Macedonian identity. Some consider the SDSM leader Zaev to be a "traitor," promoting the interests of the ethnic Albanians instead of the ethnic Macedonians. On the other side, many promoters of the Prespa Agreement are labeling those opposed as "nationalists," "backwards," "anti-EU/anti-NATO," and as supporters of VMRO-DPMNE and former PM Nikola Gruevski. In the online arena, each group frequently tries to discredit representatives of "the others"[252] by posting problematic quotes, or by ridiculing ("trolling") them with sarcasm, caricatures, etc.

---

[252] Including professors, social media influencers, journalists, and activists who openly state their positions.

Exhibit 58: An example of a caricature showing SDSM leader Zoran Zaev as an Albanian

Discussions and direct insults are only evident in the comment sections on the traditional news outlets' Facebook pages – sites that attract a mixed group of users. Otherwise, the "patriotic" and other groups usually gather like-minded individuals who support each other's views and positions. While the former may seem to be hostile or contentious, it is at least an exchange of ideas, in contrast to the echo chamber of the latter.

Furthermore, there is a general misconception or generalization that supporters of SDSM support the Prespa Agreement, are pro-EU, and liberal; while supporters of VMRO-DPMNE are against the Prespa Agreement, are nationalists, and are conservative. However, this is overly simplistic. The right wing on social media has demonstrated diversity and even antagonism towards each other on the right. There are different views on the spectrum – from those who accept that the Prespa Agreement, EU integration, and multiethnicity are realities, but feel that the change of the name was a price too high to pay, or just question the legality and the legitimacy of the constitutional changes; to those who demand abolishing the agreement, and dream of mono-ethnicity ("Makedonija na Makedoncite" – Macedonia belongs to the Macedonians). In fact, this diversity was confirmed at the latest parliamentary elections where VMRO-DPMNE lost many votes, while the political options on offer on the right side of the ideological spectrum was very diverse.

However, during the election campaign, the smaller political parties lacked the opportunity to present their views and programs in the traditional media in the way that the larger parties could. The debates in the media were organized only for the parties who were in Parliament during the last mandate. Non-parliamentary parties were presented only on the sidelines, so did not benefit from prime TV outreach potential. This also meant that citizens did not have the opportunity to hear the arguments of the smaller political parties against the main political leaders.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the political party "Levica" successfully managed to mobilize more than 37,000 votes (4.1%), securing two MPs. While Levica, as the name suggests, is a left-wing political party, it has very strong positions against the Prespa Agreement, which dominated their campaign. The party "Integra – Macedonian conservative party" received the vote of almost 12,300 citizens (1.35%), even though they were constantly

ridiculed on social media due to their unrealistic promises of a super modern rail network, a focus on astronomy and cooperation with NASA, etc. They describe themselves as having a "soft right wing, soft right center, conservative value based libertarian ideology,"[253] and use the Sun of Vergina as part of their insignia. They have a clear conservative and Christian Democrat orientation across all policies,[254] and if they continue being active on the political scene, they have the potential to mobilize supporters of the right-wing who no longer recognize a clear ideology among the bigger political options. The remaining right-wing parties did not go beyond 3,500 votes. Still, it should be noted that one of them, "Edinstvena Makedonija" (United Macedonia) promotes, "a radical overturn of Macedonian politics – membership in the Euro-Asian economic union and strategic partnership with Russia.[255] They ran under the name "Coalition – Never North, only Macedonia" and received around 2600 votes (0.29%).

Certain Macedonian groups perceive Albanians as a cohesive group, united for their "Albanian cause," and feel disappointment that ethnic Macedonians lack such solidarity and national awareness. Furthermore, there is a feeling that even if such cohesion did exist, it would be condemned by the international community, leading to accusations of double standards. This is reminiscent of status anxiety, in which a population accustomed to being in a majority position is or perceives that they are losing ground.

In addition, a lack of knowledge of inter-party relations and political divisions within the Albanian political bloc among ethnic Macedonians is clear. Traditional media report only on major disagreements between the Albanian political parties. Given the fact that DUI has been the ruling Albanian political party since the Ohrid Agreement was signed (with one short exception between 2006 and 2008), ethnic Macedonians tend to identify ethnic Albanians with this political party. The language barrier prevents even interested users from intentionally accessing pertinent information. And this goes in both directions. For instance, during the electoral campaign, a journalist interviewing Ali Ahmeti, the leader of DUI, brought this issue to light by asking him about his party's vision for an Albanian Prime Minster as a factor of unity, though the party didn't have a Macedonian language version of their party program.[256]

All of these dynamics were evident in the media space, as illustrated by the selected examples below.

---

[253] This is the short description on the official Facebook page of the political party:
https://www.facebook.com/integraconservatives
[254] Integra's programme for the 2020 elections can be found at:
https://integra.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/INTEGRA-2020.pdf
[255] Please see the website of United Macedonia: http://edinstvenamakedonija.mk/
[256] Top Tema: Interview with DUI's leader Ali Ahmeti, 10 July 2020. *Telma TV*. Available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5F9qBEQub0&feature=emb_title
We've also tried to find the electoral programme but it was available only in Albanian. A few days before the election, the website was updated with a Macedonian version.

Exhibit 59: Polarizing Tweets

Мартиан @MartianfromMKD · Jul 16

Албанците гласаа за албанските партии, ги оставија Македонците да изгласаат 4 пратеници од БЕСА што се залага за редефинирање на државата. АА бара дводомен парламент,ДУИ премиер, ДПА вицепремиер, сите се залагаат за промена на химна...
Со Албанците од СДС ќе имаат ~35.
Честитки.

ИЗБОРИ 2020   МАКЕДОНИЈА

Ахмети: Заедно сме посилни, разговарам со лидерите на сите партии на Албанците

360степени | 16 јули, 2020 16:52

○ 1   ↺ 13   ♡ 31   ↑

A tweet from one of the Bojkotiram Movement supporters, sharing a statement of Ali Ahmeti, where he said that he is speaking with all leaders of the Albanian parties, commenting: "Albanians voted for the Albanian parties, and made Macedonians vote for 4 MPs from Besa, a political party that promotes redefining the state. AA requests a two-chamber parliament, DUI a prime minister, DPA vice-prime minister, all of them want a change of the anthem. Together with the Albanians from the SDSM, they (i.e. the Albanians) will have a total of 35 MPs. Congratulations."

A Twitter thread titled "Why do we hate each other" directed towards SDSM. It includes identity issues, false comments on criminal and other cases, corruption, and inter-ethnic relations.[257]

---

[257] Translation of thread (1): They censured the anthem. They deleted the anthem from the school books. They started a dispute over the language. They brought in UCK and Tigers. They lied about Mladenov. They lied about D. Naselje. They lied about Smiljkovsko. They lied about Martin Neshkovski. They released the killers of Smiljkovsko. They released Martin's killer.
(2): Because they brought in /// in our birth certificates. Because they renamed MRTV to NTV. They renamed the philharmonic. They renamed the opera and ballet. They introduced Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia to the transcripts of school children. Because they will change our passports. Because they will change our ID cards.
(3): Because they renamed the airport. Because they're silent about the illegal construction of objects by ethnic Albanians. Because they brought in UCK to the Constitution. Because they brought a bandit to the Public Prosecution. Because we're being Bulgarianized. Because we're being Albanized. Because they unconstitutionally introduced a two-language state. The "prime minister" is a criminal. Everyone is a criminal. An article in a law was changed for #EvroVice.
(4): Why do we hate each other? Because in 2001, SDSM and the asshole journalists stood on the side of UCK. Because in 2004, SDSM divided Macedonia. We suffered rubber bullets and threatened my parents with their jobs, so that they wouldn't vote in the referendum. Because they changed the flag.
(5): Because they're constantly inclined to be "anti-Macedonian" and "anti-state". Because in 2008 when George Bush stood on the side of Macedonia, SDSM slandered Macedonia from Bucharest. Because they changed the name. Because they erased ASNOM. Because they erased our history. Because they're sanding down manholes.

Governance - Albanian Media

General Satisfaction and Trust

One characteristic of many ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia, especially those in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, is that they follow media and inform themselves in both Macedonian and Albanian. Very often, inter-ethnic intolerance is evident in comments to articles published in Macedonian. For example, the three screenshots below depict a heated debate on a news link posted on Facebook by the news portal A1On. [258] Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians exchange various insults based on ethnic, confessional, and political grounds. The lack of an up-to-date census is noted and the issue of representation of both communities is contested. Ethnic Macedonians claim that ethnic Albanians are below 20% (the threshold prescribed in the OFA), while the ethnic Albanians' sentiments are that their representation in society is way beyond the obligatory 20%. This rarely happens in the other direction since only a very small number of ethnic Macedonians speak Albanian.

---

[258] Top left translation: In the same way that you only speak Macedonian, he does so too, if you want to understand him learn Albanian. (This is followed by inappropriate comments from other men).

Top right translation: Ivce (referring to a man) you will see, on tenders now they will ask for a specific inspector to sign his form/report. The following comments are the two men discussing who can sign such reports and how it won't matter.

Bottom translation of comments/first comment: "We agree on a indiscriminate and thorough fight against crime and corruption, on all levels, no matter if someone is a party member, or from the municipal office, from an institution, if they're an expert, a public official, known or unknown person." When you have the census and destroy illegal...

Second comment: Pray to God that the census doesn't happen for another 100 years so that you can still freely rule the country.

Just to illustrate:

1. More than 10% of the population identifies as Bulgarian (which means percentage-wise going from the last census of 2002, you will see that now 15% of Macedonians are now Bulgarians)

2. You don't have to believe me, go to the State Bureau for Statistics in the paragraph for "population" and you will see that each year the mortality rate is larger than the natality, if you add up the larger percentage of natality against mortality in Albanian populations you will see the difference in numbers. It's a staggering and decreasing difference in percentage.

3. Large number of the population of Macedonians have moved away from the country in the last 10 years (mostly east and south regions) and they you will see how you will pray that there is no census of the population.

Exhibit 61: Online Intolerance

Sami Halimi
Ivce ke vidis na tender ke barat koj inspektor da mu ja pise prijavata.ahahahha

Like · Reply · 2h

Mereme Fejzullai
pa ti kako zboruvash samo makedonski i taka zboruva ako sakash da go razberesh uci allbanski

Like · Reply · 17h   3

Dejan Petrovski
Koga ke mi napravish sunet lichno ti togash:Xaxaxaxa

Like · Reply · 15h

Alban Kajolli
Dejan Petrovski aj da te pram jas sunet moze

Like · Reply · 15h

Dejan Petrovski
Alban Kajolli ако ја изедеш лигњата може.

Like · Reply · 14h

Alban Kajolli
Dejan Petrovski da

Like · Reply · 14h

Alban Kajolli
Uu da ti ebam se u picka pose ke piskate bezi beli kapciiii

Like · Reply · 14h   1

Bajram Dauti
Dejan Petrovski dojdi kaj mene ,so se sho imash od ponezhniot pol i site do eden kie ve sredam od

Ivo Dodevski
Sami Halimi neka ja pratat na Bit pazar Fida ke mu ja pise i oko nema da mu trepne.

Like · Reply · 2h   😆 1

Sami Halimi
Ivo Dodevski ahahhahaha tamam i ke si gi zatvori saatite.

Like · Reply · 1h   👍😆 2

Ivo Dodevski
Sami Halimi ful 32 si krimitce.

Like · Reply · 1h

Stojan Dimkovski
"Согласни сме за неселективна и длабинска борба со криминалот и корупцијата, на сите нивоа, без разлика дали некој доаѓа од партија, од општина, институција, дали е експерт, функционер, познат или непознат."
КОГА ЌЕ ГО СПРОВЕДЕТЕ ПОПИСОТ И УРНЕТЕ ДИВОГ... See More

Like · Reply · 20h   👍 7

Sedat Rushidi
Stojan Dimkovski moli Boga da ne se slucuva popisot uste edno 100 godini za da mozete slobodno da vladeete so ovaa drzava.

Samo za ilustracija;
1.Poveke od 10% od celoto naselenie se cuvstuva kako bugarin (sto znaci ako odime na % od posledniot popis od 2002 god. ke vidite deka ispaga poveke od 15% sto edno vreme bile makedonci sega se bugari)
2. Nemora mene da mi veruvas, vlezj vo zavodot za statistika kaj paragrafot "naselenie" i ke vidis deka sekoja godina mortalitetot kaj makedonskoto naselenie e mnogu pogolem nego natalitetot, ako na ova se dodava i pogolemit % na natalitetot sproti mortalitetot kaj albancite ke vidis razlikata vo brojka vrtoglavo se namaluva razlikata vo %
3. Golemit broj na iseluvanjeto na makedoncite poslednite 10 god. (pretezno istocen, juzhniot del) ke vidis i toa kalo ke se molis da nema popis na naselenieto.

Pozz.

Like · Reply · 20h   😆👍 3

152

A victimhood mentality is often evident, and the notion that ethnic Albanians have no prospects because of the ethnic Macedonians. However, for this situation they often blame the ethnic Albanian parties in government, and primarily DUI. The screenshots below present examples of ethnic Albanian citizens blaming DUI for the current state of affairs. The first comment reads: "After 19 years, nothing concrete. We are just going backwards. Some individuals became rich due to the Ohrid Framework Agreement." The second confirms the saying, "It is a nicely signed agreement, but it is difficult in terms of implementation," suggesting that the OFA has not been fully implemented, and is sometimes even abused.

Exhibit 62: Dissatisfaction with OFA
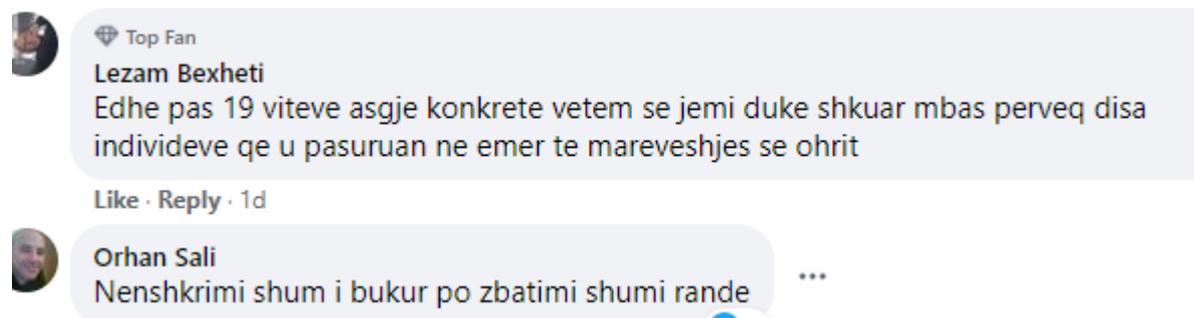
Euro-Atlantic Integration

Another interesting discussion on social media is on the question of whether ethnic Albanians should be thankful to DUI that North Macedonia has joined NATO; one can see strong criticism of DUI. In the example below, one of the commentators fiercely attacks Ali Ahmeti by saying, "You are weak. First you should graduate in order to become a proper politician. You will soon end. Albin Kurti should teach you how to work." Another comment takes a similar direction, diminishing DUI's role in previous governments: "The DUI and that pus Ali Ahmeti have always been just a mere number in the government, nobody ever consulted him for NATO." A third person subsequently comments, again, in a pejorative manner: "What can we say about a political party which always dodges political debates on TV, but on the other hand continuously speaks about politics? Hypocrites!"

Exhibit 63: Criticism of DUI
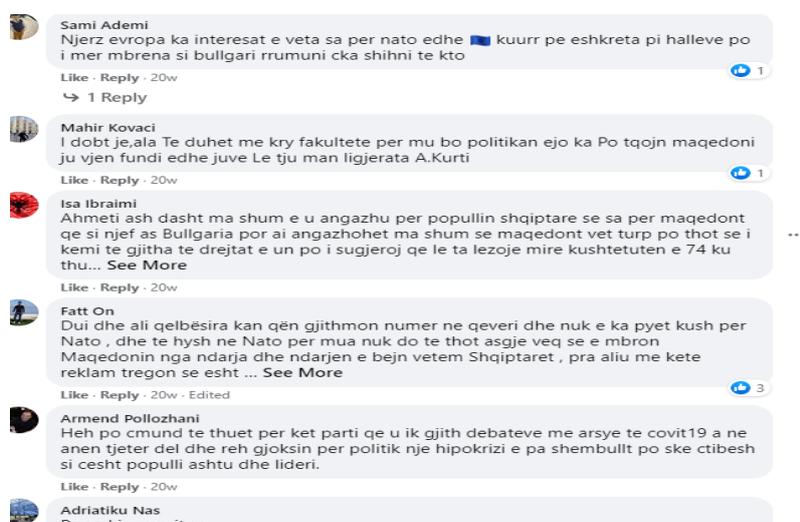
Identity and Identity Politics

After Zoran Zaev resigned from the Government in January 2020 and a technical government was formed with the intention of organizing elections, one article in a reputable Albanian news source stood out, with the title: "Albanians love Zaev more than Ali Ahmeti."[259] According to the author, "we want to admit it or not, but one thing is for sure, that Zaev has done more for the Albanians than the 18-year rule of DUI." Moreover, it even argues that "Zaev is loved more by Albanians than Macedonians," while "Ali Ahmeti is loved only by sympathizers, activists and interest groups and by no means the Albanian population."

The four photos below are taken from the popular and widely followed Facebook group "Kali i shemës" (Shemo's horse), which is a satirical group aimed at mocking and attacking the DUI. Among the anti-DUI ethnic Albanian citizens, Ali Ahmeti is referred to as "Shemo", while Artan Grubi, Ahmeti's chief of staff and MP is referred to as the "Horse." Grubi is also a former leader of the Shvercerat tifosi football fan groups supporting FK Shkupi, and is considered to be one of Ahmeti's most trusted colleagues. The first photo makes a sexual allusion related to voting for DUI. The second photo depicts a DUI flag thrown in the garbage, making a comparison of the DUI with a dirty trash can. The third sends a message that the international community, in particular the EU and the USA, should eliminate DUI from the political scene in North Macedonia, as if they were COVID-19. The last image aims to illustrate that even the international community cannot remove Ali Ahmeti from the chair to which he has been "stuck" for years. Many of these images were widely distributed before and during the early parliamentary elections.

---

[259]Mehazi, Sulejman: "Shqiptarët më shumë e duan Zaevin sesa Ali Ametin" (Albanians love Zaev more than Ali Ahmeti),, *Almakos* 04 January 2020. Available at:
https://www.almakos.com/shqiptaret-me-shume-e-duan-zaevin-sesa-ali-ametin/

ANTI - DUI '20

Nuk shkepet ky P9
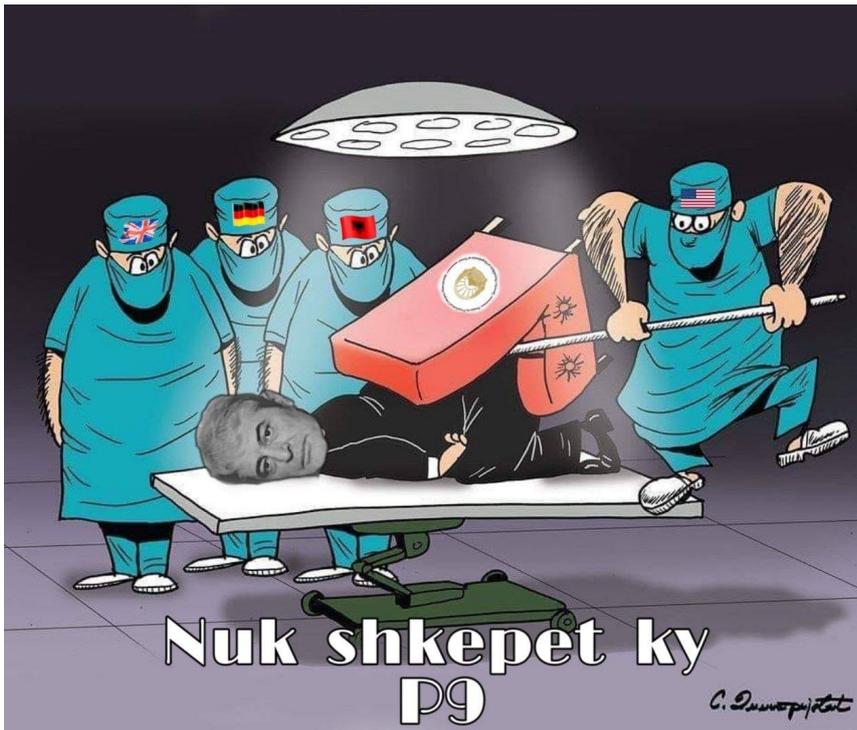
As for the supporters of DUI, one might note a certain triumphalism and pride in the actual electoral results, which once again brought DUI back as the key determining factor in forming the new government, now with enough confidence to even request the position of Albanian prime minister – which would be a first. The coalition agreement struck promises Ahmeti the PM position for the last 100 days of the term.[260]

Exhibit 65: Sitting Pretty

A photo shared on social media, indicating the privileged position of DUI, while the two Macedonian political parties have to adjust and provide comfort for DUI.

Many Facebook groups appeal and call for Greater Albania, Ethnic Albania, Ilirida, etc., and while these groups can attract quite some following, it is again difficult to tease out how many are from North Macedonia vs. other places. However, there are people in North Macedonia who do follow such content.

---

[260] „Заев премиер, последните 100 дена пред избори на таа позиција ќе ја преземе ДУИ" (Zaev will be the Prime Minister, 100 days before elections DUI will undertake this position). *TV Telma*. August 18, 2020. Available at:
https://telma.com.mk/2020/08/18/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%B5%D0%B2-
%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%80-
%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-100-
%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4-%D0%B8%D0%B7/

The two photos below are taken from the Facebook group "Shqiperia Etnike" (Ethnic Albania). The first photo depicts the borders of an imagined Great Albania, including parts of the territories of today's North Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, and Montenegro. On the right side of the photo, five historic figures highly important to ethnic Albanians are depicted: Azem Galica, an Albanian nationalist and rebel who fought for the unification of Kosovo with Albania; Adem Jashari, one of the founders and leaders of the KLA, viewed as a martyr by many; Ismail Qemali, considered as the founding father of modern Albania, a statesman, diplomat, and politician; King Zog I of Albania who led the Albanian state for 17 years; and Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbeg, an Albanian nobleman and military commander who led a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire.

The second photo presents similar borders of a Great (ethnic) Albania, making a distinction between Albania's borders today and its "historic" (ethnic) boarders, sending a message that it had become smaller through time and needs to be re-established.

Exhibit 66: Ethnic Albania Memes
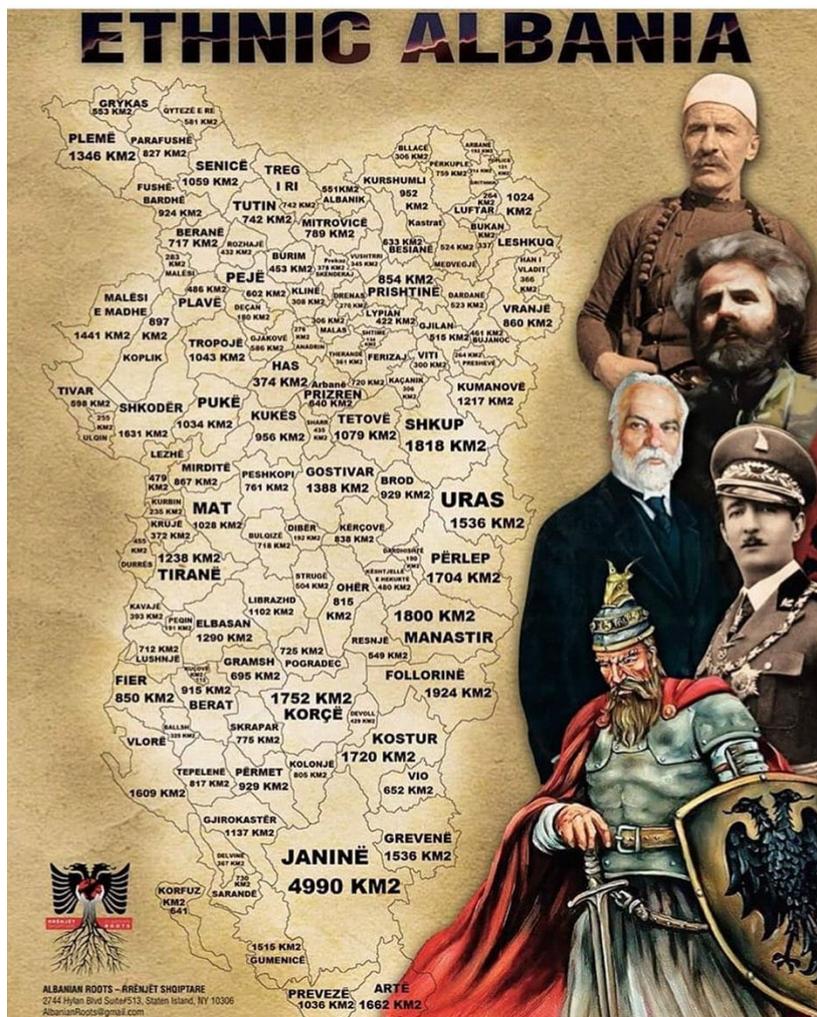
Exhibit 67: Ethnic Albania Memes

Exhibit 68: Not All Social Media is Polarizing

> **Not All Social Media is Polarizing**
>
> While much social media content is polarizing, the team also came across a column/testimony from the written by Stojanche Angelov, a former high ranking Police General and active participant in the 2001 conflict (where he was severely injured), and current leader of the political party "Dostoinstvo" (Dignity) in coalition with SDSM. Angelov aims to "bring the horrors of war closer to you so that they do not happen again." The text was originally published on a Macedonian portal; however, an Albanian news portal prepared an Albanian translation and published it for an Albanian audience.[261] This approach might be considered as a transitional justice tool that might encourage empathy and shared understanding between the two sides of the conflict.

Many of these groups are created and administered in Albania by Albanians, but have some followers and outreach in North Macedonia.[262] According to one interlocutor, ethnic

---

[261] "Si i mbijetova ferrit në Haraçinë, shkruan Stojançe Angelov" (How I survived hell in Aracinovo, writes Stojanche Angelov). *MKAlb*. June 23, 2020. Available at:
https://mkalb.mk/2020/06/23/si-i-mbijetova-ferrit-ne-haracine-shkruan-stojance-angelov/
[262] Please see: Facebook page "Shqiperi Ethnike" (Ethnic Albania). Available at:
https://www.facebook.com/shqiperietnikeofficials/community/?ref=page_internal

Albanians in North Macedonia rarely dare to create such groups fearing that they will be caught and punished, evoking memories from various difficult and troubling ethnically motivated incidents in Gostivar, Mala Rechica, and Bit Pazar.

Lastly, ethnic Albanians tend to be very cautious, communicating and sharing information face-to-face, and not so much in public, because they fear pressure from the state. Ethnic Albanians often do not feel North Macedonia is their homeland. They do not have any sentiments and attitudes regarding the flag, the anthem, or other state symbols. Unlike the ethnic Macedonians, ethnic Albanians have almost absolutely no feelings regarding the name change and similar statehood issues.

Corruption

General – Macedonia Infosphere

There is a perception of wide-spread corruption at all levels. Corruption cases regularly evoke high interest among social media users. The TV political magazine "Detektor" conducted a public opinion poll showing that the majority of the population believes that the fight against corruption and crime is backsliding: 71.4% support the re-appointment of judges, and 75.5% support vetting of judges to be done by foreign experts.[263]

As an indicative finding, the word "misuse" (злоупотреба) was searched on www.time.mk, as this is a word frequently used in discussions on (alleged) misuse of office, in local and national institutions. The word appeared frequently, as illustrated below.

Exhibit 69: Prevalence of News on Government Misuse of Power

Prevailance of news on "Misuse"

■Nov-19 ■Dec-19 ■Jan-20 ■Feb-20 ■Mar-20 ■Apr-20 ■May-20 ■Jun-20

Keword "Misuse"(Злоупотреба)

697 806 648 599 423 374 388 701
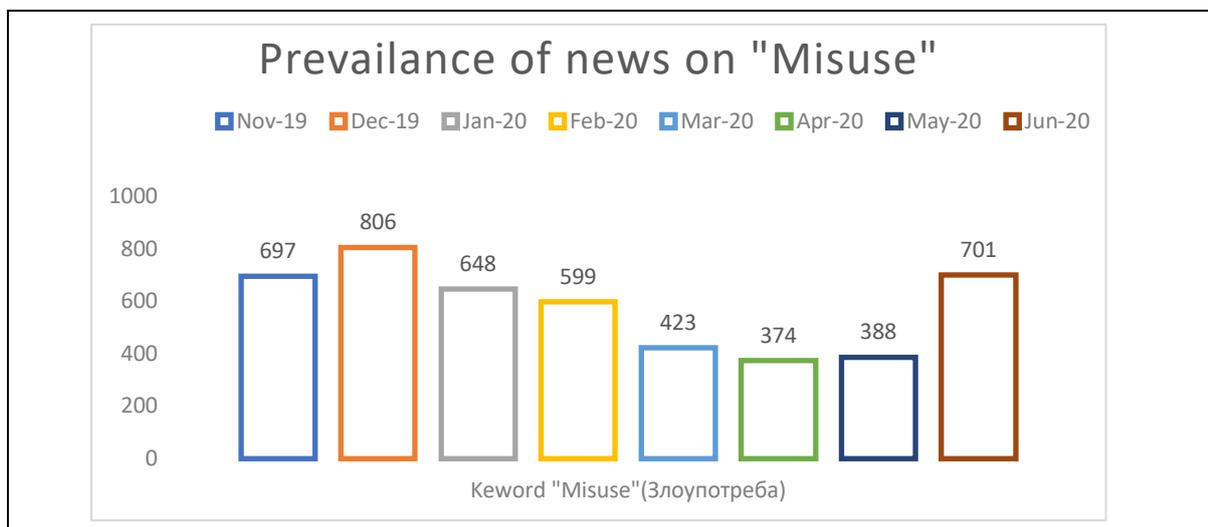
[263] „Детектор: Граѓаните сметаат дека назадува борбата со криминалот и корупцијата – во државата има помалку правда" (Detector: Citizens believe that the fight against crime and corruption is backsliding – there is less justice in the country). *Sitel TV*. 15 March 2020. Available at: https://sitel.com.mk/detektor-gragjanite-smetaat-deka-nazaduva-borbata-so-kriminalot-i-korupcijata-vo-drzhavata-ima

There were hundreds of news articles related to some kind of misuse in the tracking period. The highest numbers are evident in December 2019 and June 2020, which correspond to the months of increased party activity in advance of the (expected) elections.[264] The monitoring of traditional media similarly shows that news coverage and reporting often correlates with increased party activity (both ruling and opposition) through press conferences and press releases regarding cases of corruption, nepotism, abuse of office, or general accusations of bad governance. Afterwards, media and news portals report on the statements of both the government and the opposition, thus making it all a substantial part of the daily news content.

The significant decrease in the period from March – May 2020, corresponds to the first period of the pandemic and the initial lockdown/emergency measures. The extent to which COVID-19 took up media space both shows the impact of the pandemic globally, but also how in non-extraordinary times the media space is naturally populated by a day-to-day politics typified by allegations and counter-allegations of corruption.

The following chart racking the appearance of the word "corruption" reveals similar trends.

Exhibit 70: Number of news articles under the word "corruption" on www.time.mk, per month
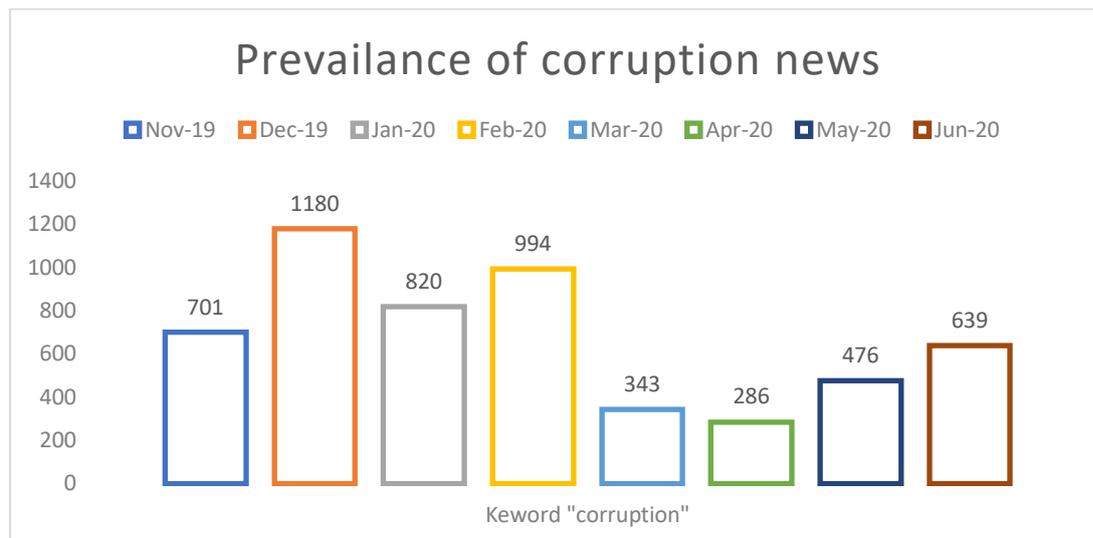
The "Racket" case was one of the most discussed issues related to corruption on (Macedonian language) social media, where users expressed disappointment with the former Special Public Prosecutor Katica Janeva. Many comments refer to the perception that, because the case involves high-level politicians from the ruling SDSM, they are untouchable by the judiciary. There are profiles stating that it was clear that the Special Public Prosecution Office (SPO) was never meant to succeed in these cases. Further showing skepticism, many politicians and activists were being ridiculed for their strong support of the SPO in the past, suggesting they were foolish for thinking it was even possible to change anything. People were commenting in a similar way when the State Commission against Corruption initiated a

---

[264] In December 2019, the political parties agreed on early parliamentary elections in April 2020. However, the elections were rescheduled to be conducted after the end of the emergency situation.

procedure against 10 former special prosecutors from the SPO.[265] Public sentiment reflects faith in neither.

Exhibit 71: Number of news articles under the phrase "Case Racket" on www.time.mk, per month
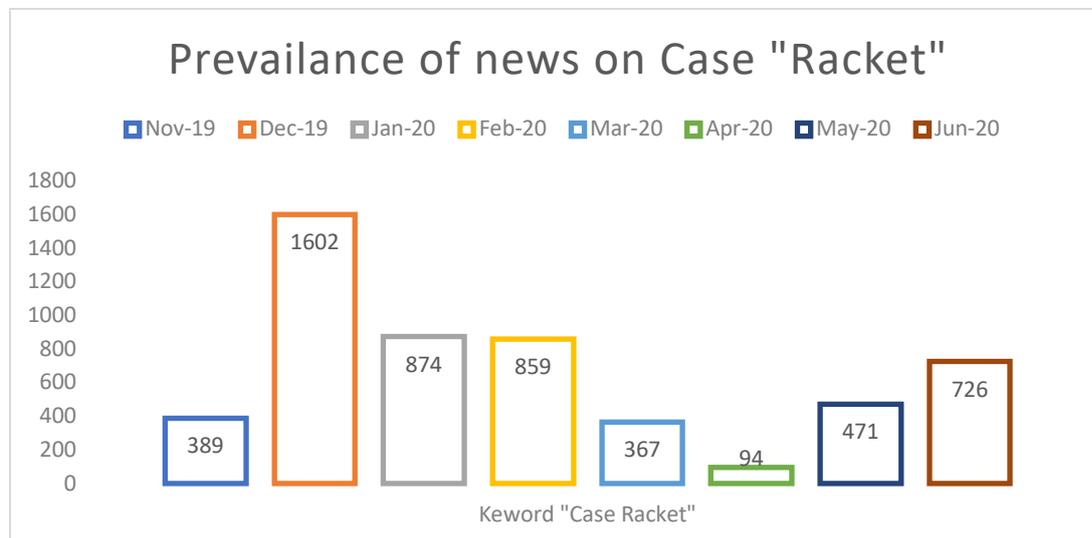
It is notable that there was quite minimal discussion of Racket in the Albanian language media and infosphere.

People involved in Macedonian patriotic groups are especially interested in and fired up by corruption cases when ethnic Albanians are involved, claiming double standards and the impunity of people close to DUI. Moreover, the corruption scandals are used to demonstrate how the EU perspective for North Macedonia is a fairytale, and how SDSM "sold out" the country's name based on false promises and short-sightedness.

Exhibit 72: Tweets about Corruption

---

[265]Please see: „Антикорупциска поведе постапка против 10 обвинители од СЈО: Јанева, Фетаи, Стефанова…" (The Anticorruption commission initiated a procedure against 10 prosecutors: Janeva, Fetai, Stefanova…) 10 April 2020. *360 Stepeni*. Available at:
https://360stepeni.mk/antikoruptsiska-povede-postapka-protiv-10-obviniteli-od-sjo-janeva-fetai-stefanova/
[266] Translation: The platform at Matka – they can't touch that.
The building at Mavrovka – they can't touch that.
The building on the square (the grass patch) – they can't touch that.

A tweet by one of the most popular Twitter users, outlining several cases when the institutions failed to deal with illegal construction by ethnic Albanians, despite clear abuse and media investigation on the cases. Macedonian patriotic groups do not rail against Macedonian illegal construction to a similar extent.

COVID-19 brought a new dimension to the corruption issue. At the beginning of the pandemic, people had a high level of trust in the government and their approach. They supported stricter measures, and the Minister of Health, Venko Filipce, from the ruling SDSM political party, became one of the most popular politicians. While NGOs, opposition and some traditional media were questioning[267] the risks of abuse of power stemming from the emergency situation, social media users in general seemed unbothered with such issues. In a situation of "life and death," it seemed people can be ready to turn a blind eye to corruption and misuse of power, as long as they feel their basic safety needs are being met. This might also reflect the result of the high tolerance for corruption in the society, where people are ready to accept certain compromises in exchange for perceptions of safety.

This exacerbates political and ethnic cleavages and stereotypes. For example, a short video from a wedding shared on Twitter, during the period when weddings were forbidden as part of the anti-COVID 19 measures, speaks to the public interpretation of this private matter. The accompanying text says: "The village of Zelino (near Tetovo) the bastion of SDSM and BESA. Don't worry Filipce (referring to the Health Minister), this is Zaev's new normal. If this was Strumica, Prilep and Valandovo (referring to predominantly ethnic Macedonian cities) you would send inspections and Special Forces. But you cannot do that here."

Nefi's buildings – they can't touch them.
The buildings on the shore of Struga – they can't touch them.
Dead state.
[267] For instance, the Helsinki Committee on Human Rights in Macedonia was regularly publishing updates and recommendations regarding the protection of human rights during emergency situation. See: https://mhc.org.mk/news/kovid-19-imash-prava-i-vo-vonredna-sostojba/

Exhibit 73: COVID Commentary

As the numbers started increasing in May 2020, the trust in the anti-COVID measures started decreasing. However, the disappointment and lack of trust was not predominantly linked to perceptions of corruption (this was mentioned only sporadically), but to the failure of the Government to stick to their own measures when coming under pressure from the main religious communities during the Orthodox and Muslim holidays. Later, when an election date was set and political campaigns began, there were criticisms about putting voters' health in danger, as well as manipulating both the measures and the numbers.

The COVID-19 situation also shined light on the huge fear of the unknown, rampant speculations, and the impulse for denial. As everywhere, there were many conspiracy theories regarding the origin or even the existence of the virus, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Discussions regarding the very existence of the virus were especially evident around the religious holidays, when some of the religious leaders called on citizens to visit churches and mosques en masse, disregarding public health warnings. People on social media were increasingly arguing, and strict measures during Orthodox Easter were seen as an attack on the faith, especially as a few weeks later, the Muslim holiday Eid was celebrated in relatively more liberal conditions. A Facebook "religious" page called "A word against the sects,"[268] with more than 7,000 followers, constantly shares fake news and disinformation against mask wearing and other preventive measures. One user shared a Russian language video describing, "the damage of wearing masks, face shields and scarfs." The video had been shared 560 times, even though it contains false information.

---

[268] In Macedonian: Слово против сектите, available at: https://www.facebook.com/slovo.protiv.eresite

Exhibit 74: COVID-19 Misinformation

СЛОВО Против Сектите
14 Jul ·

Целта на постирањето на ова видео е да се види штетноста од носењето маски, визири и марами.

Partly false information
Checked by independent fact-checkers

See Why

See Video

155   6 comments · 560 shares

Reflecting perceptions of corruption during a public health crisis, the tweet below alludes to questionable hospital tender processes, referring to an allegedly rigged tender in the Shtip Hospital, and referring to specific people close to the government. The screengrab is of a document from the hospital related to the invitation for companies to submit offers.

Exhibit 75: Tweeting about Rigged Tenders

Corruption - Albanian Infosphere

As noted, Albanian media report far less frequently on corruption than do Macedonian language media. When Albanian media do report on issues related to governance and corruption, they are usually covering news related to the work of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, or cases of (alleged) misuse of office that are also being covered in the Macedonian media. However, there is little to almost no information regarding alleged corruption and/or misuse of office when office holders are ethnic Albanians. This finding led the team to question the level of media freedom and media capture when it comes to the Albanian language media. There is no investigative journalism reporting on officials from DUI, and no such reporting by ethnic Albanian journalists. Unfortunately, any reports on freedom of media and freedom of expression provide only a general assessment of the situation in the country, without delving further into specific media spaces.

The only case that the research team was able to find regards Mustafa Dauti, a close associate of the head of the Islamic Religious Community (both the previous and the current one) and president of a humanitarian organization. The article, published in Almakos, a reputable Albanian language publication,[270] claimed that Mr. Dauti bought a luxury apartment worth 100,000 Euros, "with money from Eid and aid for the poor," in addition

---

[269] User posting (above document screen shots): "Despite having an immunological analyst, the hospital in Shtip hired another one who, believe it or not, only works with reagents of Zhuti. The tender's been published and it's just a matter of time before he gets it and we can end this not-so-happy prediction of a rigged tender by the government."

[270]"Bujar Osmani i dha 15 mijë euro grant, kryetari i "El Hilall" Mustafa Dauti blen banesë luksoze 100 mijë euro" (Bujar Osmani gave a grant of 15 thousand euros, the chairman of "El Hilall" Mustafa Dauti buys a luxury apartment 100 thousand euros). *Almakos*. 23 July 2020, available at: https://www.almakos.com/bujar-osmani-i-dha-15-mije-euro-grant-kryetari-i-el-hilall-mustafa-dauti-blen-banese-luksoze-100-mije-euro/

referencing other properties he owns. The article also established a link between Bujar Osmani, a deputy Prime Minister for EU integration and Dauti, given that the humanitarian organization in question received a grant (15,000 Euro) from the Government.

Extremism

Far-right wing/nationalist

There are plenty of Facebook groups sharing maps of a "United Macedonia," including parts of today's Greece and Bulgaria, and providing space for discussions about history. However, the prevailing sentiment does not seem to be expansionist in terms of a dream of physically uniting the territories, but more in terms of not forgetting history, feeding feelings of injustice and betrayal against the Macedonians, and spreading some kind of nostalgia, seemingly with the purpose of stoking grievance.

The Sun of Vergina is a mainstream symbol used across many patriotic and nationalist groups. When the authorities of the city of Kriva Palanka removed this symbol from the main square in 2020,[271] there was clear outrage on social media, both in that community and around the country. While this issue was only sporadically mentioned in traditional media, it became a hot topic on social media for several weeks. The leader of VMRO-DPMNE also condemned the act of the authorities.

Exhibit 76: Greater Macedonia Memes[272]

---

[271] Please see: „Не доликувало да се гази по сонцето од Кутлеш, кривопаланчани ќе чекорат по лик на светец" (It was not appropriate to step on the Sun of Vergina, the citizens of Kriva Palanka will step on an image of a saint instead). *Alfa TV*. 2 May 2020. Available at:
https://alfa.mk/ne-dolikuvalo-da-se-gazi-po-sonceto-od-kutlesh-krivopalanchani-kje-chekorat-po-lik-na-svetec/
[272] A picture of Greater Macedonia posted on Facebook, stating "This biblical piece of land has always been called, and is going to be called Macedonia."

Nationalistic content can be found on blogs and online sites, such as "Nacionalna borba" (National Struggle),[273] and "Revolucionerot," which is more current and regularly updated. While Nacionalna Borba was last updated in August 2018, they both have links to the same extreme right wing and fascist pages, while "Revolucionerot" in addition has its own Facebook page. [274] However, they fail to generate a lot of content or engagement on social media, showing limited numbers of comments and not sparking any real discussion. It is unclear who is behind this content, as the author(s) are anonymous. Their content broadly varies from discussions of issues of daily politics and the change of the country's name, to anti-migratory and racist rhetoric.

Exhibit 77: New Party, Same old Narratives?

> ### New Party, Same old Narratives?
>
> In this context, it is important to mention the emergence of the political party "Rodina" (Homeland), registered in April 2020. This is a radical party, which is not only nationalistic, but is also anti-EU, anti-NATO, talks about the expulsion of all foreign elements, including NGOs, is anti-immigrant, etc.[275] The party is clearly linked to the sites kolozeg.info and freeglobe.mk, which have been discussed in the context of fake news and conspiracy theories. The political party did not run in the recent elections, but has its own office in Skopje and has started opening local branches.[276]

Discussions on inter-ethnic relations are usually triggered by concrete incidents and events where these groups feel threatened or perceive that the Albanian community holds a privileged position. Such events include the changing of the names of schools in Chair municipality,[277] putting bilingual signs in front of institutions in predominantly ethnic Macedonian cities,[278] and especially, developments in the trial of the "Monster" case.[279] These events, all of which were observed during the monitoring period, triggered nationalistic and anti-Albanian rhetoric. Commentators regularly make a connection between the "rights of the Albanians" and SDSM as a political party. There are also comments regarding "Macedonians becoming second-class citizens in their own country" and fears of

---

[273] Available at: http://nacionalnaborba.blogspot.com
[274] As of July 2020
[275] Program objectives of Rodina, available at:
https://www.rodina.org.mk/programski-celi/
[276] The party opened its local branch in the city of Prilep on July 22, 2020
[277] Several schools in Chair municipality which were named after Macedonian important figures, were re-named after prominent Albanian figures. SDSM leader Zaev initially condemned the action, stating that the decision was not made in line with the regulation, but afterwards, he changed his position.
[278] Bilingual boards in front of institutions in predominantly ethnic Macedonian cities (Prilep and Strumica) were set. According to DUI (Bujar Osmani), the action was in line with the (2019) Law on Languages, contrary to the opinion of SDSM (Spasovski and Zaev). Media reported on the cases and on the statements. These events were used as an "arguing" opportunity between DUI and SDSM.
[279] The Monstrum Case, or Smilkovce lake killing, refers to the the case when five ethnic Macedonian civilians were killed near the village of Smilkovski, outside Skopje, on Good Friday 2012. The Ministry of Interior immediately classified the case as a terrorist attack. Five people were sent to life imprisonment, while 2 of them where tried in absentia since they were imprisoned in Kosovo for unlawful possession of weapons. In 2017, the Supreme Court ordered a retrial over the murders.

federalization, which are linked to fears of eventual potential Albanian secessionist movements.

An example of a hot topic that emerged among ethnic Macedonians happened in May 2020, when Minister of Defense Radmila Shekerinska took a picture with Fatmir Dehari, Mayor of Kichevo and a former NLA commander, posing in front of symbols of the National Liberation Army, the Albanian paramilitary formation which started the violent conflict in 2001. After significant negative feedback, she made a statement saying that 2001 is far in the past, and that such insignia doesn't mean anything. Traditional media reported on the case, and some of them also reported on the citizens' reactions on social media.[280] However, this was the most commented-on event on Macedonian language social media during the reporting period. There were numerous posts and comments across all groups generating patriotic or daily news content. Many social media users and public figures condemned the act and the response by the Minister. Within the patriotic groups, people were claiming that just using the insignia of Macedonia (including the name Republic of Macedonia and the Vergina flag) is problematic for the current governing structures. The event opened old wounds from the 2001 conflict and some people shared their personal stories and losses from those times. SDSM supporters were less vocal about this on social media, but dissatisfaction could be noted among them as well.

There was almost no mention of this in Albanian language media.

The electoral campaign provided a lot of opportunities for expressing nationalist messages and sentiments. Ethnic Macedonians were especially triggered by DUI's insistence on holding the position of Prime Minister if the coalition was victorious. A theme common across social media is that "The Albanians," who are identified mainly with DUI, have only nationalist requests and interests, instead of offering a real political and economic program. (DUI's lack of rigorous program platforms – and track record of policy making and governance in general - makes them vulnerable to such criticisms.) The tweet below captures this sentiment.

Exhibit 78: Albanian Politics and Commentary [281]

Кичеецот @gloryunited123   9h
Абе еднаш да слушнвме од албанскиве партии да бараат пониски даноци, нови болници, нови фабрики, нови автопати низ цела Македонија, а не само бараат Албанец премиер, министер, директор, двојазичност, знаме, грб. Како тоа што го барате ќе им го олесни животот на албанците тука?

32 RETWEETS 109 FAVORITES

[280] „Шекеринска продолжува да ја БРАНИ ФОТОГРАФИЈАТА СО УЧК" (Shekerinska continue to defend herself regarding the photo with UCK) *Vecer*. May 31, 2020. Available at: https://www.vecer.mk/node/500142
[281]"If only, at least once, the Albanian parties requested lower taxes, new hospitals, new companies, new highways throughout the whole Macedonia, instead of only requesting an Albanian to be a Prime Minister, minister, director, bilingualism, flag, coat of arms. How those requests are going to improve the lives of Albanians here?"

A post on a forum criticizes Albanians for reacting when an incident involves Albanian victims, but never reacting to other general incidents that affect society as a whole - accidents, air pollution, workers, etc. The last paragraph of the post below concludes: "Do Albanians wait for a religious leader, Clinton, a prominent member of ISIS or Al Qaeda, or a prominent criminal among them, to tell them that these problems directly affect them and their lives, so these issues will reach your conscious and these victims deserve your attention?"[282]

Exhibit 79: Forums for Hate Speech

A clearly hateful comment against Albanians from the same Kajgana forum goes more clearly into hate speech, stating "another proof that you are an insectuous, pedophile tribe from a

---

[282] You're falling into the trap of collective thinking, characteristic for the EU-social communities.

All Albanians are uprising for Almir and Sopot, one of which is you too. So far, I haven't heard any Albanians, neither individually or collectively, to revolt against the victims in the flood in Stojkovci (direct human error from those that sent technical support to an inadequately planned ring road), to revolt for the victims of the bus accident at Laskarci (also human error), to revolt against the children from Kichevo/Gostivar who were mauled by dogs, to revolt against the murder child from a happy wedding-goer, it was somewhere in Lipkovo, to revolt against the workers in Chair that were trapped underground and died and whose employer did not comply with the safety regulations.

Or to complain about the air pollution, or for the workers that die in their work places because they work without adequate protection, at unsafe locations or illegal ones and often overtime. Or to complain about those who have been run over by cars as a consequence of drivers going over the speed limit, driving without a license, drunk etc.

I am dumbfounded why no Albanians have reacted to this. Are they waiting on their religious leader, political leader, Clinton, high-ranking member of ISIS or Al Qaeda, a respectable criminal from their ranks, to tell them that these issues directly impact the Albanians, for the issues to touch upon your conscience and that these victims deserve your attention and to be the topics of your discussions?

cave," commenting on the news that the (now former) leader of the Islamic Religious Community married a woman who is 50 years younger than him. [283]

Exhibit 80: Forums for Intolerance
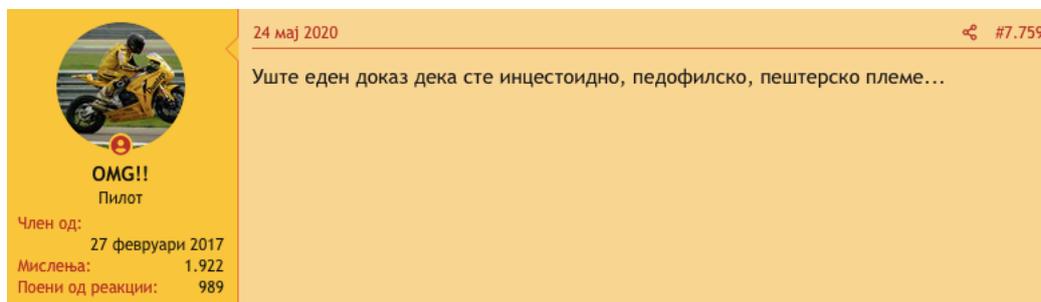
Moreover, some ethnic Macedonians in addition feel threatened by Bulgaria, based on their presumptions of Bulgaria's impressions of Macedonian identity, and the Friendship Agreement is seen as another major obstacle and asymmetric dispute on the European path.[284] Nationalist and chauvinist statements and actions coming from their eastern neighbor were met with increased claims of victimization, debates on history, and outrage against the political elites for dragging the country into such disputes. There was a discrepancy between the attention given to this topic by traditional and social media, as social media were much more interested in following and discussing the topic. Only the critically oriented (pro – opposition) TV Alfa, during the TV political show, "Fall asleep if you can," dedicated some space to seriously discuss Macedonian-Bulgarian relations. The topic was also very popular on YouTube channels related to right-wing and nationalistic content.

Nationalist content is also evident in the Albanian-speaking social media space. However, it again seems that Albanians are more cautious when expressing their opinions online, as most of the groups related to Greater Albania and Ilirida are closed groups, with group administrators who are obviously using fake profiles.[285] It is also difficult to establish if the majority of their supporters comes from North Macedonia, Kosovo, or Albania. However, there are several groups and pages dedicated to "Ilirida" or "Republic of Ilirida," which is a secessionist concept which emerged in the early 1990s, covering almost half of the Republic of North Macedonia (the Western part). It also has its own flag, which, according to pictures found on Facebook, is present in the "real world," beyond the virtual space.

Nationalist content was also found on the Facebook pages of some sports supporters' groups, known as "Shvercerat Shkup"[286] (with 38,305 likes) and "Balistet"[287] (with 53,393

---

[283] More proof of evidence that you are an incestuous, pedophile tribe from a cave.

[284] In 2017, North Macedonia and Bulgaria signed a "Friendship Treaty", aiming to bridge the disagreements regarding history, among others, through forming a commission of historians and other experts to come up with a shared understanding of history events.

[285] For instance, there is only the Albanian flag as the profile picture, or an attractive woman with the Albanian flag, no other content on their profiles and only few (10-50) friends.

[286] The fan club of FC Shkupi from Skopje https://www.facebook.com/ShverceratShkup89

[287] The fan club of FC Shkendija from Tetovo https://www.facebook.com/ballistet.1992

likes). On the page of the latter, one can find glorification of UCK and UCK fighters; while the page of the "Shvercerat" includes some content related to Greater Albania and hate speech against Macedonians and Serbs (using the pejorative term "Shkije," which is similar to the Turkish use of the word "kaur" to describe non-Muslims). Moreover, they were very likely involved in painting graffiti in Gazi Baba stating, "Skopje is Albania."

Exhibit 81: A group photo of "Shvercerat", posted on their official Facebook page, with their faces hidden.

A picture of Graffiti stating "Skopje is Albania", posted on the Facebook page of "Shvercerat", which appears to be done by their members in Gazi Baba.[288] The picture was posted on June 18 and has 638 likes.

Exhibit 82: Sharing Graffiti Online

---

[288] According to the comments.

A map of North Macedonia, showing the territory of "Ilirida" as part of the territory of North Macedonia

Exhibit 84: Ilirida II

The flag of the so-called Republic of Ilirida
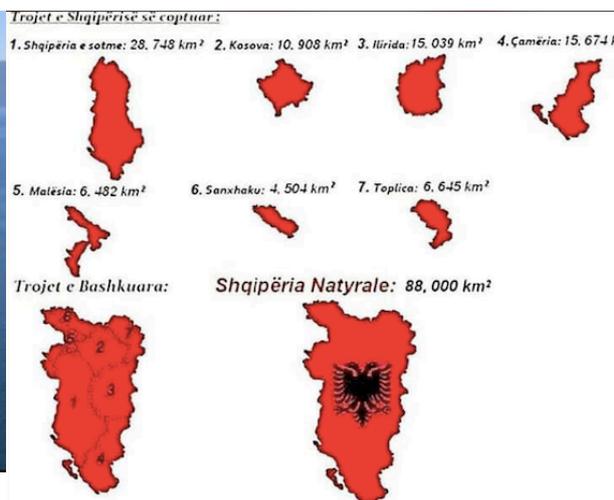
A map showing the territories which comprise Greater Albania

Islamist/militant jihadist

After actions "Cell 1" and "Cell 2" began in 2015, through which recruiting imams and foreign fighters going to Syria were prosecuted and imprisoned, the online activity of militant jihadists has substantially decreased, and many pages have been closed. However, some remain open and online, though there is no recent activity. For example, a Google search shows 8060 videos under the name of the jailed imam Rexhep Memishi. While most of them date from 2013-2015, it is problematic that they can still be found by his followers and admirers.

One of the most interesting findings in this research is that in March 2020, a Facebook page of/for Memishi was created,[289] managing to gather 1469 followers in only few months.[290] The "About" section quotes in Albanian: "The more Allah loves his slave, the more he tests him with slander, with mental and physical torture, imprisonment, threats, demolition, massacre and so on" - which can be read as understanding the imprisonment of Imam Memishi as a test sent by God. The page regularly updates videos of preaching by the imam, and the latest video dates from 22 July and has 50 shares. The team was unable to confirm whether these were re-posting of old videos sermon, newly prepared sermon from prison, or some combination.

The page is administrated by Naim Jashari,[291] an imam from Kosovo who has an audience of around 2000 followers (in addition to a list of friends). He regularly posts religious quotes from the Quran and statements referring to life ethics and the "proper" way of life and living, the power of Allah, revenge, "paying for the wrongdoings," etc. He often exploits pictures of children suffering, linking the feelings of empathy with calls for revenge.

Exhibit 85: Linking Religions and Grievance

Facebook status of Naim Jashari: "Abdullah ibn Omeri has said: a trip to Jihad is better than 50 pilgrimage trips."

---

[289] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/memishirexhep
[290] As of July 20, 2020.
[291] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/Naim.Jashari.11

Exhibit 86: Mixing Humanitarianism and Grievance
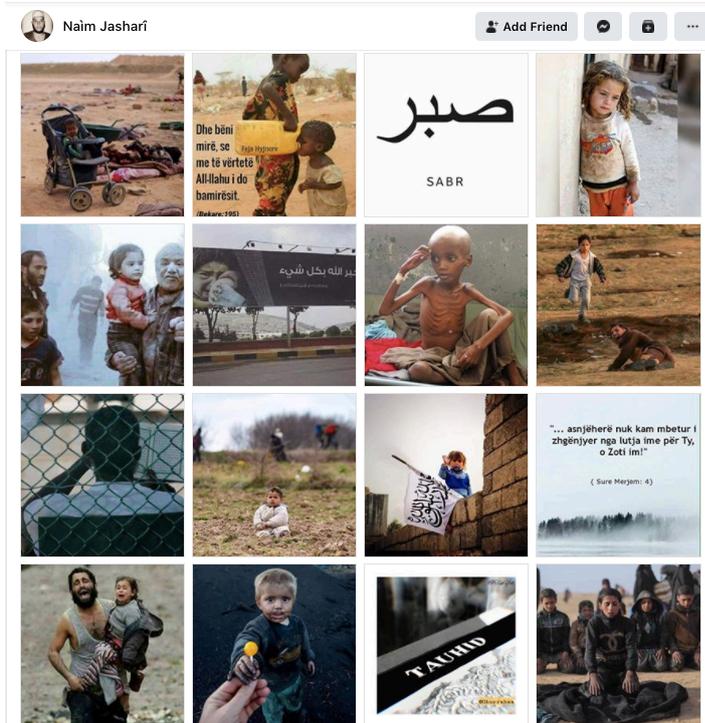
A screenshot showing a section of the pictures posted on Naim Jashari's profile. Each photo is accompanied with a quote, usually speaking about revenge, and has between 190 – 300 likes.

There are also several older pages referring to the imam Memishi that have not been shut down, but have not generated new content in the past few years. Similarly, there are few other pages related to Imam Shukri Aliu,[292] gathering several thousand followers, but without new content since 2015 and 2018, respectively.

However, videos from both imams, including re-uploading and re-sharing previously published content, have been shared by individuals from North Macedonia and Kosovo, and also across groups associated with religion, where some of them promote a radical interpretation of Islam (see the picture below). However, these groups are followed by Albanians from both North Macedonia and from Kosovo, and it is difficult to establish who is administering them.

---

[292] Shukri Aliu is an imam who played a role on spreading a violent form of fundamentalist violent ideology. He has been sentenced for a number of criminal acts, but was released from prison.

Exhibit 87: Promoting Religious Lifestyles

A picture showing the "proper way" for women to cover, shared by a Facebook page titled "Here we learn only about ISLAM," followed in North Macedonia and Kosovo.

Macedonian language portals cover information on news related to the Islamic State, especially in relation to trends in Europe. They usually translate shorter relevant portions of news,[293] and only the newspaper "Nova Makedonija" was found to have made more a thorough analysis based on various sources.[294] These articles usually follow basic journalistic standards and refer to the wider context of terrorism in Europe.

---

[293] For example: „Исламска држава ги предупреди терористите да ја избегнуваат Европа заради коронавирусот": (The Islamic State warned the terrorist to avoid Europe due to the coronavirus), 17 March 2020 *24 Info*. Available at:
https://24info.mk/%d0%b8%d1%81%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%bc%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b0-
%d0%b4%d1%80%d0%b6%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b0-%d0%b3%d0%b8-
%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%b8-
%d1%82%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b8/
[294] For example: „Како се справува Европа со поранешните џихадисти?": (How is Europe dealing with the former jihadists?). *Nova Makedonija* 16 March 2020. Available at:
https://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/svet/%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%ba%d0%be-%d1%81%d0%b5-
%d1%81%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0-
%d0%b5%d0%b2%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bf%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be-
%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%88%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%82/

Exhibit 88: Your Online Travel Agent

<div style="border:1px solid #000;padding:10px;">

Your Online Travel Agent

Traditional media sources reported on a 20-year old Albanian man from Skopje who was arrested when trying to travel to Syria to join Al Nusra in late 2019. In February 2020, he was charged under the criminal code for "participation in a foreign army, police, para-military or para-police formations." According to the Ministry of Interior, the man established contact with two Macedonian Albanians nationals via the Internet, one a returnee who had been in Syria, and one who is still there. They gave him guarantees for joining the terrorist organization and made an agreement to inform him of the time and mode of travel. In November 2019, he traveled to Turkey by bus and was arrested by the Turkish authorities while trying to illegally cross the Turkish-Syrian border. After establishing his identity (as he was without documentation and gave a false identity), he was deported to North Macedonia.[295]

The EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020 published by Europol[296] notes North Macedonia as the only Western Balkan country which reported several unsuccessful cases of its nationals trying to travel to the Middle East via Turkey.

</div>

The team couldn't identify any social media activity in which jihadist extremist and "patriotic" or "ethno-nationalistic" groups interact, debate, engage, or even denounce once another. The social media activity of jihadist supporters seems to be more interested in developments related to Islam and injustice done to Muslims globally. The MPOs exist in a separate information universe.

Fascism and white supremacy

There was no mention of these topics in the traditional media, again reflecting the nature of politics and the media landscape.

A Facebook page in support of fascism and Adolf Hitler,[297] which had not been active since 2018, was re-activated in April 2020 with the post, "Sober youth is active, again the ideology lives. You cannot destroy something that cannot die." The page has a limited audience of 275 followers and almost no comments. In addition to this, there are around 700 followers of a

---

[295] „Кривична пријава против 20 – годишен скопјанец кој тргнал во Сирија за да војува за Ал Нусра" (Criminal charges against a 20-year old man from Skopje who went to Syria to fight for Al Nusra). *Nova Makedonija*, 27 February 2020
https://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/hronika/%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2-20-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BF/
[296] European Union Terrorism Situation Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, EUROPOL, 2020. Available at: https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020
[297] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/tmladina/

page admiring the Wehrmacht, the united armed forces of Nazi Germany.[298] There is very limited interaction on these pages, and they appear to be led by individual enthusiasts without a specific and organized wider network.

There is also a blog with content related to white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and conspiracy theories,[299] in addition to topics such as Slav mythology and mysticism. The blog has been actively updated throughout 2020 (34 posts in January – May 2020), and each post is well-written, including sources, pictures and videos, which might make it attractive to individuals interested in some of those issues. Most of the posts (26) were published in April 2020, when North Macedonia was still under the most sweeping COVID-19 movement restrictions. It is possible that the author(s) benefitted from the "stay at home" situation in order to "catch up" on publishing and writing. There is no evident activity of this blog on social media, and some of the posts have been only sporadically shared by a Facebook page[300] dedicated primarily to alternative medicine.

---

[298] The page advocates that "the Wehrmacht has been the only institution in the Reich which has direct contacts with the Macedonian population during World War II."
[299] Available at: https://svarogi.wordpress.com/
[300] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/Moj-deda-i-Ajurveda-100847694828269/

Findings: Fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Senada Šelo Šabić

> ### *Key Findings*
>
> - People <u>really</u> want to talk about these issues. This is in particular the case in smaller communities. They feel left out, left behind, and ignored.
> - The sentiment that "this is not life, this is just survival," ("*Ovo nije život, ovo je samo preživljavanje*") was heard on a number of occasions.
> - There is an overall sense of disbelief that it is possible for anything to change; people have seen and experienced stagnation, and have been told nothing can change for so long, that they don't know that there are even options to make the situation better.
> - There are examples of people doing great projects, but they are all limited to the micro level and are not integrated or networked. They happen *in spite of*, rather than because of, higher level politics and governance.
> - Extremism is not an issue on the radar screens of respondents in these municipalities; there are many other issues that worry and concern people. This was seen even more acutely after the pandemic began. While extremism is not evident in their day-to-day lives, acute polarization and the politics of division have become the default status quo.
> - The COVID-19 crisis heightened the sense of importance of poorly resourced (sub-municipal) local communities (*mjesne zajednice*), and the way their potential is suffocated by higher levels of government.
> - People are proud of their communities, their resources, the natural environment, and the local history. There is a sense of BiH being a country with real potential for growth based on existing resources, but little understanding of how these resources could be put to good use, for all people in BiH.

From the start the main intention of the project has been to get into the field, and, through direct personal contacts, check existing presumptions and hypotheses, and even more importantly, to gain insights into the ordinary lives of citizens in BiH in 2020, and on the communities in which they live. As much as the team focused on finding the potential sources and drivers of extremism, the aim was also to identify sources and drivers of resilience. Why there is *not* more extremism in BiH, taking into account the bad socio-economic situation, the constraints on employment and social mobility, and the overall deep structural problems caused by poor governance; rampant corruption; low quality of media (particularly the low density of high quality locally generated media); a toxic social media/online environment; ethno-national divisions (real or perceived); lack of political reconciliation and unwillingness to critically face one's past; historical legacies, including

those from the war in the 1990s; and the overall apparent capture of public life by political parties?

While the COVID-19 crisis curtailed some of the planned field travel, two solid rounds were successfully completed, and provided a good opportunity to speak to people in places where such questions are not often asked. As noted in the description of the methodology, during the shutdown remote outreach was conducted. Various survival strategies can be identified and can be considered as means of "resilience." Buying into/joining the system (through party membership/patronage, or "selling out"), seeking to avoid or insulate oneself from the system (tending one's own garden, and keeping your head down; or "tuning out"), and increasingly emigration ("getting out," and not just among the young) can all be viewed as survival options. "Freaking out," through various flavors of radicalization, was not observed, as potential positive radicalization seems "stuck," and potential negative radicalization towards violent extremism seems to have little allure. These social phenomena are considered more in the Analysis section.

In total the team had 134 respondent interactions, either in interviews or focus groups. 22 people spoke with the team on more than one occasion, which means that the team spoke to 112 unique individuals. More details on the respondent and engagement profile is in the Annex.

The following sections summarize the main themes and findings in more detail. In addition to this thematic review, additional field details are included in the municipal snapshots later in the volume. The team was prepared to include any unique outliers as well – examples of very different points of view, comments, etc. However, there were very few, as commonality across all municipalities and respondents groups was striking. Please note that while a number of direct (translated) statements are provided below in quotation marks, other sentiments are paraphrased for clarity and brevity.

Governance

(Dis)satisfaction

There is an *almost universal* sense of dissatisfaction. Not a single interviewee or FG participant said she or he was happy – or even satisfied – with the situation in BiH. People do feel attached to their communities, and they value their neighbors, history, and natural resources, but all complain about how the political system operates. At this local level, far away from Sarajevo (or Banja Luka or Mostar for that matter), the situation seems even more depressing than in these (relatively) bustling and wealthy cities. Respondents live in predominantly depopulated (and depopulating) communities, where economic difficulties are even more visible than in cities or larger towns. Throughout the course of discussions, when talking about corruption, the issue of governance and politics came up in tandem; the reverse was also true. Corruption is seen as inextricably linked with government and politics. They are a singularity.

- The ethnic principle in public employment was raised by most respondents as a problem; nowhere, however, as strikingly as in Brčko. We heard at length how ethnic

representation is paramount at every level of government. Every party has their own piece of the pie; "it's like written in stone" (Brčko, youth organization, 1st round)

- "BiH politicians are the cause of all problems." (Bihać, politician, female, 1st round)
- "The cancers of society are justice, healthcare, and education." (Doboj, university professor/politician, male, 1st round)
- "BiH is not a real state" (Maglaj, politician, male, 1st round)
- In Glamoč, participants in our FG complained that every employment opportunity has to go through a political party. "Even to get a seasonal job to dig potatoes, it has to go through a party" (Glamoč, FG participant, female, all nodded, 3rd round)
- A large majority of respondents recognize incompetence in state and public institutions as one of the biggest social problems. Nepotism, employment, and promotion through the party system at the expense of professionalism and meritocracy is taking its toll. Respondents spoke about a related degradation in the quality of public services. "A key issue is the presence of incompetent people within the institutions." (Srebrenik, activist, male, 1st round)
- "300 people are employed in the municipality administration. Way too many considering the needs. In the city council, SNSD and SDA collaborate behind the curtains and they are uneducated people. They are both thieves." (B. Petrovac, activist, female, 1st round)
- "Most of the money from the cantonal government goes to 'administration,' intended as the political/electoral machine. We have administration that is too large that the authorities will not cut because it is a voting machine that operates according to the equation 1 employee = 10 voters." (Žepče, public official, male, 1st round)

Belonging, inter-group relationships and solidarity

Respondents expressed a lot of frustration with a BiH that is not a state with functional institutions or effective laws that cater to the interests and needs of its citizens. Positive sentiments, when expressed, relate to one's community – a town or a village, in some cases a wider geographic region. The majority of respondents want to see a positive change – a stable, functional, and prosperous state – but do not know how to achieve this. Not all, however, were without a vision; some of their ideas are listed at the end of this section.

- "We feel abandoned by Sarajevo." (Bihać, politician, female, 1st round)
- In Glamoč, people feel detached from the rest of BiH. The biggest sentiment is towards Krajina; they identify themselves as part of Lower Krajina (Glamoč, public official, male, 1st round)
- More people are turning to agriculture during the pandemic. "They have more time and they also see this as a way to be more self-reliable in case of further crisis." (Žepče, public official, male, 2nd round)
- "I want to live with Serbs, with Croats, with Bosniaks, and have a politician who works for all of us." (Glamoč, FG participant, female, 3rd round)
- "Local governments don't have much influence; everything is at the level of Banja Luka." (Mrkonjić Grad, activist, male, 3rd round)

Exhibit 89: BiH as an experiment in state building

BiH as an experiment in state building

"If our country is an experiment, it's an experiment that has lasted too long." (Srebrenik, public official, male, 1st round)

Despite or perhaps precisely because the system is not functioning, people feel drawn to each other – for support, for business, for common interest, or simply for friendship. Despite painful memories of the war that are still alive, there is a very genuine sense of BiH people being warm and accepting of each other and of others. One just has to remember that despite the terrible crimes committed in the 1990s, there have been very few acts of revenge over the subsequent 25 years. This is particularly noteworthy, as we repeatedly heard that victims cross paths with those who harmed them in towns where they still reside. To live with this pain and do nothing – that is a topic that exceeds the capacity of this report. However, the coping mechanism has not been revenge, or violence.

Another observed trend is a slow but visible process of civic groups spontaneously organizing to defend a common good, be it a river, a park, or a gallery. These are very tangible, visible causes, that are close to home and understandable.

- "The town wanted to close a public gallery. People protested, an informal group of students occupied the gallery for five days. It was a great action, even people from Belgrade came." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- The local community used the mechanism of public discussion to prevent construction of a stonepit as they think it would jeopardize the development of tourism. Terme Kakmuž is a project they support. (Petrovo, public official, female, 3rd round)
- "BiH is a charitable country (*sevap nacija*), people like to help; but it is also a nation of non-bothering (*nezamjeranja*). People do not want to confront others, fearing that someday they may need help or service from a person they confront. And thus they choose to stay silent." (Brčko, journalist, male, 1st round)
- Local people started reconstruction of an Orthodox church in Gornji Rakovac on Ozren mountain which was supported by the Maglaj municipality and local businessmen, "many of them Bosniak." (Doboj, university professor/politician, male, 1st round)
- "People do not know their individual rights; people do not know their potential power." (B. Petrovac, youth activists, 1st round)

COVID-19 also contributed to some sense of community solidarity. A general impression from conversations since the beginning of the pandemic is that people respected the measures instituted to prevent the spread of the virus, particularly at the beginning. There was even a sense that people were glad to be mobilized around a common goal, and welcomed the chance to work in solidarity on a common cause. Since the easing of measures, the reduction

of the sense of immediate risk, and contradictory information that has circulated in the media, there is both more defeatism that anything can be done, and also genuine concern on how BiH is going to cope if the virus infects a larger number of people.

The sense of cautious discounting of COVID-19 expressed by some is fed by the notion that there are other diseases out there, but that there are many other maladies that are also troubling BiH society. In spite of a general understanding of the rationale for the initial shutdowns, economic concerns seem to be as strong, if not stronger, than the fear of the virus. This is especially the case in places like Glamoč where they were not "hit" by COVID-19. In contrast, Maglaj, which suffered more, showed people the risk of infectious spread. Also, there are people who state – ironically or genuinely - that BiH cannot be strongly affected by the virus as one of protective measures – social distancing – is a way of life in many communities (Bočinja (Maglaj); Glamoč).

Those who do worry about the unpreparedness of BiH to face any potential larger number of people infected, perhaps unsurprisingly include professionals, medical staff, teachers, and mayors. Their common conclusion is that the country was lucky in the first wave, but has not sufficiently learned lessons from this initial phase and is not better prepared if in the fall the virus becomes more detrimental. Online schooling has to be improved in terms of instruction and the support that teachers need to optimize their work; hospitals need protocols and clear instructions to protect the medical staff but not at the expense of patients (including patients in need of medical attention for reasons other than COVID-19); enough protective equipment needs to be secured. Municipal officials worry that they have limited resources to support local businesses, as assistance from the cantonal or entity level has been extremely limited, if available at all.

- "In Glamoč in the past people did not have electricity for six months; they are accustomed to difficult situations. The topic of corona virus has become more a topic for jokes." (Glamoč, public official, male, 2nd round)
- "Neither the canton nor any other levels are helping." (Maglaj, politician, male, 3rd round)
- "Not all teachers were ready and up to the task. Some did not know how to turn the camera on, they are not comfortable with technology." (Brčko, FG participant, female, 3rd round)

If there is one possibly positive outcome of the COVID-19 crisis is that people have turned to more household agriculture as a backstop; more land has been turned into farmland, as such awareness of protecting the environment is rising. (This was heard in Bosanski Petrovac, Maglaj, Žepče, and Cazin (near Bihać). In terms of the broader economic impact, in April a youth respondent from Bosanski Petrovac noted that where you don't have much, at least you don't have much to lose.

Public Health

The healthcare sector is consistently identified as among the worst elements of the public sector in BiH, and this sentiment was expressed in discussions.[301] The COVID-19 crisis served as an additional spotlight on the already troubled health sector in BiH. One of the first stories reported in the crisis was an incident at the University Hospital Clinic in Mostar where procedures in treating a COVID-19 patient were breached, endangering the medical staff and patients.[302] The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) published an article on the Mostar incident in which an individual interviewed said, "…instead of fighting the virus, energy will be wasted on 'covering up negligence, irresponsibility, nepotism and favoritism during a pandemic'." The article continues to explain that, "some even labeled the incident as a 'terrorist attack.'"[303] People throughout BiH are aware of events like this, and it shapes their own outlooks.

Words commonly heard from respondents in relation to the health sector were, "underfunded," "incompetent," and "corrupt." To be fair, many people also noted that medical staff acted professionally and were devoted to their patients. But these sentiments were nearly always followed by comments that these people cannot do their job properly because of politics. There are quality individuals who *could* add value but the system impedes this. Respondents say that parties place *their people* – typically incompetent, but reliable – in management positions in hospitals. They stifle professionalism and suppress initiative and advancement based on merit – helping drive departures from the health sector. In Srebrenik, the team heard that syndicates of doctors and dentists, through organized actions, are trying to improve the status of medical professionals in BiH to stem their emigration. Whether this may work - and whether it could be replicated - remains to be seen.

The COVID-19 crisis only accentuated problems in healthcare, with many stories of inadequate procedures put in place to fight the virus and protect the medical staff – as well as the patients. Lack of protective equipment is reported everywhere – there are not enough masks and gloves and other equipment for hospitals. Layered on top of a citizenry already distrustful about the government's use and allocation of resources, there was a basic sense that people viewed this as simply the latest example of public resource "asset stripping" (authors' term). However, with the exceptions of Maglaj and Brčko, the lack of significant COVID-19 spread in these municipalities was viewed as a stroke of good luck – rather than good or effective governance.

- "Pray for yourself if you have to go to our hospital." (Bihać, politician, female, 3rd round)
- "There was a shortage of everything. One mask for two days, one pair of gloves for the whole day." (Srebrenik, professional, male, 3rd round)

---

[301] In relation to COVID-19, the online survey showed that BiH respondents overwhelmingly rated their health systems as unprepared for the pandemic: 64% aggregate (30% very unprepared pluc 34% unprepared) versus 16% (14% prepared and 2% very prepared). 16% responded neutrally, and 4% with "don't know."

[302] "Mostar: Tragi-komedija u doba korone" ("Mostar: Tragi-comedy in the time of corona"). *Deutsche Welle*, March 19, 2020. Available at https://www.dw.com/bs/mostar-tragi-komedija-u-doba-korone/a-52836922

[303] "Bosnians Blame Corruption for Allowing Coronavirus to Spread." OCCRP. March 20, 2020. Available at https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/11874-bosnians-blame-corruption-for-allowing-coronavirus-to-spread

- "After the 'ventilators affair,' people believe in the conspiracy theory according to which politicians are taking advantage of the coronavirus so that they can steal even more." (Žepče, professional, female, 3rd round).

  "People do not know what is the real story behind COVID-19; they believe the official explanation, but also think that there is something else behind." (Bihać, politician, female, 2nd round)

Environmental Degradation

It is enough to drive through BiH to see the environmental damage that has been done to the country. On the road from Sarajevo to Bihać, one encounters a case in point as one passes the "mini" hydroelectric point station on the Lašva River. This concrete structure dwarfs the narrow river valley, utterly incongruent with the descriptor "mini." The landscape is still beautiful, but is degraded and polluted. Discussions show that awareness is steadily rising among people, with COVID-19 having some effect as well in terms of the general sense of safety - of human security - that people feel, or the lack thereof. As the virus affects respiratory organs, people are beginning to realize the importance of the air they breathe.

The practice of throwing garbage on roadsides, in rivers, or in the woods, is still a common practice. It seems that part of it has to do with inadequate garbage collection services, and part with little sense of a shared commons to be owned and protected by people in a community, and for a community.

Exhibit 90: If Nobody Will, I Will

If nobody will, I will

The team heard a story of a local citizen activist, a professional taxi driver, who got so annoyed with the garbage thrown around that he started to clean it up himself. He also invested in cameras that he put on illegal garbage dump sites once cleaned. A few other enthusiasts joined and they formed a Facebook group (https://m.facebook.com/s1prirodaidrustvobih/) in which they announce their activities, and also post pictures of people caught on camera throwing out garbage. Apparently, all sites with cameras installed remain clean from illegal dumping. This activist group has grown quite popular in the community. (Srebrenik, public official, male, 3rd round)

The team heard numerous stories about illegal logging, with respondents noting that the business is lucrative, and politicians and judges are corrupt, so it pays off to bribe them and destroy BiH's forest for profit. In depopulated Glamoč, on the other hand, a respondent said that there are not many problems with illegal logging due to the fact that there are simply no people around who would do it.

The fear of floods – an issue very closely tied to the environment – is very much alive in the Bosna River valley, and the team heard about flooding problems in Maglaj, Žepče, and Petrovo. Memories of the 2014 floods are still fresh and any heavy rain causes anxiety among people who have not seen preventive actions taken to avert a repeat of the disaster in the

future. Garbage thrown into rivers is seen as yet another contributor to floods; people report as well as that needed protective infrastructure has not been built.

Mini eco flow hydropower plants probably cause the highest level of environmental awareness among people. Activists report corruption in the public issuing of concessions; a transaction for either past deeds or anticipated rewards.

- "Water is our resource. We don't need Hans or Putin to govern our water resources; you can't claim that Bosnia is yours if you sell the water" (*Bosna moja, a voda tvoja*) (Bihać, entrepreneur, male, 1st round)
- "The Law on Combatting Corruption and Organized Crime in FBiH is not implemented. On departure, SDP adopted this law which asks for the creation of a special body to fight corruption (such as USKOK in Croatia). This body has not been established. We now have a legal vacuum – no one is accountable for corruption in illegal logging, for example." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- In Šipovo, the team heard that the construction of three small hydropower plants is planned near the Janjski otoci watershed. However, even protests can be politicized. "The fishermen who are now protesting are actually doing so on the mayor's orders, so that the current owner would be left without a concession in order to grant it to someone close to mayor." (Pecka, Mrkonjić Grad, FG participant, male, 3rd round)
- "Around 120 hydropower plants have been planned in the RS alone. The magic words are *mini*, *eco*, *flow* – so you think they cause no damage. But they are even worse than conventional ones." (Pecka, Mrkonjić Grad, FG participant, male, 3rd round)

It is interesting to note that at the end of the third round of field visits in June, media reported that SDA announced that it was going to ban/freeze construction of new plants.[304] One of the research team members with long experience in environmental activism suggested that this reflects fear from that party that they could do poorly in the autumn local elections, and that they realized that this is an issue important to voters at the local level. SNSD made a similar announcement a few days later.[305] This shows some party awareness of citizen interests and frustration; however she noted concern that these announcements are solely related to election hopes in the short-term, and not to a genuine and lasting "greening" of either party platforms.

---

[304] "Nije satira nego bezobrazluk: Nakon što su uništili rijeke, SDA traži zaustavljanje izgradnje mini hidroelektrana." ("Not satire but impertinence: After destroying rivers, SDA seeks to stop construction of mini hydropower plants.") June 23, 2020 https://zurnal.info/novost/23183/nakon-sto-su-unistili-rijeke-sda-trazi-zaustavljanje-izgradnje-mini-hidroelektrana; "Klub SDA traži zabranu izgradnje malih hidroelektrana u FBiH." (The SDA club is seeking a ban on the construction of small hydropower plants in the FBiH.) June 23, 2020 https://www.sda.ba/vijest/klub-sda-trazi-zabranu-izgradnje-malih-hidroelektrana-u-fbih/723
[305] "I RS neće mini hidroelektrane." ("The RS also does not want mini hydro power plants.") June 29, 2020 https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/i-rs-nece-mini-hidroelektrane-568672

Market Functionality

As the economy is one of the most pressing problems confronting BiH citizens, it is no surprise that they had a lot to say about its dire condition. People spoke about politics controlling everything, including economic affairs. At the same time they recognize that BiH has much to offer and could be self-sustaining, and even a rich country, if only politics would be put in the service of development.

- "We would grow if we could sell our products." The perception is that the state favors import lobbies and disregards local producers. (Glamoč, FG participant, female, 3rd round)
- "People would produce more if they could sell their products." (Bočinja, FG participant, female, 3rd round)
- "Companies became like small Balkan states - the director humiliates the manager, the manager oppresses the worker, and in this way the state also functions; the higher level exploits the lower levels, and ordinary people are paying the price." (Pecka, Mrkonjić Grad, FG participant, male 3rd round)

Youth

The team heard two opposing sentiments regarding the situation of and perspective for youth in BiH, including from young people themselves. The first was one of optimism – a sense that young people, unburdened by the past and fluent in new technologies and global modernity can bring change to the country. Youth see the potential in BiH and are prepared to stay and fight for a better future in BiH. Among these optimistic respondents, there was also criticism of other young people for being too passive and unwilling to get out of their comfort zone, get active, and work for change in their society.

The second sentiment is one of depression and a sense of bewilderment with what lies ahead. These young people say they would *like* to stay, but have no hope that the situation in BiH can improve in time for them to build their lives here. Some of these more pessimistic young people related stories they have heard from home about vote-buying, corruption, and patronage. It is common knowledge among them that one should join a political party to get a job.

- "Politicians do not listen to young people." (Bihać, activist, male, 1st round)
- "Young people are not active enough." (B. Petrovac, activist, male, 1st round)
- "Young people are lethargic." (Brčko, activist, male, 1st round)
- "Young people learn about democracy in abstract terms, but they do not know how the country functions, how to perform basic civic duties (pay taxes) or exercise civic rights." (Brčko, FG participant, female, 3rd round)

Exhibit 91: Young, and Depressed

> ### Young, and depressed
>
> *The Brčko youth focus group stands out from the rest of young people we talked to in our field visits – none of them (eight) believed in the possibility of positive change in BiH. They all had plans to leave BiH, immediately or as a reserve option. Perhaps this is understandable given the experience they shared with us:*
>
> *In Brčko, the president of a class in an elementary school has to fill an ethnic quota – every year a president among children aged six to fourteen has to come from a different ethnic group. A problem arises if, for example, there is no Croat child in a class to fill this post. Then the teacher has the task of formally pronouncing someone as a Croat to satisfy this formality.*
>
> *The annual selection of the best student in a high school also has to satisfy this ethnic principle – the best student each year has to come from a different ethnic group. Thus, meritocracy, which should be the criteria to select the best student of the year, is trumped by ethnic identity. What can one expect from young people who have been nurtured in this system? It is no wonder that they want to leave. (Described by a youth FG participant, youth, female, 3rd round*

Brain-drain

Closely related to the topic of the position of youth in BiH, is the issue of emigration and brain drain. People in every age group leave, but young people, particularly educated ones, are disproportionately represented. This emigration has acquired epic proportions – we drove through towns and villages where abandoned public pools and ruined cultural facilities tell a story of lively communities in the past, nowadays populated primarily by older people and retirees. BiH is being stripped of its most valuable resource – human capital.

- "There is an exodus of young people, it is easier for them." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- "Many young people would like to stay, but they leave because there is no perspective for them here." (Brčko, activist, female, 3rd round)
- "Leaving is a choice, it is also a global process; the question is can we use it? Create a global community, new ideas." (Bihać, politician, male, 1st round)
- "Bosnia is a subject to an organized plan to depopulate the country, to move everybody to Germany and empty Bosnia." (Mrkonjić Grad, public official, male, 1st round)
- "Everybody is leaving, women in particular. It is easier to marry a girl from Belgrade, Split, or Sarajevo, than a local girl. They do not want to stay because there is a lot of hard work." (Glamoč, public official, male, 1st round)

Corruption

All respondents identified corruption as one of the primary and most important problems burdening BiH society. This sentiment is seen regardless of age, location, gender, or

presumed ethno-national identification. Similarly, when prompted to consider what should be fixed first in BiH, almost universally, the judiciary and education were noted; everything else came after that. People are aware of the scope of the problem at the macro and micro levels; and people know that party patronage and clientelism sustain corruption. They also feel they have no instruments to fight this, even if they would like to. They feel powerless. A sense of fear (loss of job, but also other methods of retaliation) keeps people under control and silent. There is no shortage of knowledge of how pervasive corruption is, yet what is missing is a popular sense that they can confront it effectively; a sense likely based on the paucity of any evident effective punitive consequences for corrupt officials. They see that corruption has been built into the BiH political system, and that fighting against it requires changing the system.

- "Corruption is the biggest problem in BiH." (Bihać, public official, male 1st round)
- "Corruption – it's just how we live, how people cope." (Brčko, activist, male, 1st round)
- "The cantonal government only knows how to employ people. *That* is their corruption. Even in this corona crisis, there was new employment – six people here, four there. The administration is exploding." (Bihać, politician, female, 2nd round)
- "Patronage is a problem – you have to be in a political party to get a job in the system."(Brčko, activist, male, 1st round)
- "Corruption is *systematic* in nature, governmental institutions are directly involved and political parties are generators not as political organizations, but as interest groups." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- "Corruption and a lack of perspective is killing BiH." (Maoča (Maglaj), public official, male, 1st round)
- "Why don't people do something? *Fear*; if you speak up you can lose your job." (Pecka, Mrkonjić Grad, FG participant, female, 3rd round)

While COVID-19 came up in discussions about governance and public administration, it was also raised in discussions on corruption. Corruption during the corona crisis related to purchase of ventilators and protective equipment is seen by respondents as just more proof that BiH is deeply dysfunctional and that its politicians, even in the worst of circumstances, are ready to trade the country's health for private profit.

Extremism

As much as we have looked for trails of extremism and radicalization at the local level, we found little to report - and little sense that respondents see this as a threat or an issue. As explained above, this could be related to the municipalities selected. However, as a small country, respondents also did not indicate fears about extremism from outside their immediate communities, so spillover was not noted as a threat.

Extremist and polarizing politics *was* noted consistently; the overall sentiment expressed is that political parties' control and manipulation of BiH society is so strong that *they* are the most persistent source of extreme and radical anti-democratic politics. That is, institutionalized extremism and institutionalized propagation of fear of extremism coming from "the other." In these nine municipalities, we did not hear about existing groups of extremists, organized violent nationalists, or hooligans. If there are some incidents, they are

usually dismissed as either being a phase in youth development/identity seeking, or just sporadic events that have no larger impact on the community. Nor did we hear fears expressed of "their" (the other's) extremists posing a proximate threat to them – not once.

- **Far-right wing/nationalist**
  - "Sometime around Orthodox Christmas, there were pictures of some guys wearing *Kokarda* (Četnik insignia on a Serb *šajkaca* hat) in a kafana; but it's not a big deal." (B. Petrovac, retired teacher, female with a Bosniak name, 1st round)
  - "You see some graffiti etc., Srbska čast etc., but it's a passing phase; a lot of kids get into it, and then just as quickly move on." (Brčko, youth organization, 1st round)

- **Islamist/militants jihadists**
  - We heard that Maoča is frustrated with its association with Gornja Maoča.[306] People have problems when crossing a border because when police sees their residence, they immediately pull them aside for questioning (Maoča, public official, male, 1st round)
  - In general, Maoča residents do not have problem with the Salafi community; they mostly work in agriculture and stay private. It is unfair to focus on the Salafi community in BiH. "Where is their center? *In Vienna*, not here." (Maoča, public official, male, 1st round)
  - "These parents are just like any other parents; perhaps only these mothers have more kids." (Gornja Maoča, teacher, female, 1st round)
  - In a conversation with an Islamic Community official, we heard about the specific nature of the Islam in BiH that is understood as a value and sustained. "We don't exclude." The imam knows the majority of BiH Muslims drink, but they still consider them to be Muslims (Maglaj, Islamic Community official, 1st round)
  - "The religious community is linked to politics. The imam is also the director of the elementary school. There's a corrupted Islamic community. Local criminals/war profiteers in mosques are in the first *saf* (row)." (Srebrenik, activist, male, 1st round)

- **Other**
  - "The biggest extremism is domestic violence and alcoholism." (Mrkonjić Grad, youth organization, 3rd round)
  - What else causes problems? "Provocative politics of diaspora; Bosniaks fled in 1992 and Serbs in 1995. They do not live here, but use banal reasons to quarrel, e.g. in a humanitarian action – the diaspora will not give money to the "other side," while local people give donations without prejudice." (B. Petrovac, youth organization, 1st round)
  - It has been noticed that there is emergence of some Serb civilian patrols in the surrounding villages, an attempt to prevent damage of property by migrants;

---

[306] Which is itself unfairly maligned; see explanation in the Maglaj Municipality Snapshot.

they feel the police are not doing enough (B. Petrovac, international official, male, 3rd round)

- o "Extremism – not really a thing. People here work hard, in forestry; the winters are hard and the days are short." (Glamoč, public official, male, 1st round)

Exhibit 91: 10 Women in Bočinja (Maglaj): Different Lifestyles, Similar Lives

10 Women in Bočinja (Maglaj): Different Lifestyles, Similar Lives

Our conversation with women in Bočinja was friendly, open and, at moments, quite jolly. The women were happy they were invited to meet, to get out of their houses and do something quite different. They all work in agriculture; only one of the women was employed (as a teacher). Both Salafi and Serb women complain about the state of the BiH economy, and fear that eventually all BiH youth will leave the country. They are used to a hard life and they would like to stay, but they do not call it a life, just bare existence. They fear environmental degradation, and note that waste thrown into rivers blocks the free flow of water and creates floods if there is rain. None mentioned any ethnic, religious, or political divisive issue among them. Social distance is their way of life in sparsely populated settlements. They therefore do not fear COVID-19, but rather poverty and economic hardship – and floods.

When asked how to improve the situation in BiH, what recommendations would you have? The response, said in an ironic, joking way clearly grounded in frustration, "apply the Ceauşescu model to all politicians," received much agreement.

(Bočinja, FG with women, 3rd round)

Migration crisis

Although a review of the migration situation in BiH was not at the core of this research and is beyond the scope of this study, it cannot be excluded from this report. The effect that migrant situation had and is having on the Krajina region, in particular in Bihać, must be mentioned as it affects all aspects of life. People are hearing that a lot of money is being spent to address the situation, but they don't see it, and they don't see the situation improving. The international community is seen as a part of the problem by many, for not addressing the bigger picture issues, and for not addressing the problems that migration is having on the local community.

Exhibit 93: On a Road to Nowhere?

On a Road to Nowhere?

Migrants walking around and large groups sitting outside the accommodation center Miral is the first thing one notices on the outskirts of Velika Kladuša. Miral accommodates young males and has been a place of frequent fights among them. From the outside, the Center appears to be a parking area next to a warehouse, with containers; it does not look like a place for human habitation. The lead field researcher spoke to two policemen who were guarding the entrance to the camp. They seemed quite depressed in explaining their

capacities to tackle the whole migrant situation. They receive a lot of complaints from citizens for crimes committed by migrants, but they can do only so much. When asked what kind of criminal/violent acts occur, they noted cases of migrants forcing themselves into empty houses, shoplifting, or sometimes attacking citizens to steal a phone or money.

However, perhaps the main reason for the sense of overall depression among citizens, including the police, is a sense of powerlessness in the situation where migrants just keep coming. They feel left to struggle on their own, while their resources are limited. (Drive through Krajina, June 21, 2020)

- "Bihać was always a safe city. There is a sense of insecurity now." (Bihać, professional, male, 3rd round)
- "Some people will use the situation to try to radicalize migrants." (Bihać, activist, male, 1st round)
- "There are more problems among the groups of migrants than between the migrants and local residents." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- "Migrants terrify citizens; we do not own our town anymore, migrants do." (Bihać, politicians, female, 1st round)
- One of team members recounted a conversation with a neighbor: A few migrants were swimming across the river fleeing from the police that was waiting for them to take them back to Lipa center. One almost drowns. Locals are upset because it is not easy to watch all that is happening. People are also tired of providing help, they don't have energy any more (Bihać, female, 2nd round)
- "The sentiment of people is changing because, it seems, this is not stopping. Migrants just keep coming and coming." (Bihać, conversation with a citizen, female, 3rd round)
- "Cooperation with the Croatian side on migrant situation is zero, Croatian police are brutal." (Bihać, activist, female, 1st round)
- In a number of conversations we heard that people are angry at the international community because it is telling them that they should be humane to migrants, implying they are treating them in a bad way. "If the international community wants to treat migrants well, why don't they put them on airplanes and fly them to European countries?" (Bihać, conversation with a citizen, male, 3rd round)

A number of respondents in Bihać also spoke about a lucrative business in assisting migrants to illegally cross the border to Croatia. In the course of the research project, the price migrants pay to smugglers apparently increased.

- "Smuggling of people is increasing because it is highly profitable; 5000 Euro to get to Germany." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- "Migrants sell goods they receive on the local market (they need money for "the game" – some 8000 Euro)." (Bihać, international official, female, 2nd round). NB: "The game" is how migrants describe their attempts to cross the border to Croatia.
- "There has been a story that two policemen resigned and are now working as guides for migrants. It is lucrative business, the price has risen from 7000 to 10,000 Euro." (Bihać, politician, female, 3rd round)

Respondent Vision and Recommendations

When asked about the future of the country, the immediate reaction was either silence or a comment that nothing can be done in this system. But if again encouraged to think beyond the current reality, to think out of the box, nearly all respondents got a smile on their face and started speaking about the riches they see around them that are not put to good use.

- "Rural, gastro-, agro-, Yugoslav history, culture, health – all this is potential for tourist development." (B. Petrovac, FG participant, female; all agreed, 3rd round)
- "We are protecting the Bosnian hill horse, bought 140 animals. It is a Bosnian national treasure. Also, therapeutic horseback riding. The project is already ongoing. Kids with autism have been involved in the initiative with good results." (B. Petrovac, FG participant, male, 3rd round)
- "Using and promoting local resources (e.g. houses, vegetables, products) for rural development. We know what the local community within 100 kilometers has to offer." (Pecka, Mrkonjić Grad, FG participant, male, 3rd round)
- "Switzerland is nothing compared to what we could become. One can make good living from organic production, but the authorities must recognize the importance of this production." (Bihać, entrepreneur, male, 1st round)
- "Culture is the most important cohesive element that could stich back BiH (history, archaeology, folklore, gastronomy, music, etc.)" (Mrkonjić Grad, public official, male, 1st round)

People were often not prepared to make recommendations, because no one ever asks them what they think – neither local officials, high-level politicians, or foreign actors. Once activated, the team heard plenty of ideas for positive change in BiH.

- "We have to change the mindset of people." (Bihać, activist, male, 1st round)
- "Reach out to normal people in direct contact, not just via social media. People do not take it seriously if they just see it on Facebook." (Bihać, activist, male, 1st round)
- "Nationality is not important; it's important what kind of person you are." (Petrovo, Orthodox priest, male, 3rd round)
- "Connect people who are active, work with passion, who are 'local stars'." (Bihać, activist, male 1st round)
- "We need to find honest and trustworthy people to form a party across ethnic groups and win at fair elections and lead the country in the interests of all citizens." (Srebrenik, professional, male, 3rd round)
- "We need to acknowledge the right of next generations to inherit a clean, healthy and sustainable environment." (Bihać, entrepreneur, male, 1st round)
- "Biggest problems in BiH are judiciary and education; without fixing them, nothing can change." (Bihać, public official, male, 1st round)
- "The system has to be simplified; too much administration, too many layers." (B. Petrovac, retiree, female, 1st round)

- "Politicians should be given only one electoral chance. If they fail to maintain their promises, they should not be allowed a new mandate." (B. Petrovac, FG participant, male, 3rd round)
- "Institutional change can occur with the elimination of the current regime, the way Romania did with Ceaușescu. Radical measures are painful but pay off in the long run." (male, professional, 1st round)
- "BiH needs a 50-year strategy. People's enlightenment needs to happen through education." (Brčko, journalist, male, 1st round)
- "BiH needs to hit rock bottom to start to change." (Mrkonjić Grad, activist, male, 3rd round)

Findings: Fieldwork In North Macedonia

Ivan Stefanovski and Dimitar Nikolovski

> ### *Key Findings*
>
> - In terms of corruption, links to urban planning, construction, and development are common, and can transcend political party dynamics through relationships with both the party in power and the party in opposition at any given time.
> - Gostivar and Veles stand out as localities that are exhibiting a number of examples of good practice in terms of civil society and inter-group cooperation.
> - The merit system in public employment is virtually non-existent; political parties act as the main "hiring agencies."
> - Trust in the judicial system and the police is low, in some municipalities falling below even the lowest expectations.
> - In municipalities without a record of Islamic radicalism, the common opinion is that poor Roma are being paid to dress in a Salafist manner.
> - VMRO-DPMNE has exploited the resentment of Macedonian nationalists, and has been behind the formation Macedonian Patriotic Organizations (MPOs) of varying size and substance.
> - Right-wing extremism is far more present among ethnic Macedonians than is religious radicalization; although among other communities such as ethnic Albanians, there are some early indications that trends could take a worrying turn.
> - Other right-wing organizations apart from the MPOs exist and are present in the public sphere with limited influence; given a particular political context (such as a leader serving as a unifying force) their influence and presence could grow.
> - Religious Islamist or Salafist radicalization is in decline, but not eradicated. Communities in Skopje, Struga, and Gostivar remain vulnerable.
> - The lack of environmental protection is an urgent statewide problem. In particular, corruption in waste management procurement should be addressed for political and practical reasons.
> - Organized crime still flourishes, in particular in border areas, and it is still largely tolerated by the authorities.

The research team in North Macedonia visited nine communities in eight municipalities in order to talk to citizens and hear more about the problems they face in their daily lives, their grievances, and also the opportunities they see in their communities. Guided by the initial research framework and questions aiming to explore corruption as a potential driver of radicalization or even violent extremism, the team also delved more deeply into topics such as (dis)satisfaction with governance, the (lack of) trust in state and political institutions, and the specific issue of environmental corruption. While it is not an easy task to say whether there is more or less religious and/or political radicalization compared to several years ago, the fieldwork findings map key societal problems in the researched communities through a more granular perspective, highlighting the specific challenges of these communities.

In total, researchers formally spoke to 80 people, either in individual interviews or focus groups, both on and off the record. It was often difficult to find female interlocutors. The focus on issues like religion, corruption, and extremism led the team into what is still a male dominated realm. And in smaller communities – particularly among minorities – women are often not in the public sphere. (A dedicated and concerted effort to focus solely on the views of women on all of these society and policy issues would be a useful endeavor.) Shaped by the semi-structured research framework, some key themes emerged fairly consistently, and are reviewed more in the sub-sections below. While a number of direct (translated) statements are provided in quotation marks, other sentiments have been paraphrased for clarity and brevity.

Governance

(Dis)Satisfaction

In general, respondents are dissatisfied with the state of governance. This is particularly the case among opponents to VMRO-DPMNE who had been active in the Colorful Revolution in 2016, who indicate disappointment with the current SDSM-led government, and frustration with "broken promises" related to bringing corrupt officials to justice. This is exemplified by the escape of Nikola Gruevski from justice (and out of the country),[307] and the fact that no one from VMRO-DPMNE who was prosecuted by the Special Prosecutor's Office is currently serving time. However, some interlocutors, for example in Veles, see a noticeable difference between the two administrations at the local level, as pressure on journalists has stopped, and the construction business in the city center has been put to a halt. [308]

Exhibit 94: Lack of justice as a driver of dissatisfaction

> ### Lack of justice as a driver of dissatisfaction
>
> *"The main issue at the local level, everywhere in Macedonia, is failure to respect the law. Laws are not equal for everyone in this country…" (Struga respondent, ethnic Albanian)*
>
> Similar sentiments were shared by interlocutors in Veles, Tetovo, and Skopje. An interlocutor from Tetovo claims that the biggest injustice imposed on him is that he is living in a "sick society." Younger interlocutors from Skopje believe that it is a great injustice that their friends feel they must leave the country in order to find a better future for themselves in more organized and just societies. The fact that no one has taken responsibility for what has happened in the country during the last three decades is the overarching narrative of disappointed interlocutors.

---

[307] Gruevski remains in Hungary, which refuses to extradite him. Marusic, Sinisa Jakov. "Hungary Refuses to Extradite Gruevski to North Macedonia." *Balkan Insight*. June 27, 2019. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/27/hungary-refuses-to-extradite-gruevski-to-north-macedonia/

[308] In this particular case, the "new old" liberal SDSM mayor came back to power, and is thought to be a decent person, especially when compared to more partisan politicians. He is an engineer by profession, so may be able to bring these skills to bear in more effective and thoughtful urban planning.

A small "oasis of satisfaction" noted is the still stable inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations in some of the municipalities, secured by inclusive and integrative local policies. The adoption of the Law on Languages in 2019, whose provisions went beyond the requirements of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, made North Macedonia a more bilingual country and further relaxed inter-ethnic relations. Additionally, the decisions by the local (municipal) councils to exceed the minimum requirements prescribed by law and give extended language rights to certain communities at the local level is another good example. This positive practice can be found in Kumanovo, Chair, Struga, and Gostivar.

Another reason for satisfaction is seen in the vibrant and progressive civil society organizations which can be found in some of the municipalities, especially those active in the cultural sphere, and to at least some extent supported by the local governments. Positive examples can be seen in Veles, Struga, and Gostivar, and were noted not only by individuals directly involved in these NGOs, but by other citizens as well. While they are the result of local initiatives, they are dependent on international funding to a significant degree.

Exhibit 95: Remittances and entrepreneurial spirit can keep people home

Remittances and entrepreneurial spirit can keep people home

"In Struga, there are a lot of remittances coming from people with successful businesses abroad. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial spirit and the vicinity to Albania and Greece expand the market and should be seen as an opportunity." (Struga, young entrepreneur)

In the ethnically mixed Northwest and Southwest of the country, economic optimism is much greater than in the central and eastern parts of North Macedonia. Still, the main grievances, such as lack of access to well-paid jobs and general economic hardship, represented the dominant narrative heard by the research team.

- A general dissatisfaction with governance can be sensed among citizens mainly due to official impunity and the lack of rule of law; this is in particular among activists and active citizens who have continuously advocated for tectonic changes.
- Embracing and even exceeding international human rights standards on issues like the adoption of the Law on Languages can improve inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations.
- Some visible examples of satisfaction and progress by civil society in parts of the country can help to increase the prospects of local youth.
- Reports of new inter-ethnic business relations that subsequently lead to friendships give hope for further improvement of inter-ethnic relations. (businessman, Struga)
- Quality can still trump politics or other concerns in hiring; "Albanian business owners employ many ethnic Macedonians, because they care about quality." (Male focus group participant, Tetovo)

Trust

North Macedonia can be described as a low trust society. During interviews and focus groups, and as evident in the online survey, strong mistrust towards both local and central government institutions was directly noted, and can be felt. In this vein, and based on these consultations, the courts, the decentralized institutions of the central government, and the police are probably the least trusted in the country.

Distrust towards the police (see more on corruption below) is a phenomenon which is widely present in many of the analyzed municipalities. Mistrust stems from personal experience or general familiarity with corrupt acts by police officers themselves, ranging from the informal pardoning of traffic violations (often including a cash payment/bribe), to their alignment with local criminal structures. However, the main structural problem in terms of police bodies and police officers is partisan employment and the incorporation of former criminal elements and structures into high positions within the police, which leads to citizens being disenchanted and mistrustful of the police. Tetovo and Veles interlocutors in particular noted doubts about the police in their local communities.

Mistrust in the judiciary, in particular the courts and public prosecution offices, is another issue that disillusions citizens and pushes them further into resignation and a sense that nothing can be improved to ensure a just system. In every single municipality that the research team visited, courts were pinpointed as havens of corruption, nepotism, and politicization, thus reinforcing and reflecting a fundamental distrust. There is a widespread perception that the judiciary, instead of being the backbone of society, has largely let citizens down in the past three decades of independence.

Trust in political parties is North Macedonia is among the lowest in the region.[309] However, having in mind the level of political party patronage of state institutions and cronyism in the political system, citizens often find membership in or support for political parties as the only way to gain a secure and steady job in the public sector, which is viewed as the solution to their main problems – unemployment and economic uncertainty. Furthermore, the generally low trust in institutions and their often poor functionality paradoxically drives citizens to think that political parties and their institutions, although largely despised, are the only solution for their problems. Political parties are hated, but are believed to be the actors that "get things done."

Overall, field work reveals commonality among respondents that the general trust in good governance, rule of law, an independent judiciary, and generally functional and professional institutions, albeit in decay for years, fully deteriorated during the rule of VMRO-DPMNE and its authoritarian leader Nikola Gruevski. The wiretapped conversations released by the then-leader of the opposition and future PM Zoran Zaev initiated Gruevski's demise, but also established the practice of publishing recorded material whose origin is not entirely clear. Subsequent wiretapped conversations released by multiple sources in the following five years exacerbated the influence of "post-truth politics," of the emergence of websites with

---

[309]Western Balkans Regional Poll. February 2 – March 6, 2020. *Center for Insights in Survey Research/International Republican Institute (IRI)*. Available at: https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/final_wb_poll_for_publishing_6.9.2020.pdf

doubtful origin and no imprint, and contributes to a society with the lowest resilience to fake news in Europe.[310] This has resulted in ample dissatisfaction in governance and politics in general.

- "It is difficult to make the people happy! If they see a big number of police, they ask 'why so many.' If there are no police, then they ask 'where is the police'. The problem for me is that the police are only in the center of the city, and we in the outskirts feel less safe." (Veles, Male focus group participant)
- "Even though the central and local government are ruled by SDSM, VMRO rules factually within Shtip. This is because the party has employed the majority of employees in the whole public sector, so they are loyal to the party." (Shtip, Male businessman)

Belonging/inter-group relationship/solidarity

A very common comment from interlocutors is that "values have been lost," referring to brighter times during Yugoslavia, when, as put by a respondent in Veles, everyone "knew their place and position" in society, and people respected and were polite to one another. Ironically, this sentiment is also shared by the younger generation, despite the fact that they did not live in those times, suggesting a transferred nostalgia from their elders. As opposed to before, today there are complaints that people are not polite to one another, and that there is no care for the public good, as evidenced in the destruction of playgrounds, parks, etc. A sense of solidarity is missing. The nostalgic sentiments have a lot to do with the idea that in Yugoslav times there was the prospect of upward mobility based on merit. However, this nostalgia holds true much more for ethnic Macedonians rather than ethnic Albanians and other smaller communities, as Macedonians were favored in terms of positions in Yugoslavia.

Spread throughout every municipality visited is dissatisfaction with the economic situation, which has led citizens, and especially younger ones, to leave, either for Skopje or abroad. This contributes to a sense of loss of "family values" and the demise of the traditional extended families to which people were accustomed, in particular in the smaller municipalities outside of the capital. This dislocation is then transferred to public life as a sense of alienation "from the community."

Exhibit 96: Even patriots flee the state

Even patriots flee the state
The team asked activists from Macedonian patriotic organizations, "Where are the patriots?" Responses from two of them help to understand why even people who mobilize as "patriots" are thinking about emigration.   - "They can't take the injustice anymore. Your kid is a straight A student, yet he works as a waiter in Malta, while some F student gets a 'stellar career.'"   - "You break into a store and steal 7 - 8,000 denars, and you get incarcerated. Someone

---

[310] Mackintosh, Eliza. "Finland is winning the war on fake news. What it's learned may be crucial to Western democracy." *CNN*. May 2019. Available at
https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/05/europe/finland-fake-news-intl/

An ethnic Albanian interlocutor in Tetovo complained about the "lack of *charshija* life", i.e. the lack of vibrant civil society or "commons" in a Gramscian sense,[311] whereby people with different interests participate in communal activities creating a sense of community. The lack of such civil society is visible in the complaints in smaller municipalities about the lack of functional youth centers which would offer extra-curricular activities for young people. The longing for a better cultural life is also clear in all municipalities, as big cultural venues that used to be active and frequented in previous times are now closed, under-funded, or dysfunctional due to partisan employment of unqualified and uninterested personnel. They serve as a visible reminder of a communal, public structure that has been lost and is in evident decay. Notable exceptions might be Gostivar, which offers good opportunities for youth cultural life, and Veles, where cultural institutions are quite active, though some interlocutors complain of the lack of an alternative/independent/underground culture for the young. Such a civil society void may be filled by political parties, religious communities (Islamic in particular), football clubs, etc.

Exhibit 97: Betting shops as civil society

> ### Betting shops as civil society
>
> "Some youngsters who want to have some cultural life go to other cities, mostly to Skopje. But the majority just hang out in the betting shops and slot-machine casinos," said an interlocutor in Shtip. The team heard similar information in all other municipalities visited. An interlocutor from Tetovo informs us that he believes that there is a high suicide rate in Tetovo and Gostivar, partially because of gambling.
>
> On a related note, there was a "protest initiative" to close betting shops and casinos in Recica, a Tetovo suburb. However, an interlocutor (a former police chief) notes that the protest was organized only to force the casino investors to pay for protection to the local mob. After they paid, the "protests" stopped.

In municipalities where manufacturing/production industries are the primary employers, there is dissatisfaction with the owners and CEOs: people have jobs, but the salaries are low; taxes, health, and social security are often not paid; and workers are even asked to return "money in envelopes" from their salaries because employers are forced to pay a minimum

---

[311] Antonio Gramsci (1891 – 1937) was an Italian neo-Marxist philosopher who wrote the state may seek to maintain power through pervasive cultural hegemony rather than force, creating a superstructure that can marginalize and destroy local communities and local, solidarity-promoting community dynamics.

wage, but expect workers to work for less. Respondents state that self-interest, selfishness, and sheer disregard for community life on the side of employers is further indicated by the fact that workers in the eastern cities and towns of Shtip, Resen, and Sveti Nikole, for example, formed one of the largest clusters of COVID-19 infection due to disrespect for safety standards.

- "Back in the day we felt safer, didn't lock our doors. Now the police is nowhere to be found, and all kind of dangers, stray dogs included, lurk around us." (Veles, male focus group participant)
- "The municipality has an initiative to acquire cinema equipment in the city library. Also, there will be a youth creative center. However, we are fearful how much it will cost." (Veles, female journalist and activist)
- "Back in Yugoslavia, we used to have the *pozornikar* (neighborhood police/watchman) who knew everything about everyone, to whom we would leave our home keys when going on vacation. Now, we don't have such an institution." (Shtip, male focus group participant)
- "People from various villages arrived in the neighborhood with different 'cultural codes.' I don't want to judge, but they lack basic culture: they throw their garbage in the elevators, they steal the municipal benches which you later find in their own yards, and they steal the municipal flowers. The mayor or local government are not to blame here, it is up to the people." (Gazi Baba, Albanian female activist)
- "There is some positive movement in terms of juvenile delinquency. I see a significant decrease, thanks to the cooperation between civil society and the police" (Veles, female focus group participant).

Exhibit 98: The COVID-19 Spotlight

COVID-19: A Spotlight on Governance, Labor, and Prejudice
Until early May, the country had been lauded for its response to COVID-19, as the numbers of new cases were kept under control. However, the authorities then succumbed to cumulative pressures from religious communities. Several events proved highly problematic: the Orthodox procession in Struga for St. George's Day (May 7), with several thousand participants; limited but nevertheless present celebrations of Orthodox Easter; and Eid celebrations. Family celebrations of *iftar* during the holy month of Ramadan, while understandably desired, proved particularly risky.   At the same time, in industrial centers such as Sv. Nikole (near Shtip), and Resen (in the south), COVID-19 spread in factories, due to shared transport or crowded workspaces. In many areas of the country, such as Tetovo and parts of Skopje, curfew was not fully enforced by the police.   COVID-19 not only revealed serious problems in governance, but also some deeply rooted

prejudice. Early on in the pandemic, a video clip emerged where a local citizen verbally attacked a group of Koreans, using COVID references and racial slurs.[312] Besides such "international racism," local prejudice also re-surfaced when it emerged that the infection was spreading more in Albanian-dominated areas. Some fell back on frequent ethnic Macedonian stereotypes against ethnic Albanians. A male activist in Chair (Albanian) said, "We didn't behave more irresponsibly than in other parts of Skopje; the infection spread because we are the most densely populated municipality in the country. But that didn't stop people from evoking the 'uncivilized Albanians' trope anyways."

Corruption

General

Corruption was identified as one of the major problems and grievances of citizens in all municipalities visited. Many interlocutors underlined petty corruption such as bribes and exchange of services as a phenomenon they either encounter, or hear about, on a daily basis. The interviewees' dissatisfaction, frustration, and at times even anger were palpable, yet these corrupt practices are infrequently confronted or contested. They are accepted as a way of life. Recurring themes in many municipalities in terms of corruption included the issue of urban planning (i.e. the "urban mafia"), and corruption in courts, municipal administration, the cadaster (land registration office), the police, and even the fire department (noted in Veles). Unemployment is another problem closely related to corruption. Employment in the public sector, particularly among youth, can be secured either through membership in the political parties in power, or by paying bribes to party officials that could influence one's employment through the party hierarchy; basically, paying money to get a job.

Impressions collected in field discussions show that the manifestations of this malady are countrywide, and have similarities that merit further description.[313]

In Struga, interlocutors mainly spoke about chaotic urban planning and the usurpation of the Lake Ohrid shoreline by either allowing commercial beaches to be illegally operated, or by the practice of increasing the number of approved floors in buildings through construction permits issued via questionable administrative procedures. Another issue raised was the exchange of favors among acquaintances employed in state institutions and those in need of a service from either the local government, or the decentralized offices of central institutions. On the other hand, citizens without friends, relatives, or acquaintances in state institutions either pay bribes, or struggle to access services to which they are entitled as citizens.

---

[312] "Скопјанец „брка" корона вирус со вербален напад на лица од азиско потекло." (A guy from Skopje is chasing away the Corona virus with a verbal attack on Asians.) 360 stepeni. January 29, 2020, Available at https://360stepeni.mk/video-kako-skopjanets-brka-korona-virus/

[313] North Macedonia has two journalistic groups doing solid work on corruption: Balkan Insight, and the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL) which is a part of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). For more information see https://www.occrp.org/en/members

Gostivar has a similar texture in terms of general corruption. A significant portion of finances are concentrated in the local construction business, and respondents noted a strong corrupt triad among the construction companies, the local government (controlled by the AA), and the central government. However, this "cooperation" goes beyond political party affiliation and ideology; even changes in the parties in government don't alter this basic fact of life. The basic court, the appellate court, and the hospital, together with the local branch office of the cadaster agency, were pointed out by respondents as the most corrupt institutions in the city. Additionally, it was strongly reaffirmed by several interlocutors that people are afraid to report corruption, or even discuss it openly, because they think that they might face consequences for doing so.

Strumica is characterized by powerful construction companies owned by prominent figures linked both to parties in government and in the opposition that control much of the cash-flow and decision-making processes at the local level. Again, urban planning and construction constitute the nexus of local corruption. In addition, being situated in the border region between North Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria, the customs and the border police provide fertile soil for corruption and cross-border criminal activities, at times incentivized to turn a blind eye to smuggling, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money counterfeiting, and similar illegal activities. Further, employment in the local public administration or the decentralized offices of central government is possible only through political party pressure and influence, bribery, cronyism, or exchange of personal favors.

Veles was hit particularly hard by the consequences of the economic transition in the 1990s, and corruption was often noted by respondents. Focus group members and interviewees alike mentioned the judiciary, i.e. the basic court in Veles, as one of the cornerstones of local corruption where citizens either pay bribes, or where other forms of influence peddling is taking place. The phenomenon of keeping "court cases in the drawer" in order to be forgotten was specifically noted by respondents in Veles. The regional office of the employment agency and healthcare institutions were also identified as local corruption hotspots. One of the most recurring issues mentioned almost systematically throughout the country is paying bribes for employment; Veles is no exception. The two most common ways to get a job in the public sector in Veles is either directly through the political parties in power, or by "buying" one's position. These phenomena were particularly highlighted in the education sector.

Tetovo gives the impression of a being a stronghold of corruption. The general sentiment prevailing among interviewees and focus groups members – both Macedonian speaking and Albanian speaking - is that *no service* at the local level can be acquired in a timely fashion without a bribe or using an acquaintance in public institutions, with the former method prevailing as a form of malpractice. The basic court in Tetovo is perceived as an institution that safeguards corruption and does not process initiated proceedings (similar to Veles). It is also perceived as an institution where bribes and favors can take you far. The hospital in Tetovo is seen as a spot where 50 euros will help you "jump the queue," while at least 100 euros is expected from medical personnel in order to provide patients with medical services. Local public institutions do not discriminate based on ethnicity, as long as one is willing to pay for services. With the profusion of new public and private secondary and higher education institutions, corruption grew dramatically. Respondents claim that teachers in high schools

even handpick prospective students whose parents are rich and powerful, to later engage in influence- and favor-trading.

Exhibit 99: Jobs for Sale

<div style="border:1px solid #000; background:#cfe0f0; padding:1em;">

Jobs for Sale

While in Tetovo, the research team heard some exact fees to secure employment in public institutions through the political parties in power: 3,000 euros for a position where a high school degree is a prerequisite, and up to 5,000 euros for a position where a university degree is needed. Interestingly enough, ethnic Macedonians are given "lower prices" for bribes than ethnic Albanians; a perverse demonstration of the law of "supply and demand" as there are fewer Macedonians there to fill the proportionally-prescribed number of positions.

Interlocutors noted that for traffic police officers summer is a busy season, as they can bribe their diaspora compatriots who live in the West and visit during the summer. A quote from a participant in a Macedonian language focus group in Tetovo painted a vivid picture: "I have a friend employed as a traffic police officer. She was supposed to be promoted, but she couldn't because she could not afford to pay the bribe for the promotion. Now, she can write more traffic fines during the summer when there are many foreigners, and many pay directly to her, instead of paying to the courts (the state)."

</div>

Shtip respondents, as elsewhere, cite clientelism and partisan employment as the key manifestations of corruption. The municipal government is over-staffed, and the team heard special complaints regarding local cultural institutions, which do not offer many activities, yet have been forced to employ people coming from other parts of the public sector. One policeman boasted to an interlocutor in Shtip (a former police chief himself) of having paid 5,000 euros for his employment. Again, the construction business is reputed to be particularly corrupt; business interests intertwine with politics. This comes either in the form of public investment and tenders (putting less asphalt in streets and roads than reported and billed, for example), or through private construction, including receiving unlawful building permits as a result of briberies and/or partisan loyalties.[314] Forestry is another sector where corruption was indicated, through public tender embezzlement or illegal natural resource exploitation.

In Chair, the patterns of corruption in the municipality are comparable to those statewide. Research conducted by local NGOs [315] on corruption and favoritism in municipal employment was confirmed by our interlocutors as well. The construction works in this urban municipality have been described as "complete mess;" one can often see construction sites without the statutory declarations of information about the investors. A recent example noted is the

---

[314] During data review and analysis, the team discussed the apparent contradiction of a rapidly depopulating country boasting so much construction. One possible explanation offered in internal team talks was the fact that construction lends itself well to money laundering,.

[315] "Conflicts of Interest and Corruption at the Local Level – Collection of Research and Monitoring Studies,"*Institute for Democracy Societis Civilis*, Skopje, 2009 (in Macedonian). Available at: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/CSF-sudir-na-interesi-i-korupcija-na-lokalno-nivo.pdf

Fontana Café, which burned to the ground, and is now illegally being not only renovated, but extended.

Environmental Issues

Several cases of environmental corruption were explained by interview and focus group participants. The largest by far is the one related to the Ilovica-Shtuka mines, close to the Municipality of Strumica. Local grassroots activists blame the largest two parties in the country – the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE[316] – for providing the Canadian company EUROMAX Resources with a concession[317] to mine and extract gold and copper at the expense of enormous environmental deterioration. This project inception goes back to the early 2000s and the process is still ongoing after court battles resulted in the Administrative Court in Skopje giving the concession back to EUROMAX. (Earlier, the government, through the Ministry of Economy, had revoked the concession, and local activists proclaimed a small and short-lived eco-victory.) In the meantime, while an appeal is still pending in front of the Higher Administrative Court, a wide geographic region in the South-East of the country still lives in fear for their health, while the micro-space around the municipalities of Strumica and Novo Selo is agonizingly devastated. Interlocutors shared concerns that the water and the soil in the radius of tens of kilometers will be heavily polluted and that households in the vicinity of the mines will probably face difficulties to survive.

Protests have become part of the constant décor for years, not only in Strumica, but also in Skopje against the central government. Grievances by locals had transformed into an example of local eco-guerilla radicalization, as while talking with the research team, one of the main local proponents even commented that, "If they (i.e., the Government) decide to let them (i.e., EUROMAX RESOURCES) begin with digging, I am prepared to die, just to prevent them. Life here is worthless if the mines begin to work!" Interlocutors shared grave concerns of corruption allegations linked to prominent politicians in the central government, originating from the inner region of Strumica. Zaev is from Strumica, and served as mayor before rising to be Prime Minister; the Secretary General of the government is as well.

Interlocutors from Tetovo and Gostivar raised concerns about air pollution and landfills in their respective municipalities. In Tetovo, the overall neglect of environmental protection was noted in both focus group discussions and individual interviews. The landfill in Tetovo is literally in the urban part of the city, just four kilometers from the center. It often burns, causing an unbearable smell, and ash is seen and felt in the air. Waste management is one of the main problems in the municipality. These problems have been longstanding, and neither the central nor the local governments invest any efforts to solve these issues – no matter which parties are in power. On the other hand, albeit in a slightly better situation, Gostivar is also facing serious waste management problems, and local activists have been trying to block

---

[316] "'Здравакотлина' ќеводикампањазабојкотнаизборитепорадинерешавањенарудникот „Иловица""" (Healthy Valley" is going to lead a campaign to boycott the elections due to the case of the "Ilovica" mine not being solved) *24*. May 19, 2020. Available at https://24.mk/details/zdrava-kotlina-kje-vodi-kampanja-za-bojkot-na-izborite-poradi-nereshavanje-na-rudnikot-ilovica

[317] "Izdadeni 362 koncesii za eksplotacija na mineralni surovini naplateni 16 milioni evra." (362 concession granted for mineral exploitation bought for 16 million euro) *Analitika*. February 27, 2020. Available at: (https://analitika.mk/izdadeni-362-koncesii-za-eksplotacija-na-mineralni-surovini-naplateni-16-milioni-evra/

the opening of the nearby Rusino landfill. Interviewees in both municipalities stress local government corruption in public procurement contracts linked to waste management and environmental protection.

- "We closed down the smelter, but our air is still extremely polluted, so there must be also something else." (Veles, female focus group participant)
- The air is extremely polluted, you can even "see pollution" in front of your eyes. I am really bothered by this. (Tetovo, female focus group participant)

Extremism

Far-right wing/nationalist

Both Macedonian and Albanian right-wing nationalist extremism have a strong presence in the country, and reciprocal radicalization abounds. One leader of a patriotic organization even ran for election this summer, and while he did not earn many votes, shows the potential for individuals with extreme views to begin to engage in formal politics. (While his candidacy was public knowledge, his organizational leadership role is not.)

As made painfully clear in the April 27, 2017 attacks on the parliament, Macedonian extremism is connected to VMRO-DPMNE and its affiliates. In addition to the traditional fears of Albanians and the so-called "Tirana Platform,"[318] Macedonian nationalism has also been triggered by the Friendship Agreement with Bulgaria and the Prespa Agreement with Greece that entailed the country's name change. During the 11-year reign of VMRO-DPMNE (2006-2017), criminal elements were used to enforce the interests of the party, using also the security services. In parallel, a sustained radicalization campaign was introduced, to either justify the usage of force, or to strengthen the feeling among Macedonians that only through fighting can they protect themselves from domestic and foreign threats.

Respondents in Veles and Shtip provided insights on how groups have been instrumentalized by the party, and how they were given impunity and financial gains in return. These discussions were vital as there has been little published on these groups. These groups were formed as a counterpoint to the vibrant civil society that acted against the VMRO-DPMNE government. At first, informal initiatives, such as GDOM (Citizens for the Democratic Defense of Macedonia) and SOS (Stop Operation Soros) acted as central organizing bodies for counter protest. However, this was seen as inefficient, and the party decided to de-centralize these organizations, and to make this resistance seem to be organic, and grassroots. In 2016-17, before and after the Parliamentary elections in December 2016, these groups were formalized into the Macedonian Patriotic Organizations throughout the country (the greatest majority in March/April 2017), such as "Andon Lazov Janev Kjoseto" in Veles, "Vlado Chernozemski" in Kumanovo, "Mishe Razvigorov" in Shtip, "Nepokor" from Struga etc. All of them are VMRO-DPMNE affiliates and took part in their rallies and protests, including on April 27. Some of the more notable members, such as Goran Angelov from "Kjoseto," and

---

[318] The Tirana Platform refers to a declaration by ethnic Albanian parties from North Macedonia, formulated during a meeting with Albanian Prime minister Edi Rama. Its evolution (from being called A Platform to the Tirana Platform) is outlined here https://sdk.mk/index.php/neraskazhani-prikazni/kako-platformata-evoluirashe-vo-tiranska-platforma-otkako-vmro-gi-izgubi-shansite-za-vlada/.

Igor Jug from "Vlado Chernozemski," have already been imprisoned, though the main organizers (e.g., Gruevski and Mijalkov) have not been. In the past year, many of these organizations have seemed to be publicly inactive, which does not mean that they have completely immobilized. According to interlocutors, they have simply returned to the party, the core, and are reorganizing in case they are needed. Thus, they could be considered to be "dormant."

Exhibit 100: Who are the "Macedonian Patriotic Organizations?

> ### Who are the "Macedonian Patriotic Organizations?
>
> There are some public misconceptions about at least two organizations that form part of the "VMRO-DPMNE-Patriotic-Organization" constellation: "Christian Brotherhood" from Brvenica near Tetovo, and "Tvrdokorni" (The Hardcores) from Skopje. A member of the leadership of a VMRO-affiliated MPO from Skopje attested that he started the organization after being told by the party to organize in order to, "raise patriotism among the people." He said that Christian Brotherhood and Tvrdokorni did not participate in any initial meetings, nor did they join protests.
>
> This was confirmed by representatives from Christian Brotherhood and Tvrdokorni during interviews: they were formed independently,[319] despite the fact that many of their members were sympathizers of VMRO-DPMNE.

Two organizations have taken the spotlight after the violence in Parliament, though neither of them participated in the 27 April events. The team secured interviews with representatives of both. "Tvrdokorni," headed by a former high-ranking officer in the (Yugoslav and Macedonian) Army, is reported as not having participated in the "For a Unified Macedonia" protests in February-April 2017, but were rather working as protection in the outlying areas, to reportedly fend off attacks from extremist Albanians. Although such attacks were not reported in the media, "Tvrdokorni" claim that Shverceri were organizing to "harass" Macedonian girls and men wearing patriotic insignia. According to them, they prevented at least three such attacks. In interviews, they were open about the extent to which they were ready to go to express their dissatisfaction with the name change and court cases related to the April 27 events, including destruction of public and private property. The leader has formed a political party, *Doverba* (Trust), but did not participate in the latest parliamentary elections. At the last minute, the leader asked his followers to vote for VMRO-DPMNE, since it is the only "viable patriotic option."

Christian Brotherhood became active and took to the streets later. Despite the name, respondents noted that they have a very limited connection to the church, and are in contact with just one or two members of the clergy. One becomes a member by taking an oath in a monastery (an "Orthodox holy place," in their words), and the organization is strictly vertically structured, resembling a para-military organization. They have ranks, similar to the

---

[319] Loose, cellular organizational structures are common among extremist groups, and has been seen recently in particular among far-right groups. See for example, "IntelBrief: Atomwaffen Goes Global." *The Soufan Center*. August 12, 2020. Available at https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-atomwaffen-goes-global/

historic IMRO, and claim to have a triple structure: public members, hidden ones with weapons, and infiltrated members within the public institutions.

Albanian nationalist extremism is present among former members of the KLA as well as younger football fans. The bloody events in Divo Naselje in Kumanovo in 2015 attest to the potential of such extremism. The murder of the young member of the "Komiti", Nikola Sazdovski – Sazdo, executed by three "Shverceri" members in Skopje threatened to seriously destabilize inter-ethnic relations in the capital. Furthermore, football fans of FC Shkupi and FC Shkendija constantly appeal to Great (ethnic) Albania and Ilirida, denounce the state and its institutions and echo strong right-wing nationalist sentiments.

- "The treason (for agreeing to the Tirana Platform) was signed in Bondsteel (the US base in Kosovo) on November 6, 2016, in the presence of Hoyt Lee, Mogherini, Stoltenberg, Zaev, Gruevski, Ljubcho Georgievski. We are left to ourselves to defend the nation." (Chair, Hardcores activist)
- "The DBK Chief (Mijalkov) started appearing at meetings and sending his henchmen to control our work, and I didn't like it. At April 27, it became evident that they were setting patriots up. The violence was done by people wearing masks (from DBK) and not by MPOs." (Skopje, MPO activist)
- "We are in grave danger. This is a struggle of good against evil. The very fundaments of this state have been set wrongly. We have no judiciary, parliament, healthcare, education. We either fight or we flee the country." (MPO activist, Skopje)

To end on an optimistic note, the team heard that far-right activists find it difficult to attract young people to their protests. They are unhappy that "Soros-affiliated" movements were drawing more young people to their ranks.

Islamist/militant jihadist

While much of the team's field work yielded original details and insights on the far-right nationalist groups, discussions on Islamist/militant jihadism was generally in line with reports published in the past several years, and reviewed in the course of this project.[320]

Islamist radicalism and extremism can be seen in parts of Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar, and other areas with a Muslim/Albanian population. In certain areas, where Macedonians are the dominant ethnic group, such as Shtip, Strumica, and Veles, some radicalization can be seen among the Roma population, which most often self-identifies as Turkish. It is usually disregarded as not serious, and that both men and women follow the Salafist fashion because they receive money for it from abroad. There were foreign fighters going to Syria originating from Gostivar, though Gostivar is considered as a moderate city when it comes to any form of extremism.[321] As the strength of the Islamic State began to weaken and following

---

[320] Stojkovski, Filip and Natasia Kalajdziovski. "Extremism Research Forum: Macedonia Report." *British Council*. April 2018; Bogdanovsky, Andreja. "We did criminalize it – now what? Western Balkans Response to the Foreign Fighters Threat." *Analytica Policy Brief*. September 2014.

[321]Qehaja, Florian and Skender Perteshi. "The Unexplored Nexus: Issues of Radicalization and Extremism in Macedonia." *Kosovar Center for Security Studies*. March 2018, p. 39. Available at http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Extremism_in_macedonia_402663.pdf

concrete police actions by the central government, religious radicalization in Gostivar became even less noticeable.

Chair has been identified by several interlocutors – and has been viewed by many donors and project managers in the P/CVE space - as the hotspot[322] of Islamic (and other types) of radicalism in Macedonia, where several para-jammats operate and offer, *inter alia*, various social welfare services[323] to the Muslim urban poor, thus attracting followers by filling in the vacuum created by the lack of state-funded activities. Three of Chair's mosques, i.e. the Jaja Pasha Mosque, the Tutunsuz mosque and the Abdyl Kadri Mosque, have been identified in the past as strongholds of Islamic radicalism. All of these three urban mosques are or have been in some point in the past controlled by autonomous groups and imams who are not controlled of the Islamic Religious Community, which is the official representative of the Muslims in the country. In 2015, the police operation Cell (Kjelija) resulted in the arrest of dozens of individuals across the country on the grounds of participating in foreign wars, including several individuals related to the abovementioned mosques.

- "Everyone should believe in God. For me, if you don't believe in God, you are not human […] we are satisfied with the work of the IRC, they help out with skills etc. But who finances it…I don't know. I am sure for some people it is just a business." (Shtip, male focus participant, Roma)
- "In the last couple of years, let's say 10 years, I can say that a minimum of 20 people from my municipality went to war in Syria; many young people are radicalized because they do not have anything to do or place to spend their free time" (Chair, male activist, Albanian)
- "It is difficult for a non-religious family to live here. Because my mother and I don't wear headscarf, people say *estagfirullah* (god forbid) when they see us on the street, or we get denied services in shops." (Gazi Baba, female activist, Albanian).
- We in Struga exactly know the villages were these groups are located: Podgorci, Oktisi, etc. Still, you cannot easily reach these people. There is a like a brick wall between them and the outside world that cannot be easily breached. (Struga, female activist, Albanian)

After the "peak" of Islamist/Salafi jihadist inspired extremism several years ago, as in much of the region this phenomenon has seemingly faded, though interest in future prevention continues. However, the interplay of dynamics with other extremists – such as extreme

---

[322] Stojanović-Gajić, Sonja. "Security Issues in the Western Balkans." *Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkan Summit*. April 2018. Available at: http://www.balkanfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CSF-PB-05-Security-Issues-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf; Stojkovski, Filip and Natasia Kalajdziovski. "Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Macedonia." Berghof Foundation/Democracy Lab Country Case Study 1, 2018. Available at:
https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_CaseStudy1_Macedonia_e.pdf
[323]For example, evidence has recently emerged of an unregistered "kindergarten" named Pcela in Cair (Skopje) which was being housed in a private property. The "kindergarten" was being used as an educational facility for children ages 6-11 to undertake Islamic education - https://www.britishcouncil.mk/sites/default/files/erf_macedonia_report_2018.pdf

nationalists in places suffering status anxiety (e.g., Chair, Gazi Baba) needs to be better understood, including reciprocal radicalization trends and potential.

Respondent Vision and Recommendations

It is evident that corruption, organized crime, and a lack of trust in institutions are the main concerns that disenchant citizens and raise concerns in most of the municipalities that the team visited. Right-wing nationalist sentiments, in particular among ethnic Macedonians, are also present and show potential for escalation if specific contextual political factors intertwine. Religious radicalization among the Muslim communities, albeit in decay, also merits continued attention, in particular at highlighted hotspots. And the reciprocal dynamics between these should be viewed as a structural driver of each. The potential for right-wing Albanian extremism is also nevertheless present, or at least the fear from it, as evidenced by focus group participants and Macedonian right-wing activists. The danger would be even more pronounced in the case of destabilization in Kosovo. However, the entrepreneurial spirit of young people in some parts of the country, dedicated attention to ensure language and other rights at the local level, combined with a lively and vivid civil society in other parts, raises optimism among interlocutors as they pondered the state of their society today.

- We have a lot of rich villages. Both Macedonian and Albanian. Maybe this contributes to lack of radicalization, I don't know. (Male entrepreneur, Struga)
- "With my friends, I visited small villages where only ethnic Macedonians live. Their reactions were: 'You from Chair, you're not so bad, you are a nice kid.' They said the same to my friend from Arachinovo. They said that, from now on, they will start thinking about others on their own, rather than by what has been imposed by politics" (Female activist, Gazi Baba, Albanian).
- "It is a fact that we were a captured state. Now, it is a bit better, but still everything goes through the party. There is still dissatisfaction. The Colorful Revolution is unhappy, because they see the injustice; the politicians we hoped would be better revealed that they are only interested in the privileges that come with the position. " (Former police chief, Tetovo).

Respondents were also asked what they would like to see, and what recommendations they would make – this is not something people are often asked, particularly outside the capital. Their responses were thoughtful and simple – and should be sought out more often.

- First and basic recommendation for a better life is rule of law. Without it, no country has a future. (Male focus group participant, Stip).
- "Another big problem is brain drain: young people either emigrate to other countries, or at least move to Skopje. For example: excellent programmers (engineers) left Struga. The municipality should create some kind of a strategy to support local businesses. Some business incubator or something?!?" (Male entrepreneur, Struga)
- "An excellent alternative to this would be sports. Struga has an excellent track record in producing young handball and football players. Many played for the national teams. Neither the municipality nor the local business invest in sports – and they should. The budget of the local government for sports is minimal. We cannot even compare to Ohrid." (Male entrepreneur, Struga)

- "[We need] professional people at the right places. A doctor should be an educated doctor, a surgeon should be a surgeon, a manager should be a manager. Each person in their rightful place. The partisan card should not be everything." (Female focus participant, Stip)
- "The public sector should learn from the private one. There is a lot of inter-ethnic employment in Tetovo, because employers are seeking quality, and employees are willing to learn. Unfortunately, in the public sector there are other criteria." (Male focus group participant, Tetovo).

Consolidated Findings: Online Poll

Ljupcho Petkovski

> ### *Key Takeaways*
>
> - More than 2/3 of poll respondents in both countries were female.
> - In BiH, voluntary initiatives (43%) outstripped those of any public institutions in terms of respondent views of effectiveness in confronting and responding to COVID-19.
> - In BiH, 53% of respondents noted that "new examples of corruption and criminal behavior by the authorities are being revealed" during the COVID-19 crisis
> - In BiH, 69% of respondents listed "none" when asked in which level of government they have the greatest trust; in North Macedonia as well, 54% of respondents noted they hold trust in "neither" the state or municipal government.
> - In terms of foreign COVID-19 crisis assistance, wide differentials were evident in BiH and North Macedonia responses, reflecting geopolitical, political (and therefore media) alignments. This indicates a need for further research.
> - This was also reflected in greater confidence in government deployment of pandemic assistance. BiH respondents demonstrated a pronounced lack of confidence (85% in the aggregate), versus North Macedonia respondents, a plurality of which gave a negative response (47%).
> - Respondents in both countries had negative outlooks on the future, with those in North Macedonia evincing more upside potential than those in BiH – though optimism was a boutique commodity in both. These results were ethnically differentiated as well, with those using Cyrillic alphabets even more pessimistic.
> - While an indicative and not scientific survey, responses are broadly in line with other data collected.

The online poll was not foreseen in the initial project design. However as noted, it was added as a part of the COVID-19 contingency planning, to supplement data collection during a period of time when field travel was either impossible or unwise. It was also extremely useful in providing a snapshot of how respondents could describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and attendant shutdown on their communities. As the survey development was described in the Introduction, this section is focused on the data preparation and data highlights.

Methodology and Data Cleansing

This report analyzes data from an indicative, non-representative, non-scientific online survey, conducted with the online SurveyMonkey platform, using snowballing and direct targeting methods of participant outreach in Bosnia and Hercegovina and North Macedonia. In both countries, the surveys were advertised on Facebook, using both national and municipal targeting of the municipalities selected for this project. The advertised posts were placed on the Facebook profiles of local NGOs and think tank organizations. The data gathered was

exported into Excel, cleansed, and transformed into a SPSS file. The final dataset was analyzed by two team members.

In BiH the polling took place between May 7 and May 25, yielding 914 complete responses out of 1570 in total. Complete responses refers to completed surveys that were formally submitted by the respondents. All incomplete responses (those that did not include responses to mandatory fields), regardless of the degree of completion, were excluded. Out of the 914 responses in BiH, 746 were submitted in the Latin script version of questionnaire, while 168 respondents opted for the Cyrillic script version of the questionnaire. Judging from the data, the Federation (FBiH) is over-represented in the sample in relation to the Republika Srpska. Well-educated people are likewise overrepresented.

In North Macedonia, two versions of the poll were conducted - one in Macedonian and one in Albanian. The poll was online and available between May 27 and June 8. The survey yielded 856 complete responses (out of a total 1289 responses), of which 808 were in Macedonian and only 46 in Albanian. Some statistical regions such as Skopje and Polog are over-represented in the sample, as are well-educated citizens. We can assume that some ethnic Albanians, who are in general well-versed at Macedonian language, filled in the Macedonian language version of the survey. We are unable to provide a compelling explanation of the lower response rate to the Albanian language poll among the Albanian speaking population. As a lesson learned future outreach should include more proactive outreach to Albanian channels. For the sake of this analysis, because of the weak Albanian response, there is no systematic breakdown between the language versions, and the bulk of analysis can be more confidently applied to the Macedonian speaking respondents.

Demography of Respondents

Both BiH and NMK polls show women to be significantly participatory, and perhaps more civic-minded as well, insofar as they participated more in both cases. In BiH, this was a 2:1 margin (66% female to 34% male); in MK, this was nearly 3:1 (70% female, 30% male).

Both polls drew statewide participation, though skewing towards the most populated cities. In BiH, the team discovered that an initial long pull-down menu of municipalities – intended to facilitate specific data on the 9 targeted municipalities, as well as a more granular break-down in general - was the endpoint for many incomplete survey responses, so the team decided to remove the mandatory label from that question after a number of days to streamline the survey and collect more full responses. In the final analysis, over a third of respondents (38%) listed "unknown" for their municipality, indicating those who did not actively select their municipality from the dropdown box selection.[324] Those respondents who listed a municipality within Sarajevo Canton (15%) alone provided more responses than all those stating that they were in the RS (13.9%); perhaps this should not be a surprise as the

---

[324] The location of this 38% of respondents cannot be deduced without using IP addresses – a labor-intensive process that would not have yielded enough information to make the exercise worthwhile. The same method would be required to determine what proportion of those who listed "unknown" for their location did so after the question was eliminated. This was the effect of the trade-off made to get more completed survey responses, and is a lesson learned for this type of data collection process in BiH.

greater Sarajevo area represents a sizable part of the BiH population,[325] and also generally represents a more educated populace. 15% of respondents selected the Cyrillic version, the remainder the Latin script version.

In North Macedonia, more than half (53%) of respondents were from the Skopje region, nearly 16% in the northwestern Polog region, and the rest from regions as follows: Southwest 3%, Southeast 5%, Pelagonija 5%, Vardar 4.4%, Northeast 6%, East 8%. Skopje is heavily overrepresented, having about 30% of the overall population of the country. Polog is representative in terms of its share of the overall population, also 16%.

Exhibit 101: BiH and NMK Regional Survey Respondents

	Entity
RS	13.9%
FBiH	47.2%
Brčko	0.9%
Unknown	38.1%
Total	100.0%

CANTON

Canton	%
Canton 10	
Central Bosnia	
Hergegovina-Neretva	
Podrinje	
Posavina	
Sarajevo	15.21%
Tuzla	7.22%
Una-Sana	8.86%
West Herzegovina	
Zenica-Doboj	8.10%
NA (RS + Brcko))	14.77%
Unknown	38.07%

Region - North Macedonia

Region	%
Skopje	53.0%
Polog	15.8%
Southwestern	3.3%
Southeastern	5.1%
Pelagonija	4.9%
Vardar	4.4%
Northeastern	6.2%
Eastern	7.2%

---

[325] The Sarajevo urban area is estimated at around 343,000 people, not including surrounding areas like Ilidža, or Istočno Sarajevo (in the RS). The 2013 census reports around 3,790,000 people in the country, a number many feel is inflated in light of procedural questions then, and also subsequent emigration. See PopulationStat at https://populationstat.com/bosnia-and-herzegovina/sarajevo; and www.popis.ba

BiH respondents were banded in the two central age ranges of 26-45 (40%) and 46-64 (41%), with 18-25 constituting 9% of the respondents and pensioners 65 and older 9%. No question about age was included in the questionnaire in North Macedonia.[326]

The educational attainment of respondents was high in both countries. In BiH, 57% of respondents completed university, with a further 39% completing secondary school. In North Macedonia, the percentages were 66.4% and 30.8%, respectively.

Most respondents noted being employed full-time prior to the coronavirus. In BiH, 58% were employed full-time, with an additional 3% part-time, 6% freelancing, 14% unemployed, 14% pensioners, and 5% students. At the time of responding, 54% were employed full-time, 5% part-time, 6% freelancers, 17% were unemployed, 14% were pensioners, and 5% were students. There was a 3-point jump in unemployment since the onset of the crisis, a nearly 1-point drop in those qualifying themselves and freelancers, and a slight dip in those identifying as students. In North Macedonia, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 67.3% of respondents were employed full-time, 5.5% part time, 11.2% unemployed, 13% pensioners, and 2.2% students. No question about current employment status was included in the questionnaire in North Macedonia.[327]

In BiH, Latin and Cyrillic versions of the questionnaire were offered, whereas in North Macedonia versions were offered in the Macedonian and Albanian languages. In BiH, around 85% of the respondents opted for the Latin version of the survey, and 15% for Cyrillic. In North Macedonia, the Albanian version of the survey was filled in by 6% of the total number of respondents, while the Macedonian version was used by fully 94%. Judging from the regions and municipalities of many respondents, we assume that some Albanian speaking citizens opted to respond using the Macedonian language survey, [328] yet the breakdown demonstrates that ethnic Albanians are underrepresented (vs. an estimated 20-25% of the general population). In BiH, we assume that Bosnian Serbs/RS residents (not synonymous) are also underrepresented by a factor of two (the RS comprises 35% of the population to the FBiH's 63%, according to the still questioned 2013 census). The representation element may skew this polling data in several ways, as discussed further below. However, in spite of these weaknesses this data still provides a compelling snapshot of opinions expressed in an anonymous, "safe" forum.

---

[326] This was due to a human error in the final full-term review and survey translation (4 versions plus English). While regrettable this does not have a significant impact on the value of the data or analysis.

[327] Again, this was due to a human error in the final full-term review and survey translation. While regrettable this does not have a significant impact on the value of the data or analysis.

[328] Based on previous experiences, we can assume that some respondents in the Albanian-majority municipalities such as Chair and Tetovo may have responded in Macedonian Eurothink notes experiences in commissioning Albanians speakers for phone surveys, only to determine that as many Albanians speak Macedonian there is no need to do this.

Exhibit 102: Script and Language Choice

Script (BiH)

Cyrillic	15.3%
Latin	84.7%

Language (North Macedonia)

Macedonian	94%
Albanian	6%

As described in the methodology overview in the Introduction, questions were designed to both tease out opinions on a variety of themes, and to logically engage respondents in an exercise in which their cumulative impressions could begin to be gauged. Key thematic findings and trends are noted below. While some selected and simple analysis is included, the bulk of analysis follows in the Analysis section of this report.

Effectiveness of Institutions in the COVID-19 Crisis

In BiH, voluntary initiatives (43%) outstripped those of any public institutions in terms of respondent views of effectiveness in confronting and responding to the COVID-19 crisis. The public sector bodies with the greatest reputations for effectiveness were the police (34%), institutes for public health (29%), municipal governments (28%), and civil defense (17%). Cantonal governments (12%), entity governments (11%), *mjesne zajednice* (7%), and the state government (5%) all ranked exceedingly low. 22% responded "don't know."

Exhibit 103: Perceptions of Institutional Effectiveness During COVID-19 Crisis (BiH)
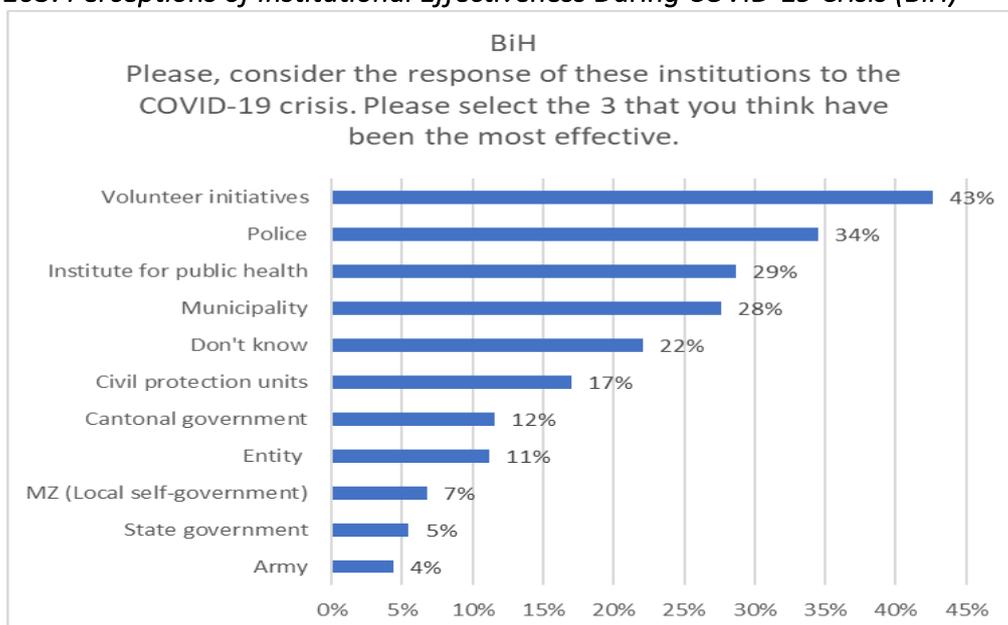
Respondents from North Macedonia evinced greater trust in public institutions than their Bosnian and Herzegovinian counterparts – markedly more for the central level, and less for municipal governments. This is understandable given that, 1) in North Macedonia political system power is accumulated at the central level, and 2) there was an undisputed consensus in North Macedonia until the end of May 2020 that the Government had grappled with the

health crisis successfully. Top rated for effectiveness were community-based public health centers (61.1%). These were followed by central level institutions (44%), the police (25%), the army (18%), and municipalities (18%). 37% of respondents selected "don't know."

Exhibit 104: Perceptions of Institutional Effectiveness During COVID-19 Crisis (NMK)
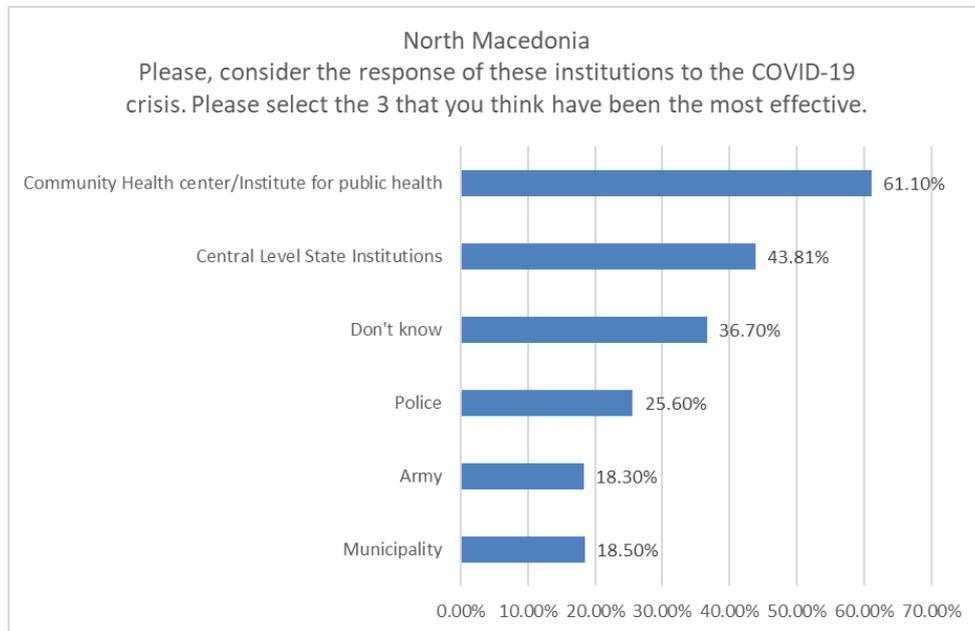
Health System Preparedness for Crisis

BiH respondents overwhelmingly rated their health systems as unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic: 64% in aggregate (30% very unprepared and 34% unprepared), versus 16% (14% prepared and 2% very prepared). 16% responded neutrally, and 4% "don't know." It is important as well to note that during the COVID-19-crisis, and during the period of the online survey, at least two high-profile scandals (described in the Introduction) related to the health care sector emerged, feeding public awareness, frustration, and skepticism.

In contrast, North Macedonian respondents were more likely to state that their health authorities were prepared – a 46.7% aggregate (35.4% prepared, 11.3% very prepared), with 29% reporting unpreparedness (20.8% unprepared and 8.4% very unprepared). 22% rated preparedness neutrally, and 2% "don't know." In North Macedonia, the crisis prompted a debate about the lack of sufficient public funding for the health system since independence. What was perceived as a successful handling of the crisis by Venko Filipche, the extremely popular Minster of Health, coupled with news about the clumsy handling of the crisis by the most powerful Western liberal democracies such as the US, Italy, and the UK, turned into an awareness about the benefits of the Yugoslav legacy, including the existence of universally accessible public health system. This, in turn, was translated into a larger appreciation of the public health services and unprecedented levels of trust. One can only speculate about the results if a poll would have been done in June or July, after cases begin to rise.

Exhibit 105: Perceptions of Readiness of Health Care Systems in BiH and NMK

Comparison of Readiness of Health Care Systems

Category	BiH	N. Macedonia
Very unprepared	29.6%	8.4%
Not prepared	34.1%	20.8%
Neutral	16.3%	22.1%
Prepared	14.1%	35.4%
Very prepared	1.8%	11.3%
Don't know	4.0%	2.0%
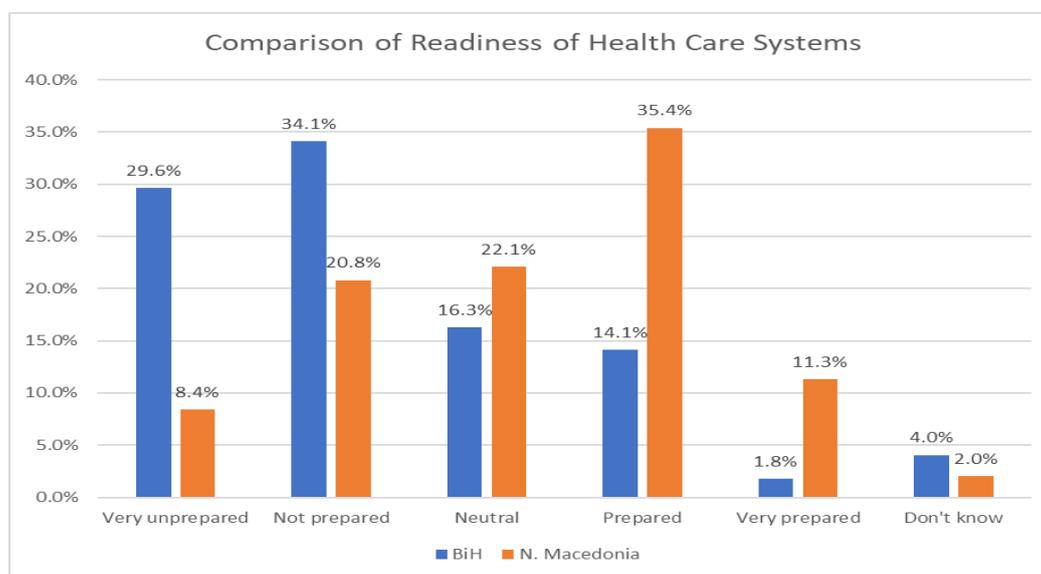
Usage of Health Care During the Crisis

In BiH, fully 69% did not use formal health care services during the crisis, with an additional 13% responding "no, although I needed to." 17% of respondents availed themselves of health services. Nearly half of those who sought treatment (46%) did so at a *dom zdravlja*, followed by *ambulanta* (23%) public hospitals (21%), and private hospitals (9%) – so 69% received treatment at a primary health care provider.[329] 79% of those who sought treatment did not use a personal connection during this interaction, going through formal usage procedures; 21% reported doing so. Only 15% of those who sought treatment felt some pressure to provide a gift (e.g., bribe) to receive better service. Of those who did seek treatment, 58% were satisfied, versus 31% who were not.

In North Macedonia, 77% of respondents did not seek medical treatment during the crisis; 23% sought medical attention. Those needing treatment overwhelmingly did so in an *ambulanta* (78%), followed by a private hospital (10%), and public hospitals (7%). Most of those seeking medical attention did not use a personal connection (74%, vs. 21% who did use a connection).

General Reflections on the Situation in the Community

Respondents were asked to pick three statements they believed reflected the reality as they experienced it in their place of residence during the crisis.

---

[329] A *dom zdravlja* is the primary public health facility in cities and larger towns where people go to see their primary, family doctor, who could then refer them to a hospital if necessary. An *ambulanta* offers more limited services and can also provide referrals for specialists. Smaller towns and villages are often served by a basic *ambulanta*.

In BiH, the top rated reflection, drawing 53% of all responses, was "new examples of corruption and criminal behavior by the authorities are being revealed," which was hardly surprising, given the corruption scandals related to the purchase of medical equipment that erupted amidst the health crisis. An additional 52% reported that "fear of the future, anger, and dissatisfaction are growing," followed by 45% who asserted that "poor coordination of institutions, lack of expertise and responsibilities can be seen." Responses tapered off below these top three responses with 30% asserting that "citizens feel that in this crisis they can only rely on those close to them," followed by the first *positive* response (22%): "greater togetherness is felt, people act responsibly respecting the ordered measures," and "volunteers and CSOs are well-organized (20%). Recorded in single digit percentages were the following: "divisions in society are growing, citizens have less trust in each other" (9%), "citizens have confidence in institutions that successfully coordinate crisis management activities" (7%), and "people feel that the state protects them in this crisis" (1%).

Exhibit 106: Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Community (BiH)
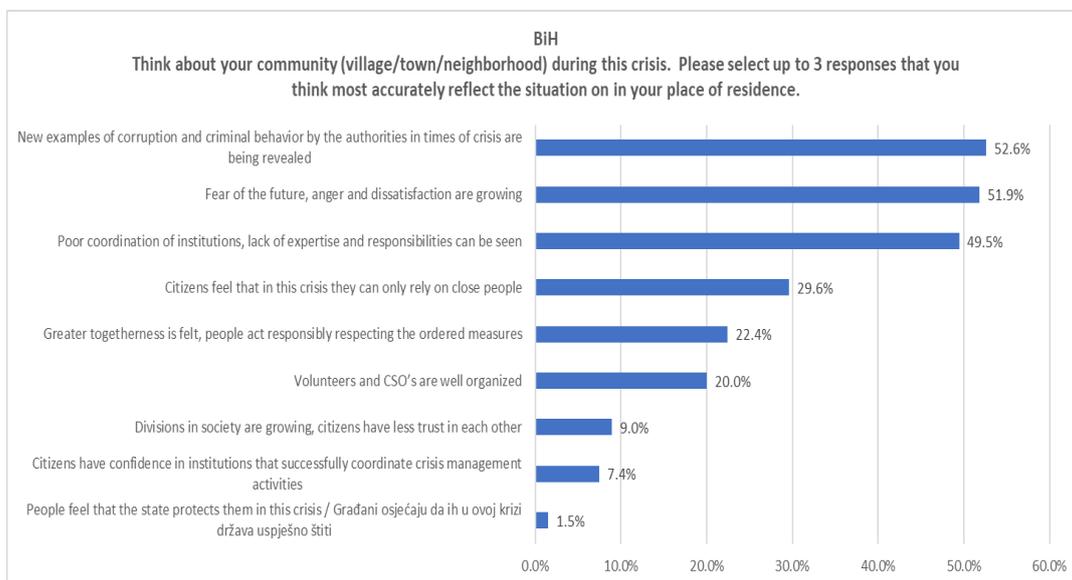
In North Macedonia, responses were more evenly distributed, with greater evident trust in authorities, which can be partly attributed to the fact that a slightly different list of possible answers was offered. (This was not planned, but the result of a failure of coordination in the final questionnaire preparation, translation, and editing processes. This error left out the factor of corruption in the options offered to respondents in North Macedonia – a prominent factor in public perception, according to conducted fieldwork interviews and focus groups.) The top-rated response (32%) was, "people act responsibly, respecting all measures," followed by "during the crisis, I believe the most in the institutions" (30.5%). 26% asserted that "greater togetherness is felt, people have empathy towards those who are threatened," 24% stating that "institutional coordination has been successfully achieved to overcome the COVID-19 crisis," and 22% stating that "during the pandemic, I believe the most in my neighbors." 15% reported that "NGOs are responding well to the crisis," 15% that "volunteers are treated well by the municipality," and 9% that "the people and the authorities successfully cooperate." These results can be yet again interpreted in the context of the widespread belief that the Government of North Macedonia responded to the crisis

effectively up through the period of data collection. Subsequently, this perception has likely changed following the new outburst of the epidemic beginning at the end of May 2020, which caught authorities off-guard.

Exhibit 107: Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Community (MKD)
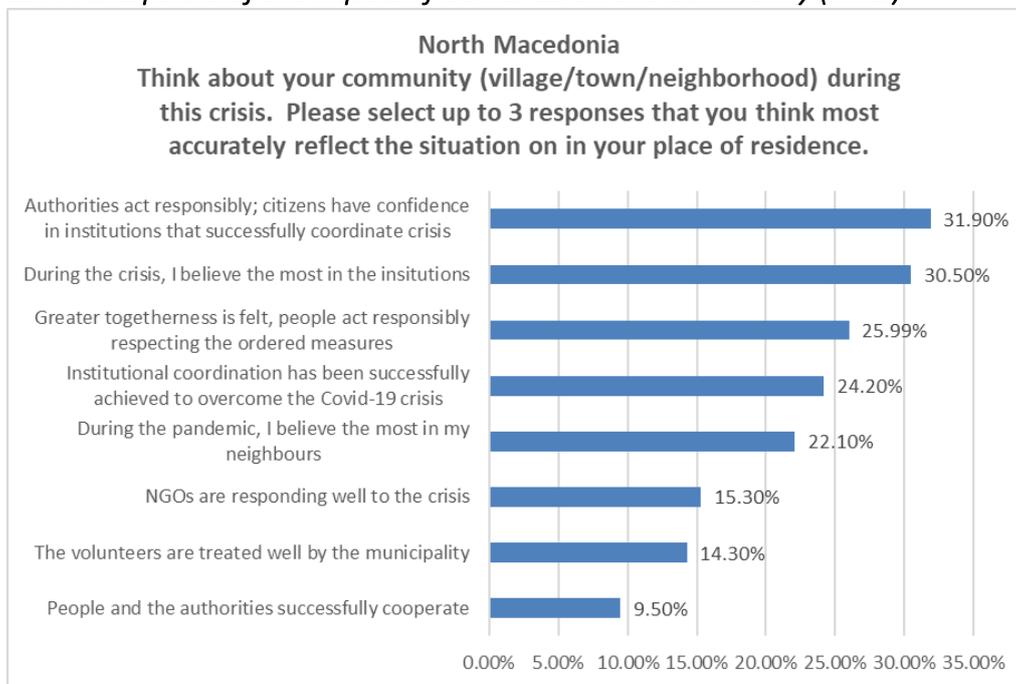
Confidence in Government – and Lack Thereof

Respondents were asked to rate the levels of government in which they placed the greatest and the least trust in both countries. In BiH, 69% of respondents listed "none" for the greatest trust; 16% of those indicated trust in municipal government; the entities and cantons at 6% each; and the state 2%. In terms of explicitly noting the institution in which they held the least trust, the state rated 44%, followed by the entity level at 21%, cantons at 5% and municipal government at 7%. (23% simply noted "none.")

Exhibit 108: Confidence in Government (BiH)
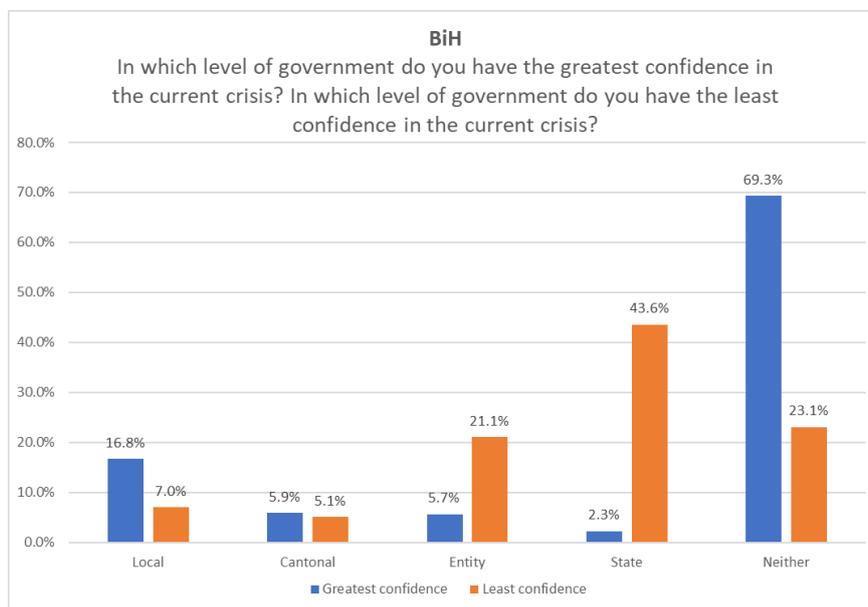
In North Macedonia as well, the top rating for greatest confidence was "neither" the state or municipal government (54%). However, this distrust is not evenly distributed: the state garnered 39% of confidence versus only 6% noting confidence in the municipalities. Turning the question around, respondents state that they had the least confidence in either level (44%), with roughly equal numbers saying local (29%) and state (26%) were worthy of the lowest confidence in addressing the COVID-19 crisis.

Exhibit 109: Confidence in Government (MKD)
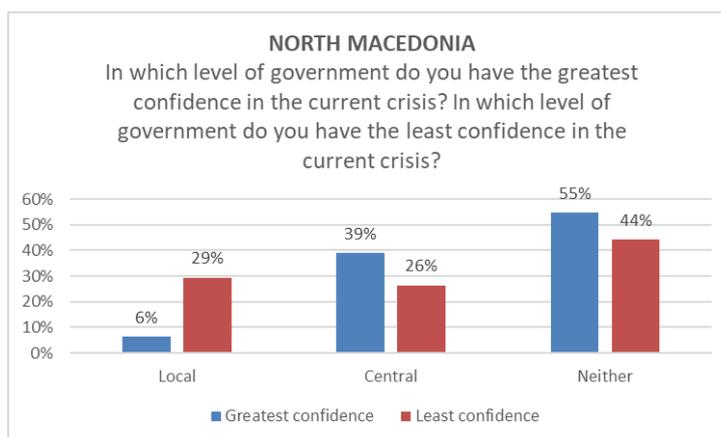
Perception of Foreign Aid for COVID-19 Aid Response – and Its Application

Respondents were asked to list up to three countries or bodies which have contributed the most to assist BiH in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. In the aggregate results, the EU was rated most highly by far at 55%, followed most closely by China and the US (25% apiece),

Serbia (22%), the UN (19%), Russia (17%), Croatia (7%), and Turkey (2%). The EU was identified as the main donor by an above-average share of respondents from the FBiH and people who chose to fill in the Latin alphabet version of the questionnaire (60%), whereas it was less frequently identified (32%) as such by respondents filling in the Cyrillic version of the questionnaire (presumed to be respondents from the RS.) On the other hand, Russia, whose actual engagement in the relief efforts during the crisis has been negligible, has been identified as a main donor by 56% of Cyrillic form respondents, 41% of respondents from the Republika Srpska, and only 6.5% of participants in the survey from the Federation. One can safely surmise that the perception of who is the largest donor in BiH reflects different geopolitical views, identity politics and broader socio-cultural factors – reinforced by media narratives. Similar patterns can be discerned in the analysis of other results (see below).

Exhibit 110: Awareness of Foreign Aid Sources (BiH)
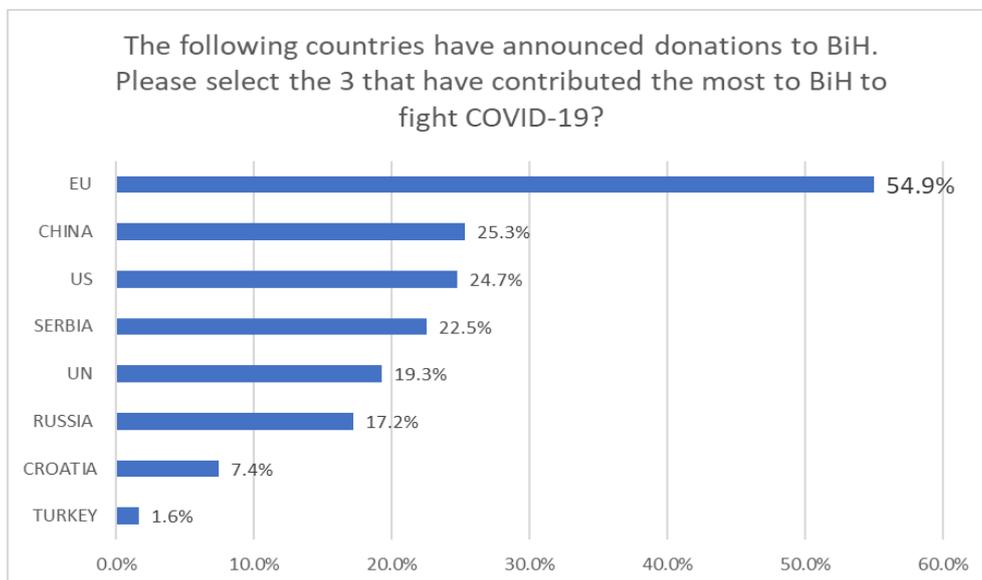
In North Macedonia, a different picture emerged. While the EU was far and away top-rated (60.7%), China came in a solid second place (41.6%), and Turkey in third (35.5%). These were followed by the US (29.3%), the UN (19.5%), Russia (13.2%), Serbia (7.8%), and Croatia (1%).

Exhibit 111: Awareness of Foreign Aid Sources (NMK)

The following countries have announced donations to North Macedonia. Please select the 3 that have contributed the most to North Macedonia to fight COVID-19?

Country	Percentage
EU	60.70%
China	41.60%
Turkey	35.50%
USA	29.30%
UN	19.50%
Russia	13.20%
Serbia	7.80%
Croatia	1.60%
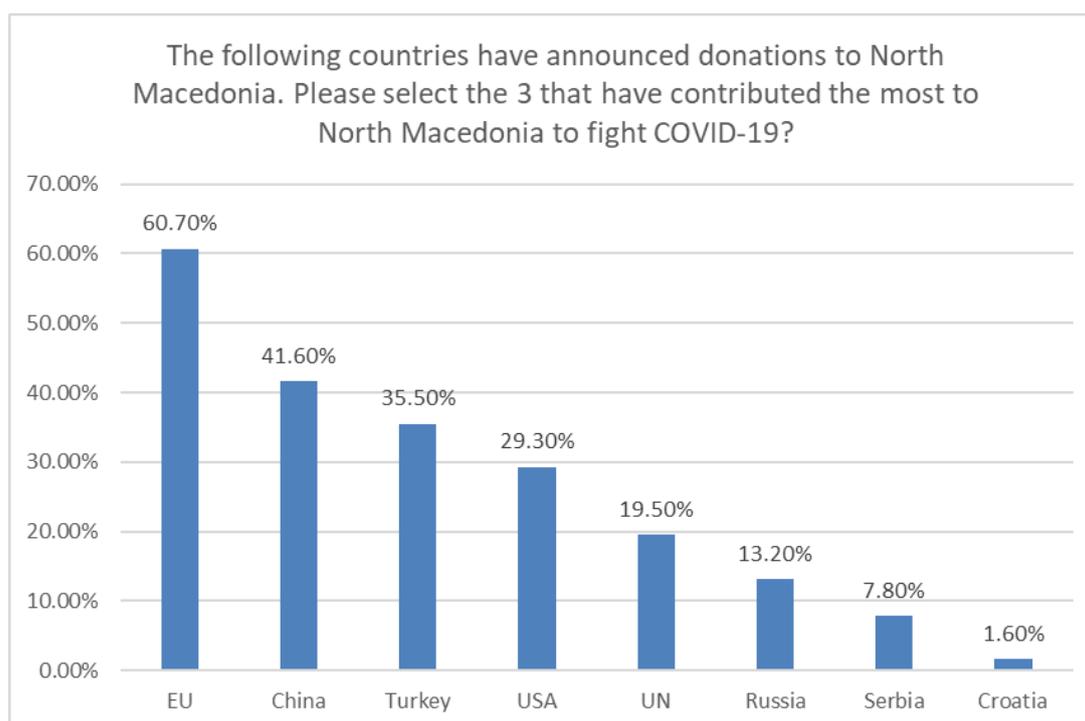
Similar patterns of variance across demographic lines can be discerned in the Macedonian datasets. To illustrate, the EU has been identified as the main donor by 83.3% of respondents in the Albanian language survey, and 59.4% of the survey in Macedonian language. This finding resonates with public opinion data from other relevant surveys,[330] which demonstrates that ethnic Albanians exhibit an overwhelmingly positive relationship with the EU, and view with anything related to Europe and the European Union positively; in so doing they are much more similar to the left-liberal, SDSM supporting pole of the ethnic Macedonian electorate. In contrast, ethnic Macedonians are much more divided when it comes to their foreign political vision, with VMRO-DPMNE articulating the views of the other half of ethnic Macedonians who sympathize with alternative and more sovereigntist foreign policy visions. This can be discerned in the fact that China was identified as main donor by 42% of respondents of the Macedonian language survey and only by 29% of those answering in Albanian. Russia was identified as the main donor by 35% of respondents who completed only elementary school, and only 10% of those who completed university.

It must be reiterated that the small number of RS and ethnic Albanian responses (in the BiH and NMK polls, respectively) in an already merely indicative survey may skew the aggregate data. But the differentials reflected in the responses collected point to potential issues to be studied in more scientific and representative surveys on these questions, and possible links to the future-focused orientation of respondents, their sense of civic and personal agency, and their optimism or pessimism, more broadly, in both countries.

---

[330] "Македонците и Албанците поделени за ЕУ и НАТО." (Macedonians and Albanian Divided on the EU and NATO.) *Voice of America News*. January 24, 2018. Available at
https://mk.voanews.com/a/macedonia-nato-/4221895.html

In terms of perceptions of how COVID-19 resources – foreign-derived and domestic – have been allocated and used, 85% of BiH respondents were not confident (60% extremely not confident and 25% not confident) that this aid would be rationally allocated. Only 3% expressed confidence that it would be, with more responding either "don't know" (6%) or neutral (6%).

In North Macedonia, the aggregate "not confident" was 47% (over 23% each not confident and extremely not confident), versus 23% confident (17% confident and 6% very confident). The proportion of those responding "neutral" was nearly equal – 22% – to the 23% of respondents expressing confidence. 8% responded "don't know."

Exhibit 112: Confidence in Aid Allocation in BiH and NMK

How confident are you that domestic funds and donated aid are being rationally allocated during this crisis?

	Very not confident	Not confident	Neutral	Confident	Very confident	Don't know
BiH	60.0%	25.2%	6.2%	1.9%	1.2%	5.6%
N Macedonia	23.83%	23.48%	21.85%	17.06%	5.72%	8.06%
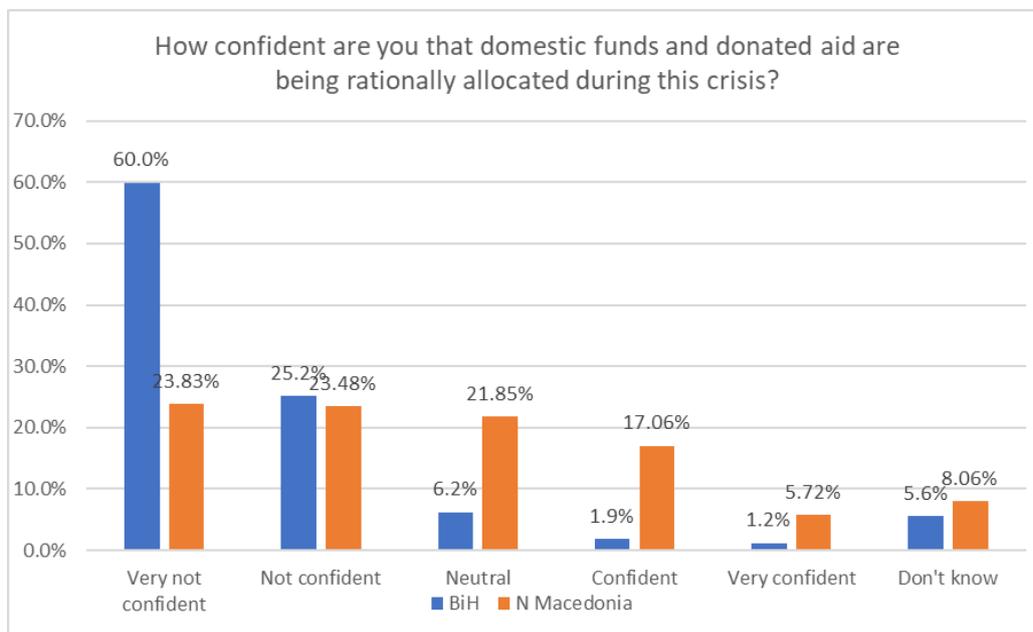
Local Voluntarism/Civic Agency

In BiH, 55% of respondents reported voluntary organizations in their community addressing the crisis, with an additional 8% noting their own direct engagement in such activities. Only 10% reported there were no such organizations, while 28% responded "don't know."

In North Macedonia, 33% of respondents reported such voluntary efforts in their community, with 3% reporting their own direct engagement in such activities. 18% reported there were no such efforts in their community. Almost 47% responded "don't know."

The different levels of voluntarism can partly be attributed to the different distribution strategies the project teams used in BiH and North Macedonia respectively. Whereas the Macedonia team relied more on a Facebook outreach strategy, the BiH team in addition shared the poll links through direct outreach to personal contacts as well, these respondents often being professionals from NGOs, international organizations, and policy makers, in other words people who belong to a group which is by nature more socially active and better informed.

Exhibit 113: Getting Involved in BiH and NMK

Are you aware of, or involved in, any volunteer organizations in your community to address the crisis?

- There are volunteer organizations in my community: BiH 54.6%, N Macedonia 32.83%
- There are volunteer organizations in my community and I am personally involved: BiH 8.1%, N Macedonia 2.69%
- There are no volunteer organizations in my community: BiH 9.6%, N Macedonia 17.64%
- I don't know: BiH 27.7%, N Macedonia 46.85%

■ BiH ■ N Macedonia

Sources of Information on the COVID-19 Crisis

In both BiH and North Macedonia, the Internet and television were the dominant news sources respondents use to get information on the COVID-19 pandemic. In BiH, 69% of respondents listed Internet portals as a source, followed by television at 64%, then social media at 57%. Friends and family rated 22%, radio 10%, and newspapers 6%. In North Macedonia, respondents rated the Internet at 74.4%, followed by television at 71%, and social media at 64%. Friends and family came in at 20%, radio 6%, and newspapers 4%.

Respondent Views on the Origin of the Coronavirus

Respondents were asked which explanation for the origin of the coronavirus they found most convincing. In BiH, 43% reported "the virus appeared in China after it crossed from an animal species." This view – natural zoonosis – is held by a solid preponderance of specialists globally. 29% responded that, "the virus originated naturally but is no more dangerous than the common flu." 14% responded that they believe that it was purposefully created and spread by an influential person "to further his interests." 6% assert China created and deliberately spread the virus, 4% believe that 5G networks spread the disease, and an additional 4% assert that the United States spread it.

In North Macedonia, 58% agreed with natural zoonosis in China, followed by the "influential person" explanation (13%), China (7.5%), the US (4%), and 5G (3%). While only indicative, it bears note that in the UK, for example, public views in polling reported in mid-June reported an even higher proportion of respondents believing that 5G was responsible (8%), with 30% believed that it was developed in a laboratory.[331]

---

[331] Andy Wells, "COVID-19 conspiracies: 7% of Britons think that there is no hard evidence that coronavirus exists, poll suggests." *Yahoo News*, June 18, 2020. Available at: https://uk.news.yahoo.com/coronavirus-conspircy-theories-135550521.html

Exhibit 114: Understanding the Origen of COVID-19 in BiH and NMK

	BiH	N Macedonia
US deliberately created and spread the virus	3.6%	**3.70%**
The virus is related to the introduction of the 5G network	4.5%	**3.20%**
China deliberately created and spread the virus	5.9%	**7.50%**
The virus was created and spread by an influential person for the promotion of its interests	14.2%	**13.20%**
The virus originated naturally but is no more dangerous than the common flu	28.7%	**7.00%**
The virus appeared in China after it crossed from an animal species	43.1%	**57.70%**

Impact of the Crisis on Emigration

Respondents were asked what sort of impact, if any, the crisis will have on migration from their countries.

In BiH, 43% asserted that more people will want to leave. A further 30% stated that while the impetus to leave will be high, doing so will become more difficult. 15% believed it would have no impact, 3% stated people would feel safer staying put, and 8% did not answer.

In North Macedonia, 31% believed that more people would want to leave, with a further 33% reporting that those who wanted to would have a more difficult time doing so. 25% believed there would be no impact, with 12% believing people would feel safer staying.

Exhibit 115: Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 on Emigration in BiH and NMK

Do you think COVID-19 crisis will impact emigration from BiH / NMK?
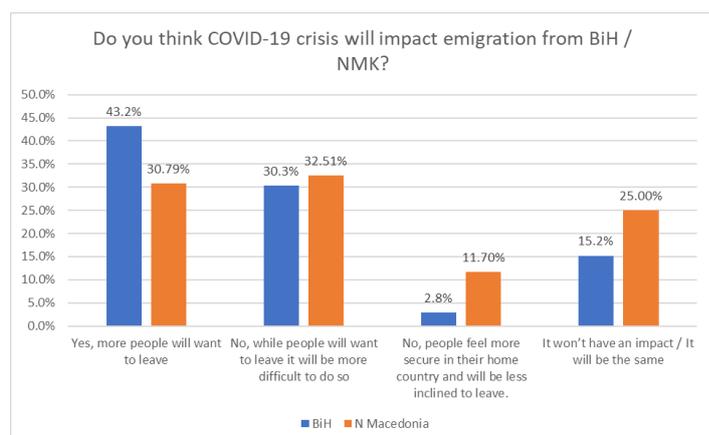
COVID-19's Impact on Politics

Respondents were asked to assess the potential impact of the COVID crisis on politics in their country. They were allowed more than one answer.

In BiH, the most common answer (46%) was "it will become clear to the citizens that the authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible and expensive." 33% asserted that "the crisis will not change politicians / political parties and they will continue to focus on their interests;" a further 29% believed that "politicians / political parties will additionally accuse each other and continue to quarrel." An aggregate of 19% believed there would be social unrest – but this reflected 23% of respondents from Federation of BiH and *no* respondents from the RS. 11% stated that "citizens will achieve a higher degree of unity and mutual trust, and they will seek new political options that will suit their beliefs;" but these respondents included *none* of those responding in Cyrillic.[332] Only 1% believed that politicians would rise to the occasion, "demonstrating unity and cooperation to combat the consequences of the crisis." The most clear-cut differential is the level of coercive control exercised within the Republika Srpska versus that in the Federation – where political elites are just as jealous of their prerogatives and ill-gotten gains, and lack centralized means to protect them, but possess greater ability to dodge political responsibility due to structural fragmentation. Where the RS leadership has used the stick more recently, political leaders in the Federation can still (largely) resort to finger pointing – though the displays of overwhelming force at the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown demonstrated the same reflex utility of fear.

---

[332] Touquet, Helene. "The Republika Srpska as a Strong Nationalizing State and the Consequences for post-Ethnic Activism." *Nationalities Papers*. Vol. 40, No 2, March 2012, pp. 203-220.

Exhibit 116: Looking Forward I (BiH)

Which of the following statements describe the possible outcome of the COVID-19 crisis's impact on BiH politics? You can select more than one answer.

- It will become clear to the citizens that the authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible and expensive. — 46%
- The crisis will not change politicians / political parties and they will continue to focus on their interests — 33%
- Politicians / political parties will additionally accuse each other and continue to quarrel — 29%
- There will be social unrest — 19%
- Citizens will achieve a higher degree of union and mutual trust, and they will seek new political options that will suit their beliefs. — 11%
- I don't know/I don't want to answer — 2%
- Neither — 1%
- Politicians / political parties will demonstrate an awareness of unity and co-operate in combating the consequences of the crisis — 1%

Exhibit 117: Looking Forward II (BiH)

Question	Cyrillic	Latin	18-25	26-45	46-64	65+	RS	FBiH	Brčko	Unknown	TOTAL
Politicians / political parties will demonstrate an awareness of unity and co-operate in combating the consequences of the crisis	5.70%	0.40%	2.4%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	0.8%	0.5%	0.0%	2.30%	1.2%
The crisis will not change politicians / political parties and they will continue to focus on their interests	64.3%	27.3%	35.7%	36.8%	29.4%	29.3%	39.4%	29%	50%	35.1%	32.9
Politicians / political parties will additionally accuse each other and continue to quarrel	47.9%	25.8%	36.9%	34.3%	23.5%	24.4%	33.9%	26%	50%	30%	29.2%
It will become clear to the citizens that the authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible and expensive.	34.3%	47.9%	45.2%	45.1%	46.6%	46.3%	37%	50.8%	50%	42.8%	45.8%
Citizens will achieve a higher degree of union and mutual trust, and they will seek new political options that will suit their beliefs.	0%	12.9%	9.5%	7.6%	13.2%	17.1%	7.1%	12.1%	12.5%	10.9%	10.9%
There will be social unrest	0%	22.5%	17.9%	15.9%	19%	34.1%	8.7%	26.7%	25%	13.2%	19%

Respondents in North Macedonia were also negative, but differently so – perhaps in part due to their simpler political structure. 51% expected no change in self-serving political behavior. 29% believed that citizens would achieve greater unity and mutual trust, while 28% asserted that citizens would conclude that "authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible and expensive." 15% believed politicians would become more quarrelsome, while 9% foresaw social unrest.

Exhibit 118: Looking Forward I (NMK)

Which of the following statements describe the possible outcome of the COVID-19 crisis's impact on North Macedonia politics? You can select more than one answer.

Statement	%
The crisis will not change politicians / political parties and they will continue to focus on their interests	51.2%
Citizens will achieve a higher degree of union and mutual trust	29.3%
It will become clear to the citizens that the authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible and expensive.	28.3%
Politicians / political parties will additionally accuse each other and continue to quarrel	15.3%
Politicians / political parties will demonstrate an awareness of unity	10.4%
Don't know	9.2%
There will be social unrest	9.2%
Neither	5.6%

Respondents from North Macedonia, just like their BiH counterparts, were divided regarding these questions along regional, ethnic, linguistic, and other demographic lines. Whereas 54% of respondents using the Macedonian version of the survey were cynical about the impact of the crisis of social change ("The crisis will not change politicians / political parties will continue to focus on their interests"), none of the respondents answering in Albanian opted for this statement. On the other hand, 54.2 % of respondents opting for the Albanian language survey chose the statement indicating hope: "Politicians / political parties will demonstrate an awareness of unity", which was a choice of only 7.8% of the Macedonian language survey respondents. Other divisions and variances are visible in the table below.

Exhibit 119: Looking Forward II (NMK)

	Macedonian	Albanian	Male	Female	Skopje	Polog Region	Eastern Region	Completed	Completed	Completed	Employed full time	Pensioner	Students
The crisis will not change politicians / political parties and they will continue to focus on their interests	54.20%	0%	46.9%	53.0%	53.1%	44.4%	54.8%	57.6%	41.3%	10%	57.1%	39.60%	47.4%
Citizens will achieve a higher degree of union and mutual trust	30.2%	14.6%	32.2%	28.1%	31.5%	23.7%	32.3%	31.3%	26.9%	10%	29.7%	35.1%	26.3%
It will become clear to the citizens that the authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible, and expensive.	28.6%	22.9%	30.2%	27.4%	27.5%	29.6%	25.8%	31.2%	23.1%	20%	28%	22.5%	21.1%
Politicians / political parties will additionally accuse each other and continue to quarrel	15.0%	20.8%	20.9%	12.9%	15.0%	13.3%	22.6%	17.3%	10.2%	25%	14.2%	20.7%	5.3%
There will be social unrest	9.4%	6.3%	9.3%	9.2%	8.8%	4.4%	12.9%	8.1%	10.2%	30%	7.6%	12.6%	15.8%
Politicians / political parties will demonstrate an awareness of unity	7.8%	54.2%	11.6%	9.9%	7.7%	17.8%	9.70%	7.4%	15.5%	20%	7.8%	12.6%	21.1%

The reasons for this differentiation in the data (and the aforementioned caveats bear repeating: the data is not representative and *only* indicative) could owe to a number of factors. On the political structural side, North Macedonia is centralized and pyramidal – as is the Republika Srpska as an entity within the Dayton-ordained BiH state structure. This is a double-edged sword for citizens. On the potential positive side, there are clearer lines of responsibility that could – were there functional political representation, media scrutiny, independent judicial oversight, and action – deliver greater accountability. As the rest of this report (and numerous prior works) demonstrates, however, this is far from the case. The downside of such centralized structure is that it allows leadership greater coercive leverage – and the public fear thereof, whether exercised in real time or not. In both cases, power-sharing dynamics maintain coercive leverage while further diffusing actual accountability. But the differential between the two states and between BiH's component parts may reflect these factors.

In addition, the authors can offer some highly speculative ideas on reasons for the differentials based in the social realm. The parallels between the two Cyrillic-alphabet respondent groups, Macedonians and Bosnian Serbs (admittedly, a much smaller respondent pool), are striking in terms of relative pessimism and sense of resignation. In BiH, the most popular unity of respondents is to the assertion that authorities are "unprofessional, irresponsible, and expensive." But even there, the shell game that Dodik plays is that it is not the RS that is costly, but rather *the rest* of the state. It is the authors' own experience that regionally, ethnic Albanians are more optimistic and future-oriented than post-SFRY Slav groups – and among these, Cyrillic-alphabet usage seems to act as an amplifier for a

sentiment that the best days are in the past, not the future. One might speculate that the reasons for this could be rooted in, a) the relative lack of development in Albania and ethnic Albanian-populated regions (Kosovo, NW Macedonia, areas of south Serbia and Montenegro) vs. Slav-majority areas; b) the perceived lack of political agency in both areas (albeit under starkly different regimes); c) the political structures and their coercive leverage; d) relative natality (a differential currently abating, but highly visible through Generation Z); and e) a sense that a Latin alphabet is effectively global while a Cyrillic one is particular (there is no single standard, even in the Yugosphere!), which neatly conflates with backward-looking nationalist narratives.

All of these interpretations, it must be stressed, are educated guesses based on the data – which has numerous methodological asterisks attached. These theories would be worthy of further research, tailored to these questions and designed to obtain scientific and representative responses.

***

As noted, this online poll was neither planned as a part of this research in the original research design, nor scientific as would be a formally commissioned and implemented poll. However, it does provide an additional data set, and another snapshot of the two case study countries at a time of unique challenge and crisis. Read together with the rest of the project data, none of the responses stand out as outliers; instead it is affirming in terms of data triangulation.

Findings: Field Snapshots

Introduction

The following section comprises a substantial portion of the length of the overall report. Each municipality investigated in this project is individually profiled in brief in the following pages. The purpose of this exercise it to ensure that the granular texture of the rich data captured on each community would not become lost in either the raw presentation of findings, or in the theoretically-informed Analysis. This presentation approach was assessed as being the best way to ensure a strong grounding in the local context.

Each narrative snapshot follows a similar skeleton to include the city or town's history, demographic and ethnographic profile, recent historical events, political developments, experience with corruption, civic engagement and mobilization, instances of extremism and links to wider trends, current challenges, and future outlook. For the BiH snapshots, data on local election trends over time is noted, with the number of municipal seats held by the various political parties indicated. While written in a style aimed at giving the reader a sense of what the place is like, they are aimed at being not merely descriptive, but analytical in nature at a granular level; themes seen within them are later incorporated into the overarching analysis.

We also endeavor to give the reader a sense of relative scale of each municipality. As explained, based on the expertise of each country team, each team's collective profile of municipalities selected for investigation is different. In North Macedonia's case, municipalities in regional centers or of wider political significance were selected. Given the lopsided centrality of Skopje in the country's population, politics, and external visibility, this seemed a promising avenue of inquiry – and so it has proven to be. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the team chose to visit a few larger conurbations (Bihać, Brčko) and definitely also covered a great deal of ground. But it consciously selected municipalities that could locally be considered *tamni vilayeti* (dark administrative areas, using the Ottoman term *vilayet*), outside the main urban centers where international attention and resources tend to pool – Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, and Tuzla. This also proved a productive and revealing mode of inquiry. The fact that among the two country cases numerous consistent themes made themselves evident demonstrates suggests common phenomena in terms of institutional corruption, drivers toward extremism, civic views, and overarching political practice.

Finally, it should be noted that while some census data is noted to provide background on the demographic of each municipality (overall population, and ethno-national breakdowns), census data is not necessarily reliable. The 2013 census in BiH was criticized for both data collection and results tabulation.[333] In North Macedonia the lack of a reliable, up to date census presents a similar deficiency.

---

[333] Perry, Valery and Soeren Keil (eds.) "Introduction: The Politics of Numbers in the Post-Yugoslav States."
Contemporary Southeastern Europe, Special Issue on the Politics of Numbers in the Post-Yugoslav States Vol. 2,

Community Snapshots: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bihać Snapshot

The municipality of Bihać (pop. 56,261 in the 2013 census; approximately 40,000 in the city and the rest rural), located in the northwest of BiH, is a picturesque town studded with monuments to the region's history, from medieval Bosnia to the Partisan anti-fascist liberation struggles of World War II. Gifted by the beautiful Una river ("The One" in Latin), the town and its surrounding area invite visitors to explore nature or simply observe, in meditative silence, breathtaking views of Una waterfalls and rapids. The name Bihać means royal property and this region was, in mediaeval times, ruled primarily by Croatian kings, earlier by Franks and Byzantines. In the 13th Century Bihać acquired the status of a free city, which contributed to its development and prosperity. Its green hills and slopes bring images of Tuscany, but the hills and villages also speak of the harsh and just Krajina people; many folk tales and songs were written in their glory and memory.[334]

Its location offers potential in terms of a pleasant climate, proximity to Zagreb (150 km away) and the Dalmatian coast (Rijeka is 200 km away), and agricultural and tourism potential, and a history of out-migration and *Gastarbeiter* ensure existing links with regional compatriots throughout Europe and around the world. However, this tradition of entrepreneurial mobility has become a negative, with demographic trends now stripping the region of not just those of prime working age but entire families, and young people. This is driven by a number of factors that are leading people to give up on Bihać and BiH, including the lack of perspective caused by decades of dysfunctional – and unaccountable – government.

Bihać's long past and recent history reflect its geographic location as a key point in the Krajina ("frontier") region, which marked a divide between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. In World War II, massacres perpetrated by the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) Nazi puppet state took a massive toll on villages and towns, creating a momentum for Partisan resistance and also planting seeds of historical grievance in need of critical understanding and reflection. The war in the 1990s was particularly unique, as Bihać was caught between Serb breakaway forces in Croatia and the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) and besieged for three years. While the local V Corps and HVO formed part of the Army of BiH, the establishment of an "autonomous province" by an anti-Sarajevo Bosniak local magnate Fikret Abdić (more below) led a further dynamic to the war and the people suffering through it. The war was finally ended in August 1995 when Operation Storm changed the strategic equation in neighboring Croatia as well as Bihać and the surrounding area.

Issue 2, 2015. Available at http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/cse/en/introduction; Perry, Valery. "The 2013 Census in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Waiting for Results and Counting the Questions." *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*. Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2015. Available at http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/cse/en/perry

[334] Krajina means "frontier" (as does Ukraine, not coincidentally), and those who lived here were – more than others in the region – engaged in the wider conflicts of their ages, particularly the long frictions between the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires. Communities were settled to engage in the frequent skirmishing and sometimes higher intensity conflict between the empires. The damage wrought by the simplistic and historically lazy "ancient ethnic hatreds" idea, propounded by Robert Kaplan in *Balkan Ghosts*, which held sway in many Western chancelleries and commentariats in the early 1990s, is still evident among foreign circles.

Bihać's proximity to Zagreb and distance from Sarajevo has always give it a different political outlook, and the intra-Bosniak fighting and factions in the recent war exacerbated this distinction. While predominantly Bosniak (88%),[335] SDA has never enjoyed the near political monopoly it has enjoyed elsewhere, as an "Alternative SDA" and other nationalist or civic parties have jockeyed for positions. As the administrative center of Una-Sana Canton, and as a notably rapidly depopulating part of BiH, the canton struggles to get attention or investment from either the Federation entity or the state. Proximity to the RS should offer opportunities for cross-entity development, cooperation, and investment, yet politics from Banja Luka mean this opportunity is squandered. It is a Bosniak majority canton, hemmed in between the RS, Croatia, and Croat-majority Canton 10 – a political enclave a generation after it was a wartime enclave besieged militarily.

Exhibit 120: Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDA	SDP	SDP	SDA	GS
Municipal Council/Assembly					
HDZ	1	1	2		
SDA	13	13	9	12	11
SDP	10	12	16	10	5
SBiH	4	2	2		
SPRS	1				
BSP BiH	1	1			
STRANKA PENZIONERA FBiH		1			
SDU BiH			2	1	
A-SDA				3	5
NS - RADOM ZA BOLJITAK				1	
SBB BiH				2	2
HDZ 1990				1	
GS					5
DF					2

The current mayor, Šuhret Fazlić, (former longtime member of SDP), was elected as a member of the then-new Građanski savez (Civic Alliance) political party led by Reuf Bajrović. He had left the SDP months prior, choosing his new party alignment for reasons of convenience rather than running as an independent.[336] His election owed to popular dissatisfaction with the previous SDA mayor, yet he has struggled to work with a municipal assembly in which SDA has a majority. He has had to build a working coalition with an assortment of smaller parties, while dealing with SDA members with strong ties to the party HQ in Sarajevo and more broadly in BiH. In more recent developments, Mayor Fazlić generated grumbles among his constituency by aligning with regional mayors in the Pomak

---

[335] 2013 BiH Census. Available at: http://www.statistika.ba/?show=12&id=10049

[336] Alma Midžić, "Una – politički kapital" [Una – political capital], *Sindikalizacija*. Available at: https://sindikalizacija.wordpress.com/2018/09/10/una-politicki-kapital/

(Pokret za modernu i aktivnu Krajinu – the Movement for a Modern and Active Krajina), with Mayors Nermin Ogrešević of Cazin (A-SDA), Zikrija Duraković of Bužim (A-SDA), and Zlatko Hujić of Bosanski Petrovac.[337] His alignment irked many in Bihać who saw this new constellation with figures in these established parties as a betrayal of independent, civic politics and values. Despite political shifts, Bihać citizens consistently feel ignored by most political actors in BiH since the war. It is also noteworthy that while Bihać has its own public university, founded in 1997, many students study in Banja Luka, as it is closer and cheaper for them than studying in Sarajevo or Mostar.[338]

Corruption and its after-effects in Bihać cannot be disentangled from the history of Agrokomerc in neighboring Velika Kladuša – a major Yugoslav era food conglomerate managed by the same Fikret Abdić who established his own rival Bosniak option opposed to SDA in Sarajevo during and after the war.[339] Extraction of resources, theft, and illegal (or at a minimum improperly acquired) gains that were obtained before the war and then in the Wild West privatization that followed allowed for substantial asset stripping, and also hamstrung effective post-war entrepreneurial development – as did an ethnic node-based political system that ignored the region. More recent instances of corruption include alleged malfeasance related to the EU-funded Velhovo wastewater treatment plant,[340] which involved both SDA and SDP,[341] and a falsification of diplomas affair that included the former prime minister of the canton, A-SDA's Admir Hadžipašić. There has been no justice to date. These latter two cases are illustrative of the broader problems in BiH of diploma fraud among officials (and the primacy of partitocracy over meritocracy), environmental malfeasance and fraud, and the role of external money and investment in facilitating such corruption.

A notable case of regional ecological activism assembled against the placement of a nuclear waste site on the Croatian side of the border in the municipality of Dvor na Uni, directly across from Novi Grad (Bosanski Novi), located in the RS.[342] The municipalities of Novi Grad, Kostajnica, Kozarska Dubica, Bosanska Krupa, Cazin, Bihać, Bužim, and Velika Kladuša all demanded that the state Regulatory Agency for Radiation and Nuclear Security hold an expert public briefing on the matter in Novi Grad (Bosanski Novi), to explain to citizens the

[337] In 2018 elections, Hujić was elected as an MP in the Una-Sana canton assembly, nominated by A-SDA, Pomak, and Zajedno. An interesting video clip illustrates his personality: https://www.krajina.ba/video-legendarni-zlatko-hujic-ovo-je-kao-formula-1-a-ja-sam-dobar-sofer

[338] See more on the University of Bihać at http://unbi.ba/eng/

[339] This highly local party, the Democratic People's Union (DNZ), relied heavily on the feudal, cult-like following that Abdić assembled and maintained as he ran Agrokomerc and made Velika Kladuša an archetypal "company town." Silber, Laura and Allan Little. *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*. Penguin Books, 1997, p. 211. The party splintered and is now politically marginal even in Velika Kladuša. But it maintained ferocious loyalty through 2006, when one team member served as an OSCE election observer in the town.

[340] "Wastewater Treatment Plant Opened in Bihać," *EU Delegation in BiH*, July 6, 2017. Available at: https://europa.ba/?p=50871 This collaboration among factional rival parties demonstrates that the search for illicit gain – often through well-intentioned projects – can transcend even bitter local, personal rivalries.

[341] "Naša stranka Bihać: Malverzacije SDA i SDP-a u vezi s izgradnjom gradskog odvodnog sistema," [Naša stranka Bihać: Corruption in SDA and SDP cooperation in construction of the municipal sewage system]." *Naša stranka*, September 18, 2015. Available at: https://www.nasastranka.ba/nasa-stranka-Bihać -malverzacije-sda-i-sdp-a-u-vezi-s-izgradnjom-gradskog-odvodnog-sistema/2929/

[342] Vanja Stevanović, "Viši nivoi vlasti nedovoljno učinili za radioaktivni otpad," [Higher levels of government have not learned enough about radioactive waste]. *SRNA*. November 6, 2015. Available at: https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/drustvo/Visi-nivoi-vlasti-nedovoljno-ucinili-za-radioaktivni-otpad/335026

potential environmental and health impacts. This struggle continues, and although the voices of institutions and NGOs from the municipality of Bihać are a little quieter now, there is a significant mobilization potential. In addition, Ekološka koalicija Unskog sliva (EKUS - Una Basin Ecological Coalition) has organized joint civic and inter-municipal actions, grouping citizens in Bihać with compatriots throughout Krajina, including the other regional center, Prijedor, in the RS.[343] The group has long campaigned against hydroelectric dams on these two rivers.[344]

Against this backdrop – historical narratives of violence, the recent divisive war, and a lack of current constructive opportunities and perspectives – one might expect a population open to radicalization and the exploration of different ways of engaging with a community or idea. Salafist communities did emerge in the Bihać area, as well as in neighboring Cazin.[345] Some of these families resettled in Gornja Maoča in Tuzla Canton, and during the peak of ISIS recruitment and activity, some travelled to Syria to participate in that war and caliphate building effort.[346] There are few signs of other active extremisms. In a focus groups discussion with young people, when asked about this, they noted that the problem was in the past, indicating that there were now only a few "Wahhabis" quietly practicing their version of Islam.

One can speculate that there is little fertile ground for other variants of extremism, as depopulation has been a safety valve. However, anti-migrant sentiments are revealing a new intolerance that could be exploited.

Two main challenges face Bihać: brain drain (or perhaps more accurately, "brain rejection"), and the migrant crisis/situation. The second issue should be viewed as having a multiplying effect on already existing circumstances, as it is exacerbating the sense of being abandoned by every level of government, as well as now by the EU, and neighboring Croatia. The crisis is laying bare public administration and governance failures. This is deeply tied to the first point – brain drain. Individuals and families who may have put off the decision to emigrate are now

---

[343] The group's registration document in Prijedor notes its constituency of "citizens of the basin rivers Sana and Una, youth, municipalities, entity, and state governments," under values of "democracy, tolerance, and sustainable development." See
https://www.prijedorgrad.org/files/sadrzaj/S4390_EKOLOSKA%20KOALICIJA%20UNSKOG%20SLIVA%20-%20EKUS.pdf

[344] "Ne hidrocentrali" [No to a hydropower plant], *Nezavisne Novine*, May 20, 2008. Available at: https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Ne-hidrocentrali/23627

[345] In 2015 Azinović and Jusić noted that, the number of volunteers from Bosanska Krajina (northwest Bosnia) is gradually increasing, though the fact that some of these people have never resided at their registered residence" made it difficult to research. Azinović, Vlado and Muhamed Jusić *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Atlantic Initiative, 2015. Available at https://wb-iisg.com/docs/the-lure-of-the-syrian-war-the-foreign-fighters-bosnian-contingent/; In 2018 Bećirević highlighted in a case study the experience of one man, Samir Begić from Bužim in Krajina, who went to Syria and was killed in 2014. Bećirević, Edina. *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. *British Council*. April 2018, p. 50-51.

[346] A documentary film on these dynamics was made, focusing on one man who ended up leaving his family when some chose to go to Syria. Brkanić, Džana. "Epizoda 91: U raljama ekstremizma – od Maoče do Sirije" [Episode 91: In the jaws of extremism – from Maoča to Syria]. *Detektor*. February 8, 2018. Available at https://detektor.ba/2018/02/08/epizoda-91-u-raljama-ekstremizma-od-maoce-do-sirije/

seeing this – on top of the economic situation, the broken education and public health systems, and the lack of a basis for a future-oriented perspective – as the final straw that broke the camel's back.

In a focus group with young people, while the participants were informed and realistic about the raft of problems in the country, when asked to name a good aspect of BiH, the answer was quickly given by a young woman, and unanimously agreed: "us." These young people know they could leave and find other opportunities, but want the option to be able to stay and (re) build their home. The love of nature and the water, the strong sense of history, and also the regional (and diverse) Krajina identity creates ties to the area. However, far from ensuring a strategy to keep and attract people to Bihać, virtually every policy from the canton, entity, and state seems purpose-built to obscure a coherent vision of a better, just future.

Bihać has demonstrated remarkable resilience, throughout the 20th century, in the recent war, and even today. However, a generation of frustration over a lack of improved prospects is depopulating and deskilling the region. The safety valve for a society seen to be corrupt and dysfunctional is emigration; this exit option is helping to prevent more gravitation towards extremist options, but is stripping human assets. One can imagine Bihać building on its "outsider" status to help to spearhead a new political, economic, and social vision for the country. However the party system and its hydra of influence has prevented any strong options from emerging.

Bosanski Petrovac Snapshot

The road from Sarajevo to Bosanski Petrovac (pop. 7328, according to the 2013 census) is long and winding, the first part of the journey marked by mountains and narrow river valleys evoking a sense of closeness, while near Bosanski Petrovac the geography opens up into rolling hills pocked with untended WWII Partisan memorials. The town's layout and architectural bones suggest an always small but once more "striving to thrive" small town community, with the needed mix of schools, government buildings, recreation (*Dom kulture*, and a large and now empty pool) and cafes/kafanas. Monuments to four important cultural figures, and memorials related to the anti-fascist struggle of the 1940s, are marks of a shared intellectual and moral heritage. Surrounding karst anomalies, like the semi-spherical sinkhole indentations in Bravsko Polje, make the area picturesque and invite exploration.[347] Yet today many of the buildings are vacant, and the streets are far from bustling, as emigration – a traditional practice – has accelerated in recent years. While one can understand the pull to Bihać, Banja Luka, Sarajevo, or abroad, a very active local youth council is trying to work so that those young people who want to stay (or return) might be able to do so; so that mobility is an option, not an existential or personal necessity.

The town's location in the Krajina frontier region has made it a canvas against which numerous historical events played out. In WWII, the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH) perpetrated atrocities in and around the area, in particular against Serb villages. The Partisan resistance heritage is therefore quite strong (the first anti-fascist women's front – AFŽ - conference was held there on December 6, 1942), both in terms of tangible history and the memory of older citizens and those who grew up hearing these stories.[348] During the recent war, the region saw some of the earliest attempts to forestall violence, but these local efforts crumbled as broader, non-local agendas were put into motion.[349] The community's non-Serb residents were expelled in summer 1992, as the area was close to territories that would connect the rest of the newly established RS with the breakaway Serbian Autonomous Krajina region in Croatia.[350] As a part of joint Croatian Army (HV)/Army of BiH (ARBiH) operations in summer 1995, the region's Serb population was expelled, and during this joint offensive there were in addition some fights between the Croatian and ARBiH troops, including in Bosanski Petrovac.[351] The trial of ARBiH 5th Corps commander, Gen. Atif

---

[347] "A rare phenomenon called 'sailors' – Bravsko Polje," *Dron.ba*. Available at:
https://www.dron.ba/en/product/a-rare-phenomenon-called-sailors-bravsko-polje-6/

[348] "Na današnji dan osnovan je Antifašistički pokret žena; stvorio je temelje za ravnopravnost spolova u Jugoslavij." [On today's date the Anti-fascist women's movement was founded; it built the foundation for gender equality in Yugoslavia]. Telegram.hr. (no date). Available at:
https://www.telegram.hr/fotogalerije/zivot/na-danasnji-dan-osnovan-je-antifasisticki-pokret-zena-pocele-su-se-silovito-boriti-za-ravnopravnost-u-jugoslaviji/#

[349] Stephen L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1999. Page 130.

[350] Chuck Sudetic, "Envoys Offer New Report of Serbian 'Ethnic Cleansing' in Bosnia." *New York Times*, September 27, 1992. Available at:
https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1992/09/27/581692.html?pageNumber=12

[351] Operation Maestral was a joint military operation by the Croatian Army (HV), Croatian Defense Council (HVO) and Army of BiH. See https://www.historija.ba/d/136-pocela-operacija-maestral/

Dudaković, is ongoing for the killing of civilians in Bosanski Petrovac, among other locations, in Operation Sana '95.[352]

According to the 2013 census, the population of a little over 7300 is now 54% Serb and 43% Bosniak, compared to 1991 when it had over 15,000 residents was around 74% Serb and 22% Bosniak. This depopulation reflects a history or migration to more urban areas, the impact of the war, and limited return. The town is included in the area of operation of an OSCE Field office in nearby Drvar, which was re-opened after having been closed some years ago, as part of an effort to work more closely in that area. In autumn 2020 there are plans (supported by the OSCE) to organize events to mark both the Bosniaks fleeing in 1992, and the Serbs fleeing in 1995, to promote reconciliation. However, while discussions with young people demonstrate open-mindedness and pragmatism, politics are embedded in the schools. Students are forced to learn from either the Bosniak (Federation) or Serb (RS) curriculum. Strong religious communities ensure that no alternative subject is offered for students who want to opt out of religious instruction.

Exhibit 121: Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDP	SNSD	NAŠA STRANKA	INDEPENDENT	INDEPENDENT
Municipal Council/Assembly					
Zavičajni socijaldemokrati RS i BiH	1				
SDA	4	3	3	2	4
SDP	3	1	1	1	1
SBiH		1	1	1	1
SBB				1	1
SPRS	4	2			
ŠLJIVAR VOJO	1				
SNSD - MILORAD DODIK	4	7	6	5	2
STRANKA PENZIONERA - UMIROVLJENIKA BiH		1			
LDS		1			
NAŠA STRANKA			3		1
NS - RADOM ZA BOLJITAK			1	1	
DNZ BIH			1	1	1
SOCIJALISTIČKA PARTIJA			1	1	1
SNS					1
DNS				1	2
A-SDA				1	1
DF					1
AHMET HIDIĆ		1			
ČISTA SDP				2	

---

[352] Lamija Grebo, "Dudaković i ostali: civili bježali s vojskom" [Dudaković *et al*.: civilians fled with the army]. *Ratni zločini i tranzicijska pravda*, February 3, 2020. Available at: https://detektor.ba/2020/02/03/dudakovic-i-ostali-civili-bjezali-s-vojskom/

The previous Mayor, Zlatko Hujić (A-SDA/Pomak/Zajedno), a businessman with a constructive mentality, has been credited with bringing the supermarket Bingo to town and attracting other investments. He is currently a member of the city council and will run in the upcoming elections. In 2018, Hujić was charged with a misdemeanor - abuse of office and authority and forgery of an official document - and resigned as Mayor. According to one respondent, his legal troubles were part of a political set-up by the SDA and SNSD to discredit him and force him out.[353] Hujić is expected to do well in the upcoming elections as he enjoys local support. (In 2016 he was elected with 60% of the vote.) The current mayor is from SNSD. Bosanski Petrovac doesn't have anyone representing them in the Cantonal Assembly, and it is difficult to see how this can be improved in the current situation. (If everyone in Bosanski Petrovac voted for the same candidate then they could in theory get a representative, but this has not yet been attempted.) The economic situation is decent, with Bingo and Pirnar (an aluminum products manufacturing company) employing people from Bosanski Petrovac as well as people travelling there from Cazin and Bužim. The nearby Oštrelj ski resort has been closed, as the owner didn't want to invest in additional equipment for snowmaking even though the facility had been used by locals and people from nearby Croatia.

While there are not a lot of resources to feed into corruption schemes, respondents did note that corruption is a part of life. Members of the Crni Vrh mountaineer association complain that the Law on Forests (*Zakon o šumama*) is not properly followed. In terms of party patronage, 300 people are employed in the municipality administration, which one interlocutor noted is far too many considering the needs of the small community. One interlocutor provided an anecdote about the director of a kindergarten who, having fought to get her job back through a legal process, is now accused of being hired through political connections although she is truly qualified. (This is allegedly motivated by the fact that she refused to become a member of SDA.) It was noted that in the city council, SNSD and SDA members collaborate behind the scenes; council members were described as "uneducated people." One focus group participant noted that the main problems are criminality and corruption, yet said the political system is not so relevant. This is an interesting cognitive gap in terms of the impact of systems and structures on process and outcome. The lack of a trusted judiciary also has an impact on business, as a respondent noted that investments are hindered as foreign companies don't trust the BiH judiciary and legal system. In a focus group it was noted that constant exposure to polarization and unaccountability forges irresponsible citizens, and that the moral system has suffered a blow. "Maybe we need a dictatorship that could impose a new culture," one FG member opined, clearly looking back to a period when Socialist Yugoslavia managed to have that social footprint – at least in many memories.

There is an active Youth Council staffed by young people who are trying to create conditions so that they and their peers can stay in Bosanski Petrovac if they want to. There are around 15 active young people, with around 5-10 described as very active. They are working to create a Youth Center for their activities and have a good relationship with the mayor; talks were planned for spring 2020, before COVID-19 affected plans everywhere. They organize

---

[353] While the facts in this case are unknown to the authors, such collaboration at the local level by ostensibly adversarial nationalists is commonplace in BiH; other Serb-inhabited municipalities in Canton 10 seem to demonstrate joint HDZ-SNSD pressure to depopulate them, and the recent SDA-HDZ deal in Mostar demonstrates the priority of both parties is maintaining dominance.

screenings of films, plays, held a Mali Advent and New Year's activities, and enjoy cooperation with partners in Bihać, Ključ, Drvar, and Banja Luka. A regional *radna akcija*[354] was planned, but had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. They enjoy support from the OSCE and Mozaik, the latter of which has funding from the US and others to run an Omladinska banka (youth bank) that supports small activities. The Association of Mountaineers "Crni Vrh" has up to 40 members, and has the support and collaboration of the municipality (current and previous Mayor), the Cantonal Forestry Administration (from 2020), and the OSCE.

On the first day of July 2020, the municipal assembly rejected a proposal to discuss the topic of leasing public land to an investor who plans to build an animal and medical waste incinerator. The project is supported by the mayor, but because of the strong opposition of some delegates, the discussion on the land lease has been postponed. Arguments against the incinerator include: the investor (the company "Zani" from Lukavac) does not possess competencies to run the incinerator; measures that need to be established to ensure control of pollution are not transparent; citizens' fear of health hazards and environmental pollution; there are no users of the incinerator from Bosanski Petrovac; and no new local jobs would be created.[355] A public discussion is soon to be held, and online petitions have been circulated; citizens seem highly motivated to prevent such a project in their municipality.

No examples of extremist activity were found or mentioned in discussions, though political polarization was noted as pervasive, in general and in particular before elections. An incident related to a young person wearing a Chetnik symbol in a kafana was noted as inconsequential. It seems that as elsewhere, the most divisive factor in BiH is politics.

Two challenges were noted by interlocutors. Emigration is a problem, and while there have always been people leaving Bosanski Petrovac to go to larger towns or abroad, many note that the pace of departures has increased. One respondent said, "We are currently exporting young people. We export educated people to the Netherlands, and they send us tulips. My son is 19 years old, hardworking, and went to work in Germany at a McDonalds." Some people do come back when they retire, as they can live better and more cheaply in Bosanski Petrovac. One person estimated that around 100 people went abroad, mostly in their fifties, to be able to earn a pension. The "Balkan route" of migrants and asylum seekers from points south and east is also an issue, though not as big a challenge as it is for other municipalities in the Krajina region. There have been concerns that migrants passing through have squatted in or damaged houses in rural spots populated by Serbs – many of which were abandoned in the war. Some civilian patrols have been set up as there have been allegations of insufficient effort by the police to patrol in these Serb areas. People in Bosanski Petrovac protested against an idea that a migrant camp be erected in their municipality. A respondent said that this protest was not against migrants, but was a protest against a state that abandoned them, and it showed that people want to have a voice on something that would affect their lives.

---

[354] That is, a collective civic (lit. translation) "work action" for some community benefit. These were common under socialism, giving communities "sweat equity" and personal investment in projects and the resulting infrastructure.

[355] "Zdravko Radošević: Korak bliže ka zabrani gradnje spalionice u Bosanskom Petrovcu" [Zdravko Radošević: One step forward towards a ban on building an incinerator in Bosanski Petrovac], Naša stranka, July 1, 2020. Available at: https://www.nasastranka.ba/zdravko-radosevic-korak-blize-ka-zabrani-gradnje-spalionice-u-bosanskom-petrovcu/18957/?fbclid=IwAR0IOcz8WiBjAH7cYGjo_XrfNxFMi-gSGKzSyvsDJXKjnUxciS7lYUXIhg8

When asked if some of the migrants should be allowed to stay, to (re)build Bosanski Petrovac, responses focused on their possible qualifications. In any case, several noted that the migrants don't want to stay in BiH, but rather wish to move on to richer EU member states.

During the height of the pandemic, one interlocutor (reached remotely) sketched out a perhaps unexpected, sunny side of COVID-19. Students who had been in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, etc. came back to Bosanski Petrovac, so more people were around. This respondent is also optimistic that perhaps people who can work online anywhere could be part of an interesting trend if people realize they can work remotely and can choose where they want to be. There are young people who would like to be a part of building their community, if they have the chance to do something meaningful. They would like the option to stay because they don't like the idea of living in "those systems," (referring to a hyper-capitalist urban rat race), and note that they wouldn't feel like they belong there. While reversing these trends might seem a pipe dream, one can looks at Ireland's history of depopulation, and how over time and with the right conditions people came back and could thrive.[356]

There is also an increased effort to put to better use local historical, cultural and nature resources. There are individuals who are investing in rural tourism, and a number of associations offer recreational, mountaineering, or extreme sports activities that are attracting visitors.

One respondent active in the town noted a number of comments on the nature and dynamics of politics in Bosanski Petrovac: Politicians create crises which do not exist and manage to foster intolerance; they poison kids who now talk about the war even though they didn't experience it; as long as the current political class is in power there will never be peace or development. Positions in government are held by uneducated people; we need a change the structure and remove those who steal elections. A former teacher said that Dayton needs to change and that the system has to be simplified so we don't just keep seeing the same problems, noting that all of the parties are working against each other, while they also work with one another. The political gamesmanship noted above illustrates how this plays out in real life. One young respondent put it succinctly: "*Politika u BiH nije posao nego biznis.*" (Politics is not an occupation, but a business.)

---

[356] Ireland's migratory tradition of export, re-import, and import of non-Irish human capital could be instructive. The shift from the "Celtic Tiger" boom to bust in the financial crisis a decade ago demonstrated the reflexes to go abroad remain hardwired in the Irish psyche, as does a desire to return.

Brčko Snapshot

Embraced by rivers, the larger Sava and the smaller Brka, Brčko (pop. 83,516 in 2013 census; 45,500 in the city) invites a visitor for long, effortless strolls. There are no hills, no steep streets, no rough terrain. Brčko is flat and wide, open for entrance from all sides, quiet and calm. The land is fertile which gave generations in the past enough income to gain a reputation as wealthy and jovial Posavina people. Today, it tells a different story. Scars from the last war are visible, not only on buildings, but also on people.

Brčko's location at the north-eastern hinge of the RS has made it strategically significant since the war, explaining the brutal nature of fighting and population displacement. Yet, for a number of years, due to a favorable economic climate (facilitated first by the Arizona Market and later by hefty customs revenues, before the implementation of the state-wide VAT regime) and an initially more intentional international effort, returns had occurred and more integrative approaches to living and governing were introduced. The town's position on the Sava should make it an ideal junction; the development of the riverside, for commercial or recreational/tourism purposes has been an object of talk and plans for years, yet there has been little achieved. Close personal and economic ties with both neighboring Croatia and Serbia should make Brčko a business headquarters outpost; lack of an income tax on freelancers in the District in principle shows another forward-looking policy. And Brčko's young people have studied a unique Brčko -developed curriculum where they have spent more time learning together than apart – an imperfect system, but one that has been less visibly segregated than other educational approaches in the entities.

However, for all of this investment and potential – and along the same timeline of the past 14 years – Brčko has fallen prey to the same dynamics as the rest of the country, in terms of domestic politics and its consequences, and also in terms of emigration. Its future outlook therefore remains questionable, and this strategically important part of BiH remains as much of a political "prize" as it was in November 1995 when its status nearly scuttled the completion of the Dayton peace accords.

Brčko, together with Mostar, has been seen as one of two cities in BiH that represent different approaches to dealing with particularly devastating wartime experiences, and the compromises negotiated when the fighting ends.[357] Since the Washington Agreement of 1994 that ended fighting between Bosniak and Croat forces, Mostar has been in a state of perpetual talks, processes, and incremental changes, mostly nudged along by the EU, while at base the city remains divided between east (Bosniak) and west (Croat).[358] Brčko, on the other hand, has been viewed since its establishment as a District in 1999[359] as more of a success

---

[357] Moore, Adam. *Peacebuilding in Practice: Local Experience in Two Bosnian Towns*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.

[358] For all the anticipation of the SDA/HDZ "deal" in 2020 it is worth remembering the 2003 Commission for Reforming the City of Mostar, convened by the OHR and representing the various parties. See report at http://www.ohr.int/archive/report-mostar/pdf/Reforming Mostar-Report (EN).pdf

[359] Agreeing on the status of Brčko nearly broke down the Dayton peace talks, until there was an agreement made to put off the status of Brčko to a future arbitration agreement. Holbrooke, Richard. *To End a War*. Modern Library. 1998.

story, with an American supervisor more directly involved in the administration of the district, using a more top-down approach to peace implementation intended to buffer the District from divisive nationalist party politics, and an understood ethnic key among the three main groups aimed at softening power sharing.[360] Yet after being a frontrunner in issues like police, education reform, and local governance for some years, the city now faces the same challenges and is enmeshed in the same dynamics as the rest of the country, showing that no district can exist as an island, immune from the broader political party incentives and state-wide political dynamics. This is especially evident absent effective external countervailing action, which has been the case since 2006.

After the establishment of the District in 1999, Brčko did not have local elections until 2004, at which point a multiethnic coalition led by SDP established the District government. Different from BiH's municipalities, the mayor of Brčko is not directly elected, but selected by Assembly councilors. In 2008, an SNSD mayor was selected, with the former SDP mayor selected as President of the District Assembly; Moore writes that the transition from a Bosniak to a Serb mayor in itself was an achievement.[361] In 2012 a Croat was selected. The current mayor of Brčko is from SNSD, and the range of other parties in the District Assembly demonstrates the range of party options (4 HDZ, 3 SDA, 2 SNSD (Mayor included), 2 SBB, 1 SDS, 1 PDP, 1 SBiH, 1 Socialist Party.) However, for all of the seeming variety, there is little new thinking, and little treatment of Brčko's residents as constituents who deserve a district administration that works for everyone, regardless of their affiliation.

Exhibit 122: Election Trends

	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDP	SNSD	HDZ	SNSD
Municipal Council/Assembly				
SDP		7	5	2
SNSD DNS		4	4	-
SDS DNNS PDP SRS RS		6		-
SDS		-	3	-
SBB		-	3	2
SP-PUP-DP		-	3	-
HDZ		2	2	3
HSS		-	2	2
Stranka za BiH		3	2	1
PDP SNS		-	2	-
NDS DSS		2	-	-
HDZ 1990 HSS NHI		2	-	-
SDA		2	-	4

[360] *Bosnia's Brčko: Getting In, Getting On and Getting Out*. International Crisis Group Report 144. June 2, 2003. Available at https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/bosnia-and-herzegovina/bosnias-Brčko-getting-getting-and-getting-out; Perry, Valery. "Democratic Ends, (Un)Democratic Means? Reflections on Democratization Strategies in Brčko and Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Bosnian Security After Dayton: New Perspectives*. Michael Innes (ed.) New York: Routledge, 2006.

[361] Moore, p. 115.

SDS-NDP	-	-	-	5
SNSD				4
Socialist Party/Pensioners' Party of RS		1		
Brčanski demokratski pokret				2
PDP - NS				2
Socialist Party				1
DF	-	-	-	1

The ethnic key approach to public administration staffing divides positions up by ethno-national affiliation of the three constituent peoples; a system initially intended to ensure no group felt marginalized as systems were reconstructed and reformed. However, in the absence of broader change this key has calcified. One respondent noted that while the census notes a population of around 83,500 in which 42% are Bosniak, 35% Serb, and 21% Croat, in fact there are so few Croats actually living in Brčko that many are driving in from nearby Orašje to take jobs allocated for Croats. This system is replicated among young people; a focus group participant said that this ethnic key is also present in youth councils, noting that for one position they needed a Croat but didn't have one, until someone said, "I think my grandmother was a Croat…." thereby solving the quandary. While laughable, this could all lead to more grave security and political problems in the future, for example when Bosniaks and Serbs begin to question why they are being denied a larger pie of the patronage pie.[362] In addition, while the District was created precisely to avoid being divided between the two entities – held instead "in condominium" by both, and falling under the aegis of the state – creeping legislation and rules from the entities have infected this system in substantial ways. Perhaps most underappreciated, Brčko residents are required to claim entity citizenship, and in turn derive rights (the right to vote, pensions, etc.) through entity channels in spite of not residing in an entity.[363]

Once considered to be a possible beacon for justice sector reforms, corruption is now deeply embedded in the district. Public sector vacancies are issued, but discussions revealed that everyone knows in advance which party placement will get it, and even which individual will be selected. The Center for Investigative Journalism has done reporting on how government financial support for civil society facilitates patronage (leading to the drafting of a new law, in process at the time of this writing.)[364] There are no high level cases of corruption that have been successfully prosecuted. The political party actors have thoroughly divided the Brčko

---

[362] This has long been the case with the AFBiH, which has difficulty attracting Croats to fill set billets. See, "Mostly Serbs applied for Service in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina." *The Sarajevo Times*. July 31, 2020. Available at https://www.sarajevotimes.com/most-serbs-applied-for-service-in-the-armed-forces-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina/ /

[363] "Entity Citizenship by Choice for Citizens of Brčko District. *The Sarajevo Times*. February 9, 2014. Available at https://www.sarajevotimes.com/entity-citizenship-by-choice-for-citizens-of-Brčko-district/

[364] "Grants in Brčko to Friends and Voters," *Center for Investigative Journalism (CIN),* November 29, 2019. Available at https://www.cin.ba/en/brcanski-grantovi-prijateljima-i-glasacima/; "Lawmakers Denied Money They Used for Buying Votes," *Center for Investigative Journalism (CIN)*, May 11, 2020. Available at: https://www.cin.ba/en/zastupnici-ostali-bez-novca-kojim-su-kupovali-glasove/

pie, and everything is allocated. "Because so many 'national' powers are concentrated in a small cadre of people, graft is even worse than in the rest of Bosnia, where it is endemic. 'This is a very small community, everyone knows everyone,' says police chief Goran Lujić. 'That can be a problem.'"[365] An individual interviewed in this research noted a similar sentiment: "*Blago vama u FBiH i RS-u, vi imate samo jednog za namiriti*" ("Good for you in the Federation or the RS, you only have one with which you must settle"), meaning that in both Entities there is one ethnic party in power with resources to give out to that groups, whereas in Brčko they have three of everything - 3 associations of war invalids, 3 veterans' organizations, etc., and it's no wonder that Brčko is in ruins; after they settle all interests times three, nothing is left.

Young people see this, noting in a focus group that in elections votes are transparently bought and sold; one must wonder about the impact of a young person growing up their entire lives and seeing/hearing that this is how politics - "democracy" - works. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the community as everywhere, with a respondent noting that the government has taken advantage of the situation to remove some school directors and to marginalize an assembly representative by placing him in self-isolation to prevent participation. On the other hand, as the pie shrinks, there is the possibility that party-driven transactionalism could fray if people feel they are not getting their fair share. What people who become disillusioned might decide to do about the situation is difficult to say.

Brčko's unique situation has made it the site of a host of civil society development efforts, ranging from the US-funded Civitas civic education program to OSCE-supported youth council initiatives to support for many various NGOs working on topics including youth and the environment.[366] One NGO, Proni, has been working with young people in Brčko for years. They have experienced a new burst of energy as a result of receiving funds to set up youth centers around the country, funded through P/CVE funds. While their work is good, and youth participants appreciate it, one should wonder why after 25 years of international and donor engagement money must still be spent to refurbish or set up youth centers. *Mjesne zajednice* in Brčko are organized as NGOs, and one local activist noted that MZ councils are required to explain how they spend money they are given, which is a change from past practice.

The most notorious extremist activity associated with Brčko is related to the rural Salafi community of Gornja Maoča. However, local residents would quickly say that using the name Maoča in association with the Salafist community is wrong. The location where the closed off community resides is called Gornji Fatovi.[367] This may sound like an unnecessary detail, but not for someone from this area. Local residents would prefer that media reports refer to Gornji Fatovi for what it is. Maoča belongs to Brčko, Gornja Maoča (Gornji Fatovi) to

---

[365] Geoghegan, Peter. "Welcome to Brčko, Europe's only free city and a law unto itself." *The Guardian*. May 14, 2014. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/may/14/Brčko-bosnia-europe-only-free-city

[366] "Brčko ljetni kamp" [Brčko summer camp]. Civitas.ba. Available at https://civitas.ba/programi-neformalnog-obrazovanja/Brčko-ljetni-kamp/

[367] A documentary film explored this and the associated prejudices in a film entitled, "*Ja sam iz Maoče Maoče* (I Am From That Maoča); see Aleksandar Brezar's "Mistaken Identity: Bosnian Film Explores Religious Prejudices." *Balkan Insight.* August 22, 2019. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/22/mistaken-identity-bosnian-film-explores-religious-prejudices/

Srebrenik. Administratively, they are perhaps less separated than mentally. Residents of Maoča, although they are quick to say they have no problems with the Salafi community whose only road runs through Maoča and where they shop, are frustrated with the Salafi association. For example, when crossing a border, they already know that the police will put them aside when they show documents with their residence marked as Maoča. The Salafi community remains inward-looking, Srebrenik being their point of reference for issues related to education, healthcare, and infrastructure. (In Srebrenik municipality the team heard that the Salafi community causes no problems, and that the only concession Srebrenik made for them was to allow teachers to wear a headscarf while at school. We spoke to these teachers and they seemed friendly and open, neither of them wearing scarves outside school. Speaking about children and parents, they said there is no difference between these parents and any others, except perhaps that these mothers have more children than is common.

More recently, a number of people from the Maoča area did travel to Syria.[368] A documentary was produced about a man who refused to leave for Syria with his family, and what his life was like since then.[369] Today there continues to be heavy surveillance of this remote, hard to reach community which does not vote and keeps a low profile – something the research team experienced when it accidentally arrived in the village while looking for the school in Maoča. There are indications that those who were most radicalized had already left, leaving fundamentalists who want a quiet life, and to be ignored.

In terms of far-right extremism, respondents in Brčko could point to little. One youth respondent noted that some kids will get involved in some football fan groups that can have extremist elements, but then will leave just as easily, almost like a rite of passage.

The challenges in Brčko are similar to other part of BiH, but with the twists inherent in its status. As young people leave the ethno-national balance will change and be further skewed – a particular trend among the Croats, but also a risk among any young people who feel their future will be brighter in Germany, or even closer to home in neighboring Croatia or Serbia. The young people in the June 2020 focus group were more pessimistic and less ready to see a path forward than their peers in several other municipalities; it is possible that they have been more saturated by the political environment in a community where everyone knows everyone, and are more acutely aware of the political games and positioning. Brčko's position and status will ensure it remains a pawn played by the bigger parties at the state level, either in shoring up political support or in stoking local level divisions – through entity citizenship benefits, through a return to more school segregation, and other steps aimed at moving the District away from, rather than towards, integration.

It can be difficult to find room for optimism. While the US Supervisor could in theory play a role in changing the momentum, actions to date suggest a focus on de jure legislative tasks

[368] Bećirović, Edina. *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. British Council. 2018. See also, Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 37.

[369] Brkanić, Džana. "Epizoda 91: U raljama ekstremizma – od Maoče do Sirije" [Episode 91: In the jaws of extremism – from Maoča to Syria]. *Detektor*. February 8, 2018. Available at https://detektor.ba/2018/02/08/epizoda-91-u-raljama-ekstremizma-od-maoce-do-sirije/

(related to conflict of interest, freedom of assembly laws, etc.) rather than on the meaningful implementation of laws and their impact. Further, the Supervisor is only ever as strong as the American policy behind it, and is greatly impacted by the broader American/EU policy on, and expectations for, BiH. That being said, there are bottom-up options that deserve support, not just as apolitical humanitarian or youth efforts, but as active and legitimate constituents of the District who should be mobilized in developing a broader political options and identity for all citizens within BiH. As everywhere there are people who want to stay, but want to live where there is vision. One local journalist / activist said that BiH needs a 50-year strategy, and that people's enlightenment needs to be built through education. He went on to note that politicians are most afraid of knowledge; political representatives only think about the four years of their mandate and that is why there are no long-term, successful policies.

Driving into Brčko and walking around the town creates a strong sense of uneasiness – where is all of the money from the budget going? Trees growing from ruined, deserted buildings 25 years since the end of the war seems hard to explain. On the main street, waste is thrown into round-shaped bins made out of concrete. There are metal containers in them. But the garbage is collected in a way that a worker takes it out by hand and throws it into a construction trolley wheel (*tačke*), not in a proper garbage collection unit. How much does a plastic, usual garbage collection cart costs? Handrails on bridges are rusty and old. Brčko should be a gem, polished and shining for the budget it has; it looks unpresentable, slovenly, and unkept.

The depressive tone of the youth focus group was disconcerting, for if young people are overwhelming negative there is little scope for a positive future vision. However once again it is telling that there has not been more extremism in Brčko, in light of the wartime dynamics and peacetime ethnonational dominance. It is interesting that there are not more prominently visible anti-migrant groups, Serbian nationalist groups, or Bosniak nationalist groups; that these groups were not raised at all suggests that they have little to no impact. As noted nearly all Salafists have morphed into a quiet oddity, routinely surveilled. That being said the thorough ethnonational division of the District by the leading parties, and the division of Brčko residents into citizens denied the opportunity to derive their citizenship from BiH, thereby further empowering the entities, is troubling. If broader regional political dynamics do begin to legitimize border changes, and if there is ever a serious effort by the RS to secede from BiH, Brčko's pseudo-stable resilience to date would likely by replaced, first by a final exodus, and then by making Brčko an internal front to which extremist young men looking for a fight would come. Alternately, an initiative focused on ensuring that Brčko is able to work as a unit of local self-governance free from high-level political games and pressures could help to spur more interest in strengthened local governance more broadly, to reduce the financial and political stranglehold of the cantonal and entity layers. Similarly, strategic litigation aimed at ensuring Brčko residents can vote without claiming entity citizenship, and confirming their right to derive their BiH citizenship directly from the state, could again help to strengthen local/state governing relationships, while consigning the middle layers to increased irrelevance.

Glamoč Snapshot

The clean air and spectacular views on the road to and from Glamoč (pop. 3,860, according to the 2013 census) soon reveal a community that feels like a ghost-town. While many towns in BiH have been progressively depopulated, Glamoč's strong civic and architectural bones now stand empty and abandoned, impressive buildings and common spaces testifying to a recent past in which a mostly rural community thrived in the town center, with an economy based on agriculture and the timber industry. People are straightforward and hardworking, with a somewhat harsh sense of humor. History has taught them not to trust authorities, and not to rely on external help because it is either an empty promise or comes too late. They identify themselves as south Krajina (južna Krajina) and take most pride in describing themselves as harsh but fair - "Like the rest of the *Krajišnici*."

As a Serb-majority municipality, in a Croat-majority canton, in a Bosniak-majority entity, Glamoč is the epitome of the convoluted results of the Dayton BiH structure, and of the incentives in the structure to neglect, ignore, or actively subvert communities that are not viewed to be "yours" – whether this happens at the cantonal, entity, or state level. In spite of the melancholy, it is possible to leave the town with a sense of possibility, as there are individuals who are brave enough to speak out for something different, and others who seem like they might consider doing so – if properly asked and mobilized.

Before the war Glamoč was approximately three-quarters Serb, and at the start of the war many of the community's Bosniaks and Croats left. Ethnic cleansing – of people and of heritage- followed, and Glamoč was used as a position from which the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) could bombard Livno. However, operations in summer 1995 by the HVO led to the swift expulsion of the Serbs, emptying out the territory. Return efforts began shortly after the war, both for the sake of former residents there, but also to open up return in other parts of the country, as the domino dynamic of the refugee/internally displaced person (IDP) return process demanded. However, opposition by the HDZ was pronounced.[370] In the country's first post-war municipal elections in September 1997 Serb parties won 40% of the seats, opening the door to more return (the *Povratak*, or "return" movement), which was itself opposed by some in the RS who felt Serbs should remain in the RS, to ensure the success of the ethnic cleansing and homogenization project (the *Ostanak*, or "remain" movement).[371] The latter position was that of the authorities in the RS, which undertook efforts to stifle return – beginning a dynamic still evident today, of nationalists effectively collaborating to keep "their" people in territory these parties control. 2013 census data (which cannot be seen as fully reliable) indicates that the population is now around 43% Serb, 32% Bosniak, and 23% Croat; an interesting case of a town being (at least officially) more diverse than before the war (the 1991 census showed 79% Serbs, 18% Bosniaks, and 1.5% Croats).[372] A

---

[370] "A Hollow Promise? – Return of Displaced Serbs to Drvar, Bosansko Grahovo, and Glamoč," *International Crisis Group*, January 19, 1998. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/bosnia-and-herzegovina/hollow-promise
[371] Ibid.
[372] The 2013 BiH Census results show the 1991 census results side-by-side. The full compendium is available at: http://www.statistika.ba/

respondent said the *real* population is much lower, and 84% Serb, 14% Bosniak, and 1.8% Croat.

The local political environment can be described as a toxic combination of intentional neglect, political marginalization, and post-globalization dereliction. There is little motivation or interest in a small, remote, Serb majority municipality by either the HDZ-dominated canton, or the SDA-dominated/HDZ facilitated Federation. The 2016 local election resulted in a mayor from SNSD, and a local assembly with a mix of seats held by mostly nationalist party representatives: SNSD (4 seats), SDA, HDZ and DF (2 seats each), and 1 seat each held by a smattering of others. No interlocutors described the system as functional or effective. One respondent who began monitoring assembly council meetings in the interest of more accountability and transparency initially faced hostility, though this ebbed. This same respondent noted the lack of interest by the mayor and government in civic initiative, noting that early pandemic response efforts to engage local women in sewing masks and equipment (there are many women who work as seamstresses) attracted attention from a journalist, while the mayor wasn't even interested in meeting or promoting this.

The campaign for the local election has already started, and respondents noted it will be tense. Citizens are frustrated, even rebellious, making pages and mobilizing on social networks. Political campaigns are usually monotonous, employing tired nationalist messages; people are well-aware of the manipulation and influence of the parties. However, among the research team's interlocutors, one young woman is running for the assembly, and one man as an independent candidate for mayor. More broadly there are reasons to be concerned about the future of this municipality if ideas regarding changing external or internal borders in the region gain currency. It is not a stretch to imagine that in the case of the *de jure* or *de facto* establishment of a Croat third entity (the aim of HDZ), that Glamoč and the other Serb-majority municipalities in FBiH (Drvar, Bosansko Grahovo, Bosanski Petrovac) would be viewed as "naturally" belonging in the RS. The spinoff effect of this would be clear – why would Bosniaks in Srebrenica then tolerate remaining in that entity, when they might splinter off to join the Federation? Furthermore, those municipalities under RS control would separate Krajina from the Federation entirely – increasing the likelihood of strong Bosniak resistance to any such effort.[373]

Exhibit 123:Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDA, S BiH	HDZ,HKDU	SNSD	SNSD	SNSD-SP
Municipal Council/Assembly					
HDZ,HKDU		3			
HDZ BiH	4		2	2	2
Zavičajni socijaldemokrati RS i BiH	2	1			
SDA, SBiH	4				

---

[373] Kurt Bassuener, "Bosnia Cannot Disintegrate Without Violence," *Balkan Insight*, April 6, 2011. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/e-bdaily%202491%201.7%208.pdf. See also a follow-up on Daniel Serwer's Peacefare.net blog, "Damage limitation won't work, so fix it," *Peacefare.net*, April 7, 2011. Available at: https://www.peacefare.net/2011/04/07/fix-it-because-damage-limitation-wont-work/

SDA		2	3	2	2
SDP				1	1
SPRS	3				
SNSD - MILORAD DODIK	2	2	3	4	4
STRANKA PENZIONERA - UMIROVLJENIKA BiH		1			
NS Radom za boljitak			1		
DF					2
SP				1	1
SDU		2	2	1	
SDS		3	2	1	
PDP		1	1	1	1
HDZ 1990-HKDU			1	1+1	1+1

Corruption is evident locally, and in the canton, which affects Glamoč. A focus group revealed that all participants view corruption as a problem, with examples noted in the education sector, and complaints that public sector jobs and public companies are given to people in Tomislavgrad, Livno, and Kupres - presumably Croats - rather than qualified people from Glamoč.

Irregularities and the unpredictable nature of processes related to the rental of agricultural land at the cantonal level was noted. Instead of doing paperwork every 10 years people are required to do it every year, which leads to uncertainty and the perception that this is more about seeking progressive excuses to expropriate land as paperwork is seen to not be in order.[374] Glamoč would seem to have high potential for corruption in the timber/forestry industry (Glamoč's forest constitute 7% of BiH forests, and 40% of Livno canton forests), and there is frustration that employment in the industry is all conducted from Livno. One issue that links corruption, malgovernance and politics is related to a former military exercise site on Glamočko polje, now used for the destruction of surplus munitions from around BiH; the so-called "Poligon."[375] This site was initially the Federation Army Combat Training Center (when the entities had their own armies and the FBiH's was being brought to parity with the VRS through the "Train and Equip" program).[376] Long a source of local concern (ignored by authorities and the international community alike, though there have been occasional champions),[377] the site constitutes an environmental disaster area that has led to allegations of cancer rate spikes. Politicians have said for years that they will address it, but nothing has been done. An additional potential environmental disaster is the announcement of the potential construction of a landfill to which waste from other municipalities would be

---

[374] Link: https://bhrt.ba/neizvjesna-jesenja-sjetva-u-kantonu-10/

[375] On surplus munitions broadly, see Vlado Azinović, Kurt Bassuener, and Bodo Weber, "Assessing the Potential for Renewed Ethnic Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Security Risk Analysis," *Democratization Policy Council/Atlantic Initiative*, October 2011. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/DPC-AI_BiH%20Security_Study.pdf . For a critical article on the munitions destruction, see S. Mišljenović, "Srbi neće u svom ognjištu" [Srbi do not want it in their hearth]. *Novosti*, June 26, 2019.

[376] Federation Army Combat Training Center at Livno/Glamoč, *OHR*, March 7, 1998. Available at: http://www.ohr.int/federation-army-combat-training-centre-at-livnoGlamoc/

[377] Former UN Mission to BiH Special Envoy Jacques Paul Klein was receptive to local arguments against the use of the site in the late 1990s, as return of Serbs to the area continued.

brought.[378] There are rumors that waste from *Uborak* (a contested site in Mostar) would be disposed of here. While waste needs to go somewhere, and one can see the appeal of a wide open and very empty municipality location, the optics of trash from the divided HDZ/SDA Mostar ending up in a predominantly Serb municipality – as with a military ordnance destruction site in an area populated by a minority group – are difficult to discount.[379]

There are some efforts in Glamoč, in the town but then also with a partner organization in Livno (Center for Civic Cooperation). While there are officially around 20 organizations, around 5 can be considered active. Much must be attributed to the efforts of a young leader there who is seeking to engage citizens in local government oversight, and who is trying to increase the potential for women to work in relevant small industries (sewing, local food production, etc.). There is a local food kitchen for the poor, which gets support from Caritas. A respondent noted a need for a psycho-social center, particularly for women, as there is so much frustration, grievance, and lack of perspective. People in general are looking to simply get by. There is not even the sense that the situation in Glamoč, or in BiH, could possibly be better.

Extremism was not noted by respondents, other than the typical pervasive nationalist politics that escalated in election periods. There are not sufficient people in Glamoč to even sustain genuine and organized extremist groups. Local graffiti has been more anti-government (SNSD) than anti-marginalized groups; the authorities quickly cover it up.

One focus group participant, himself a politician from SNSD, said that with the upcoming local elections, we will see a rise in nationalist rhetoric in media. He said that he does not see nationalism and hatred among people, only in the media. "When I turn on TV, I think it is war. I see nothing of it when I look around."

The primary challenges are brain drain and corrosive politics. No level of government has an interest in genuinely helping to build the municipality, or supporting a better life for its residents. The only incentive that any political unit would have to engage in Glamoč is negative – and this would be Banja Luka, for political purposes; that is, to compel depopulation, partially for propaganda ("Serbs are not safe in the FBiH"), but also to add to the "kept population" of those fully reliant on the ruling party for housing, sustenance, etc. Without changes and the introduction of some hope, the town will be empty in a decade.

Walking through Glamoč, a team member reflected that if he had a lot of money, he would buy Glamoč, and turn it into a planned and intentional community based on fresh air, tourism, pensioner living centers, and health tourism. The empty buildings are beautiful and scenic; while the town center is walkable and community-designed, one can be in the forest

---

[378] The politics of garbage collection and dumping have been investigated in the past. See, for example, "Rubbish Report – The Real Face of Power Struggles in Bosnia." *Populari.ba*, June 2012. http://populari.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/rubbish_report.pdf

[379] The concept of environmental racism – that groups which are subject to racial or group discrimination can suffer environmental injustices as a matter of policy – is now well-established. See Vann R Newkirk II, "Trump's EPA Concludes Environmental Racism is Real." *The Atlantic*, February 28, 2018. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/the-trump-administration-finds-that-environmental-racism-is-real/554315/

in 15 minutes. The altitude of nearly 1000 meters makes it an ideal place for treating respiratory diseases. Austro-Hungary knew this and a hospital from the time they ruled BiH still stands, empty and unused. With some creativity and imagination, Glamoč can be offered as an oxygen spa, a place for restoring one's health, physical and mental, through fresh air, local grown food, sports. There are two natural lakes in the proximity of the town center. One can imagine a different type of summer tourism where people could escape the heat and crowds of Dalmatia. This sounds far-fetched; however, with climate change such opportunities will be needed in the future. Further, the fact that people were very open to speaking to the team, on multiple occasions and alone and in groups, shows that there are people who care, who are tired of being neglected and could be mobilized around forward-looking ideas.

It is easy to discount Glamoč as a town that is simply past its prime and destined for depopulation. However, one could apply to same to many parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region in general. Yet not everyone wants to – or can or should be expected to – live in only the largest cities. A real rural development and tourism strategy could change the perspective of this municipality. Unfortunately, there is no such vision – in general or for this marginalized municipality. And Glamoč could once again be a geo-territorial pawn if trends towards increased political/ethno-national homogenization continue, not only by local nationalist parties, but abetted by international actors confusing these games with "ownership."

Maglaj Snapshot

Maglaj (pop. 23,146 in 2013 Census; just over 6,000 in the town) is a small town about 90 minutes from Sarajevo, and 30 minutes from Zenica, situated on the River Bosna. A view from the old fortress, just above the town center, is impressive. On sunny days, one can see far away letting the imagination stretch by looking at the flow of the wide, slow Bosna river. In Maglaj, one can see both small town potential and decline. The remnants of a more prosperous past, lumber related industries, and related public investment, are clear in the well-structured and livable town center, while the links to the medieval and Ottoman pasts are present in the now neglected fortress skeleton and old town *mahala*. Maglaj's location during the war led to intense wartime hardship and extreme political polarization that largely entrenched nationalist party outlooks and control. However, there has been solid Serb return to the area over the past 20 years, which, together nearby Žepče's mixed Bosniak-Croat population, has insulated it from total demographic homogeneity. A litany of missed opportunities and limited perspective have led to individuals to seek opportunity and hope elsewhere. This population outflow has left the town less vibrant and with reduced human capital.

During the third round of field visits, Maglaj and some other parts of the region (e.g., Tešanj) were marking war-related military anniversaries – by both the Army BH and the HVO. While in some parts of wartime Bosnia there were agreed and functional ABiH/HVO alliances at various times, in Maglaj the town was besieged from 1993-94 by the VRS as a part of military actions in Maglaj, Žepče, and Tešanj in which the VRS played a role in selectively supporting the HVO in its fight against Bosniak forces. In addition to the wartime dynamics of the three "local" armies, Maglaj also saw the arrival of foreign fighters from around the world who saw Bosnia as the next Afghanistan, and sought to wage *jihad* in support of persecuted Muslims.[380] Following the Washington Agreement of 1994, forces from the region were later instrumental in movements leading up to summer's Operation Storm, which substantially reduced Serb held territory in BiH and Croatia, leading some in the ABiH seeing a potential opportunity to quickly move to take Doboj and parts north. A complete offensive of this kind was stopped by the US and its allies, as instead peace talks were prepared for autumn 1995. A mujaheddin brigade played a part in a successful ARBiH Third Corps effort in 1995 to break through Serb lines in Vozuća in the Ozren mountains (near Doboj and Petrovo), followed by the unlawful killing of many captured Serb fighters.[381]

The war divided the population as it did everywhere, and Maglaj has two of the notorious segregated 2-in-1 schools (as does nearby Žepče).[382] However, while there have been signs of

---

[380] Li, Darryl. *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire and the Challenge of Solidarity*. Stanford University Press, 2020.
[381] Some of the charges were noted in ICTY indictments; see Sadović, Merdijana. "Delić Indictment Unsealed." *Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR).* November 15, 2005. Available at https://iwpr.net/global-voices/delic-indictment-unsealed. Aimen Dean recounts the massacre in his memoir, *Nine Lives: My Time as MI6's Top Spy Inside al-Qaeda.* London: Oneworld, 2018. Li refers to the Battle of Vozuća, focusing more on the lore surrounding recounting of divine support to the Muslim fighters in the battle in their time of need. See Li, pp. 80-82.
[382] *"Two Schools Under One Roof" – the Most Visible Example of Discrimination in Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.* OSCE Mission to BiH. December 3, 2018. Available at https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/404990

reconciliation at the grassroots level – most notably illustrated in the documentary film *Maglaj: War and Peace*[383] – there has been little similar progress seen in formal politics in the municipality, canton, or wider country.

Maglaj, similar to much of Zenica-Doboj canton, has been a solid SDA stronghold for the post-war period, reflecting the wartime dynamics, its predominantly Bosniak population, and proximity to Zenica. The current mayor, from SDP, was elected in 2016 due to corruption-rooted dissatisfaction with the previous SDA mayor - not due to broader voter pushback against SDA generally. The mayor has therefore been embattled, struggling to work with a municipal assembly in which he does not enjoy solid majority support, and a canton in which SDA remains the significant player. In addition, the mayor came under heavy criticism for his response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as a fellow SDP assemblyman, also director of a local textile factory, failed to promptly close a factory, resulting in Maglaj being a hotspot for a time.[384] This case highlighted to many the inappropriate links between politicians and business owners, and the prioritization of profits over public health, and, while this is in no way unique to SDP, they are positioned to suffer electorally in autumn 2020. Further, the mayor noted that the municipality failed to receive sufficient support from the canton in this public health crisis, and didn't receive aid as did other communities. While not spoken, such dynamics can perhaps be explained by party dynamics, and an interest by the SDA in Zenica to deny an SDP-led mayor support.

Exhibit 124: Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDA	SDA	SDA	SDA	SDP
Municipal Council/Assembly – number of mandates					
SDA	10	12	13	11	11
SDP	9	7	7	8	7
SBB	-			2	2
Stranka penzionera	1	1	1	1	1
HDZ	-	1	1	1	1
NS RzB	-		-	1	-
Stranka za BiH	5	2	3	1	1
NDS	-	2	-	-	-
DF	-	-	-	-	2

In the civic sector, funds allocated for civil society are used to build up/buy support in what amounts to government-organized NGOs (GONGOs). Udruženje građana "Fojničani" notes that they never received support under the previous SDA mayor, but now with SDP they do.

---

[383] Sito-Sucić, Daria. "Bosnia war veterans become peace messengers as threats to stability rise." *Reuters*. February 26, 2020. Available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-veterans-reconciliation/bosnia-war-veterans-become-peace-messengers-as-threats-to-stability-rise-idUSKCN20K1HL

[384] "Raste broj zaraženih u novom žarištu COVID-19 u Federaciji BiH" [A number of infected is rising in a new COVID-19 hotspot in the Federation BiH]. *www.radiosarajevo.ba*. April 28, 2020. Available at https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/raste-broj-zarazenih-u-novom-zaristu-COVID-19-u-federaciji-bih/375330

They are demanding that the government routinely and transparently publish a list of who is supported, and with how much money. In addition, funds coming in from external donors such as UNDP can exacerbate aid competition through a complicated process that favors larger organizations – often with party/political ties – simply to apply for funds. An interlocutor with long experience with the international community and donors notes there is an irony in the fact that while an organization like UNDP will seek "partnership" by requiring that local proposal selection commissions are comprised of municipal political representatives, this in fact reinforces party privilege and power while at the same time expanding the pie of resources they may distribute. In addition to strengthening patronage, this makes it easy to overlook Serb or Croat returnee applications, who have fewer patrons in government. In such an environment, it is easy to understand why local Croats rely on the government of Croatia for aid/support, and Serbs leave or eke out a quiet life – sensing it is not really "their" town.

Liberal, civic, civil society (e.g., not religious bodies) is minimal, and is project and donor dependent. The focus areas of Udruženje građana "Fojničani" include national reconciliation, social inclusion, and rural development. They also set up the Volonterski centar za socijalnu inkluziju (Volunteer Center for Social Inclusion), which is equipped with a kitchen and a music workshop, a hall, projectors, etc. Their flagship project is ''Žene mira: Misija mira'' where women of different ethnic groups sew bags and hand out these "bags of peace" (*vreće mira*) at local religious sites.[385] (Note: this is 25 years after the end of the war.) In 2014 and afterwards, they engaged in flood relief. However, even this effort was politicized, as a representative noted that while they raised funds to sanitize and renovate a sports hall at an elementary school the school blocked the usage of the renovated facility for the implementation of a USAID-funded "škola mira" (peace school) project; the activists explain this noting that political parties exert influence over the school and they do not want reconciliation. A respondent noted that since as an NGO they cannot change the system, they try to get the most out of it and try to obtain local government funding to do the work they want to do.

As noted above, the greater Maglaj environs had seen the influx of foreign fighters coming to Bosnia in the name of jihad in the early '90s. Some of the them stayed, marrying local women and settling into mostly rural lives. A concentration emerged in Bočinja, about 20 minutes away, as the government allowed them to live in abandoned Serb houses in the village. However this community was dispersed by the government in cooperation with NATO SFOR (particularly US) forces in 2000/2001, partly in support of the return process, but also because they were seen as a security threat. The region in general was once again the focus of security analysts and patrols during the rise of ISIS in Syria, as individuals and families from went to Syria. "These isolated communities – including Gornja Maoča, Ošve, Bočinja, Dubnica, and Liješnica – saw high levels of departures of foreign fighters to Syria from 2012

[385] Bradarić, N. "Maglaj: Realizacija Volonterskog centra za socijalnu inkluziju" [Maglaj: Establishment of a Volunteering Centre for Social Inclusion]. *Dnevni Avaz.* January 11, 2018. Available at https://avaz.ba/kantoni/zenicko-dobojski-kanton/339500/maglaj-realizacija-volonterskog-centra-za-socijalnu-inkluziju

to 2016, amounting to at least a quarter of the Bosnian contingent."[386] Discussions suggest that it was the most radical who left, with the remaining people wishing to live quietly, and being frustrated with the stigma and attention they continue to receive.[387] Discussions with the head of the Islamic Community in Maglaj revealed an interest in denying Islamist preachers seen to be extreme a platform by denying access to large publicly owned spaces. Ošve is a more isolated community that has not been integrated within the BiH Islamic community. There does not seem to be much concern about this community, however, as their leader is seen more as an eccentric than extremist. They remain private, work in agriculture, are constantly observed and cause no problems. The Salafi residents of Bočinja were born in BiH, and there are no longer foreigners among them. However, they are practitioners of a puritanical/Salafist form of Islam, with adherents living a rural life.

The *mjesna zajednica* of Bočinja is headed by a Serb (who comprise a large majority there), with a Salafi deputy. One might fairly wonder why individuals in a country with European Union ambitions would seek to live a rural life according to Salafist principles; one can plausibly frame this as a rejection of broader society and an exercise of religious freedom. While one might draw parallels between the Bočinja Salafists and, say, the Amish in Pennsylvania, the broader social environment cannot be discounted for making the decision to go to Syria seem rational. In fact one might reasonably wonder why *more* individuals did not make this choice, considering the region's recent history and grim current outlook.

The 2014 floods that ravaged Bosnia and Serbia took a particularly high toll on Maglaj and much of the Bosna River Valley.[388] Landslides destroyed and damaged houses, and streets were washed away. The rising tides of the Bosna River flooded the city center. While heavy rains are a natural phenomenon, many blamed the lack of prevention on inadequate government planning, and attributed landslides and damage to homes on illegal sites or poorly planned construction. A substantial amount of aid has been donated to the region since then, coordinated by UNDP and others, to try to prevent similar future destruction.[389] However, respondents note that little tangible change in terms of infrastructure is visible.[390] As one participant in a focus group noted, "we fear floods more than Corona." The impact of the floods took a toll on a municipality already suffering economically, and hastened the interest in young people and entire families to leave. The lack of adequate sports and recreation facilities, or of a vision for the future, together with poor economic prospects make exit a rational choice. Tourism opportunities that could strengthen the economy and

---

[386] Bećirović, Edina. *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. *British Council*. 2018. See also, Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 37.

[387] Džidić, Denis and Arnes Grbesić. "Bosnian Salafi Village Bemoans Terror Tag." *Balkan Insight*. February 12, 2016. Available at
https://balkaninsight.com/2016/02/12/bosnian-salafi-village-bemoans-terror-tag-02-11-2016/

[388] "Bosnia and Serbia Floods: Thousands Flee as Death Toll Rises." *The Guardian*. May 18, 2014. Available at
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/18/thousands-flee-floods-bosnia-serbia

[389] "Izvještaj o Realizaciji Sredstava za Sanaciju Posljedica Poplava u BiH iz 2014. Godine." Mreža Brana. March 2016. Available at https://www.cpi.ba/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FINALNI-IZVJEŠTAJ-O-REALIZACIJI-SREDSTAVA-ZA-SANACIJU-POSLJEDICA-POPLAVA-U-BIH-IZ-2014.-GODINE.pdf

[390] Toe, Rodolfo. "Lack of Transparency on Bosna Flood Cash Slated." *Balkan Insight*. February 10, 2016. Available at https://balkaninsight.com/2016/02/10/report-highlights-lack-of-transparency-on-flood-reconstruction-in-bosnia-02-09-2016/

energy of the town – for example related to medieval Bosnia or eco-tourism, have failed to materialize as a result of a lack of cross-cantonal or state-wide planning and development support. In spite of its beauty, it is easy to imagine Maglaj becoming a town of pensioners over the next generation, with diaspora relatives coming to visit only on holidays.

Following discussions in Round 3 of the research, while having a coffee an interlocutor pointed out a young woman walking by, noting she had just been named to the BiH national volleyball team. It is amazing that in such poor conditions – in terms of education, recreation, critical thinking, and merit-based thriving –such high quality young people can still emerge and shine. Tapping into these young people – in Maglaj, and among those who have left but maintain ties – is critical if the town is not to die a prolonged death. However, inchoate local and diaspora organization requires consolidation around an idea and a vision if it is to escape the "projectitis" trap.

Considering Maglaj's circumstances – the war, the siege, the arrival of mujahidin during the war and the integration and settlement of some; Serb returnee dynamics, the impact of the financial crisis, the floods and now the pandemic – it is shocking that there is not more extremism, and more potentially destructive radicalization. For now the safety valve is emigration. Maglaj would benefit from a state-wide rural development strategy, a state-wide tourism-promotion strategy, and participation in a state-wide environmental protection effort. Instead, it is losing time year after year to municipal-cantonal-entity-state political party positioning, in which, as a small and poor place, it consistently falls low on the radar screen, even on the list of transactional priorities.

Mrkonjić Grad Snapshot

The municipality of Mrkonjić Grad (pop. 16,671, according to the 2013 census) - a prime part of the puzzle piece of the RS that juts into Federation territory that touches on three different Federation cantons - is forested and remote, with beautiful and scenic mountain roads and intricate river systems. The town, the administrative center of the municipality, has a history that was successful enough that even today people point out that it was once one of the richest towns in the Balkans, and the site of one of the oldest schools. However, as a result of recent wartime destruction, dysfunctional post-war politics, and economic dislocation, the town feels empty, in spite of its walkable center where one can find all of the elements of a potential strong community center. A large, shiny, newly built Orthodox church dominates the view when driving into the town. The surrounding area hosts pristine nature that could be the backbone of eco/agro-tourism, including along the Via Dinarica, if environment-destroying infrastructure projects aimed more at benefitting parties outside the region (e.g., HE plants) are abandoned, and a more forward looking and cohesive tourism and rural development strategy is developed.[391]

The town's location in the Krajina frontier region has, like Bosanski Petrovac and Bihać, made it a strategically sought chunk of territory throughout the 20th century. Under the occupation of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH), and in the wake of atrocities against civilians, and especially Serb communities, the State Anti-Fascist Council for the Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH) was held in the town in November 1943, marking the formal commitment of the Partisan anti-fascist resistance to a free Bosnia and Herzegovina comprised of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. As a part of joint Croatian/ARBiH operations in summer 1995 the region's Serb population was expelled, and when Croat forces seized the town, Bosniak forces were unhappy, having themselves sought this land to connect Bihać and Jajce.[392] During the peace talks, as the parties squabbled about territorial land allocation percentages, Mrkonjić Grad, which had been taken by the Croats in fighting in September 1995, was "given" to the RS so that Milošević could get closer to the 49% of BiH territory he expected for the RS. (This was possible only after Bill Clinton called Croatian president Franjo Tuđman to seek his flexibility on this matter.)[393] Departing Croatian forces burned down much of the town (also in neighboring Šipovo) when withdrawing in early 1996- peacetime destruction aimed at sending a signal against return.[394] While the population even before the war had a strong Serb majority (80% in 1991; 96% in 2013), the big demographic change over the past generation has been size, as the population dropped from around 26,000 to around 16,600. A local mass grave of 181 Serbs killed in 1995's Operation Storm by the Croatian Army was discovered in 1996, after the territory was returned to Serb control as a result of

---

[391] The Via Dinarica trail traverses the Balkans in several directions, and its trails include all the countries that comprised Yugoslavia and Albania. See https://www.via-dinarica.org/

[392] Stephen L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1999. Page 130.

[393] Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*, Modern Library, New York, 1998. Page 364.

[394] Gerald Toal and Carl T. Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and Its Reversal*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011. Page 165.

the Dayton Peace Agreement.[395] The village of Baljvine is known for historical ethnic concord.[396]

Exhibit 125: Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDS	SDS	SNSD	SNSD	SNSD
Municipal Council/Assembly					
SNSD	4	11	11	12	12
DNS			2	3	3
SP			2	2	3
SDS	9	5	4	4	3
PDP			2	2	2
SRSRS		2	2	2	1
NDP					1
SNS	2				
SPRS	5	4			
PDP RS	2	1			
SAVEZ SDA-S BiH	1				

The mayor since 2011 has been Divna Aničić from SNSD – one of the very rare female mayors in the country.[397] The municipal council enjoys a strong SNSD presence with 12 seats, against a collection of other parties. BiH Prime Minister Zoran Tegeltija is also from Mrkonjić Grad, where he served as mayor from 2004-2012.[398] There are therefore strong party ties in the municipality. Shortly before the first field visit in February, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić visited the town, and banners related to his visit remain strung across the main street. Milorad Dodik accompanied him, and they brought equipment for two high schools and announced plans for creating new jobs in the municipality.[399] The team was unable to get an agreement with anyone from the municipality to meet, on either field visit, in spite of multiple requests.

One informal interlocutor who sat in on a discussion noted being bullied in his job as a police officer, an experience which has shown him how difficult it is to pursue justice. He noted you can't start a labor dispute if you don't have money, because it is impossible to finance expensive court costs from a monthly salary of 700 KM. As an additional anecdote, he noted he tried to start his own business, and it was successful, but then soon some people with more "power" used the system against him (through forced inspections, etc.) because

---

[395] "Serbs unearth 181 bodies in mass grave." *Associated Press*. April 6, 1996. Available at:
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/serbs-unearth-181-bodies-in-mass-grave-1303475.html
[396] "Baljevine: The Only Village without a Conflict." *Sarajevo Times*. February 18, 2019. Available at:
https://www.sarajevotimes.com/baljvine-the-only-village-without-a-conflict/
[397] See Mayor Aničić's bio at the municipality web page: https://mrkonjic-grad.rs/29/Nacelnik
[398] "Who is the Ethnic Serb Nationalist Slated to Lead Bosnia-Herzegovina?" *RFE/RL*. November 20, 2019.
Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/tegeltja-ethnic-serb-nationalist-prime-minister-bosnia-herzegovina-/30283267.html
[399] "Dodik, Vucic: No differences between Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia." *SRNA/N1*. January 1, 2020. Available at:
http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a406845/Dodik-Vucic-No-differences-between-Serbs-in-Bosnia-and-in-Serbia.html

someone else with connections opened a similar store. This is an example of how the system is used to punish the disloyal or destroy competition. An unauthorized drug refuse site was found in the municipality, raising questions about who knew what about this hazard.[400] One claim is that a larger quantity of medical waste was thrown into a bauxite mine after the war that was never attended to, and then additional medical waste was recently thrown in while no responsible person or institution has been identified.[401] There is an interesting and lucrative minefield business: 300,000 m^2 is considered to be a mine risk area. This is not just about ensuring a safe environment, but is part of a "trade in minefields," meaning it pays to declare the whole area mined as it is an opportunity to make money (mine clearance costs 3KM per sq. m). There have also been ongoing efforts to try to prevent the installation of "mini" HE plants, which are already destroying the natural water system.

Efforts to declare land a nature park have met opposition. We were told a story which shows how private interests, packaged in strong national sentiments, can kill a progressive idea, even when municipal authorities support it. An attempt to proclaim a part of a mountainous area including an empty village a nature park, where adequate investment would be made to protect it from devastation and to attract visitors, turned into a long struggle against some local people who descend from a village where nobody lives today. The presentation of plans showing that their inheritance would actually gain more value if used for tourism purposes had no success. It all culminated in a public gathering where a medical doctor who in his spare time dresses in traditional Serb attire and rides a horse around this intended nature park area, rose to speak. Everybody went silent because doctors have authority in small communities. The doctor said in solemn voice: "There are more and more nature parks and less and less space for Serbs." This was enough. The opposition to the initiative grew, the mayor withdrew her support, the investor gave up. There was no voice of reason able to counter the man on the horse.

For a small and depopulated municipality, there are some strong bright spots in terms of engagement and activism – the question is whether they could ever have a broader structural impact. There is an active Omladinski centar in Mrkonjić Grad that has received funds from American and other donors since it began doing work to try to support return, reconciliation, and other projects just after the war. The current director also has long experience working on issues of inclusion of people with disabilities. About 25 minutes outside of the town center, in a scenic valley, the Pecka tourism center the has developed an eco-tourism business, to capitalize on local outdoors activities, mushrooming, and its position on the Via Dinarica, which could help to boost tourism throughout the region. They have also applied for the USAID Localworks project, cooperate with GIZ, and participate in an EU Cross Border Cooperation project with Karlovac and Slavonski Brod. Since COVID-19 struck, some 15 people from Mrkonjić Grad that live in the USA collected approximately $5,000 which was used to buy basic goods for packages. The aid was distributed mostly by youth organizations that provided information on citizens in need, and around 70 people received aid through this action. There is also a private radio station, Radio Šik, operating since 1996 that claims,

---

[400] "Divlja deponja lijekova dvije decenije prijeti Mrkonjić Gradu" [Illegal Medical Waste Site Threatens for Two Decades Threatens Mrkonjić Grad]. *Al Jazeera Balkans*, June 23, 2019. Available at:
http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/divlja-deponija-lijekova-dvije-decenije-prijeti-mrkonjic-gradu
[401] "Medicinski otpad truje Sanu" [Medical Waste Poisons], *slobodnaevropa.org.* Available at:
https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bih-medicinski-otpad/29854837.html

"We are the first radio station in this area to be a member of major services such as: Voice of America (VOA), Deutsche Welle (DW), and today we are a member of the Free Europe (RFE) radio network today."[402]

Research and discussions did not reveal any extremist groups. There could be three explanations for this. First, as a region that is nearly 100% Serb there is no need to define oneself as extremist – they don't need to be (or performatively be) in opposition to anything, or anyone. Second, extreme nationalist positions can and have been mainstreamed and institutionalized through the political system – the rhetoric of SNSD has become increasingly polarizing and extreme – and the Srpska Radikalna Stranka has 1 mandate on the local assembly. Third, it is possible that there are manifestations and even (semi) organized activity, but the group was not able to meet members first hand; however there was no mention of such threats by the other respondents. One interlocutor who spoke with the team does hold some strong theories related to purported US/western engagement behind all of BiH's problems, past and present; and willingness to uncritically believe such not infrequently embraced theories suggests a trust and critical thinking deficit that could, in determined hands, be manipulated towards extremist ends.

Mrkonjić Grad is an example of a basically homogenous community, in which the leading RS party holds control, and yet accountability and transparent governance is missing, suggesting that we cannot blame inter-ethnic contestation for the lack of justice. It also suggest that a lack of common sense and rational functionality permeate even public administration within the RS, even after more than two decades of assistance aimed at public sector administration reform. One interlocutor told the team of a recent incident when he needed to seek medical attention. Though born and raised in Mrkonjić Grad, and now living in the municipality, he was unable to access emergency medical care as his papers are currently registered for Banja Luka. He was ultimately able to get emergency care from nearby (smaller) Šipovo, and chronicled his experience on social media. The changing demography and economic characteristics of the town are not simply related to the war, but to an institutional and systemic lack of accountability stretching a generation. A member of the SRS who agreed to speak spoke in more Bosnia-centric terms than one might expect. In later reflection a team member speculated that this individual had tied up his identity in that party, but was supremely dissatisfied and unable to find an option that would be better; plugging into such dissatisfied individuals could be a key to change.

That the team was able to identify forward-looking individuals willing to speak was in itself a sign that there are people interested in having a voice, expressing their opinions and hopefully having an impact in changing the problems they see around them every day. Environmental protection is a strong and tangible issue that motivates people to get involved at the local level. The Pecka center is an example of a local effort gaining recognition beyond the borders of BiH. Visitors from Europe come for mountain climbing tours, a mushroom picking school is now a tradition, and we encountered a group of kundalini yoga instructors on a retreat in February. GIZ is supporting an investment in bungalows. Hiking through the woods, including a visit to Sana spring, is part of ongoing tourism development efforts. A garden with homegrown vegetables is slowly expanding, testifying to an increasing demand

---

[402] http://www.sikradio.com/o-nama/

from visitors. Despite initial suspicion and opposition from the village to this investment, the whole village now supports the Pecka center. They offer accommodations and sell their produce.

While individual victories against environmentally disastrous projects is important, the systemic drivers that help to lead to such cases require consideration. While good grassroots environmental efforts often include broader BiH and regional networks, there is little spillover effect into broader areas of policy; efforts are kept at the tangible and specific. People need to be mobilized around a vision of a better future, to keep them from leaving and keep them fighting for their communities.

The reported sense of injustice and systemic frustration in Mrkonjić Grad is interesting because it shows that these things happen to everyone. In this case, it is Serbs pressuring Serbs- without regard to ethno-national affiliation. While both are bad practice, the latter is especially dangerous in light of the politics of fear. However the lack of justice and good rule of law/accountable governance shows that the RS is not a fair, more just, or more accountable unit of governance. The same political incentive exist to legislate through fear and patronage.

Petrovo Snapshot

Petrovo is a place where, if you would drive into it without any prior knowledge, you would be intrigued to explore its natural surroundings. Set amidst thick woods and untouched nature in a valley below the Ozren mountain, Petrovo is a calm, sparsely inhabited municipality. However, if one were to drive to Petrovo with some prior knowledge of their past, s/he would hardly do so with a sense of nonchalance. As stated by one of our earliest interlocutors in the project, Serbs themselves have a saying: there are Serbs and there are Petrovo Serbs. Their role in the second world war, turning against Orthodox priests, is remembered among people as a proof of their opportunism and extremism. Just as they were radical communists during Yugoslavia, one interlocutor explained, they turned into radical nationalists after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Perhaps an explanation for the reputation Petrovo has developed is that this mountainous community, historically secluded and forged by the harsh environment, learned to rely upon itself, a reality that might have favored the development of a suspicious attitude towards foreign elements, often perceived as threats.

The current municipality of Petrovo (pop. 6,474, around 2300 of which are in the town/administrative center), halfway between Tuzla and Doboj, was (re)created during the recent war from parts of the neighboring municipalities of Gračanica and Lukavac, so that Serbs in that area would fall within the newly established RS. (It had been merged into its larger neighbors during administrative reforms in the 1960s.) The town center lacks an old town or market core; the main points of interest, such as monasteries or businesses, lie along the outskirts. In reality it looks and functions as a village, and the fact that it has been reconstituted as a municipality does not seem to have increased the livelihood of its inhabitants.

A glance at today's inter-entity boundary line (IEBL) shows that Petrovo, Doboj, and the surrounding areas fall along many territorial demarcation lines that a generation ago were military front lines. The war in this part of the country was difficult and shifting, marked by the three main armed factions struggling for territorial control and positions. The VRS wanted to hold the Ozren pocket to sever ARBiH supply lines; Radovan Karadžić said, "If Vozuća falls, Moscow falls as well."[403] Following the end of the war and the impact of Operation Storm, Doboj and Petrovo fell in the RS, and hardline politics prevailed. In a history about the politics of return, Petrovo's (re)creation was framed as one part in a greater strategic Doboj cartographic puzzle, as ethnically "clean" municipal enclaves were created (Doboj-Jug and Doboj Istok for Bosniaks; Petrovo for Serbs; Usora for Croats). Minority return to Doboj town was bitterly contested from the start.[404] However today much has normalized, and while there is not strong political cooperation, people cooperate practically: people go to Gračanica or Tuzla for shopping, and go to Doboj for education or to the hospital. There is also good cooperation in arts, culture, and sports in the region.

---

[403] Gerald Toal and Carl T. Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and Its Reversal*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011. , p. 124.
[404] Toal and Dahlman, Pages 273-274.

Exhibit 126: Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SPRS	SNSD	SNSD	SDS	SDS
Municipal Council/Assembly					
SDS	7	6	5	6	4
SNSD	3	4	7	4	3
DNS			1		2
NDS					2
SNS	1				2
SRS – Srpska u sigurne ruke					1
PDP		1	1	2	1
SRSRS			1	1	1
Partija ujedinjenih penzionera				1	1
SP				1	
DP Dragan Čavić				1	
SPRS	5	2			
SRS Vojislav Šešelj		1	1	1	
PSRS		2	1		
NRS	1				

The municipality (like nearby Doboj) has been an SDS stronghold, with the current mayor being elected with over 60% of the vote in 2016. However, SNSD, the RS political party powerhouse, has made inroads. In early August 2020, mayor Petković announced he was leaving SDS to join SNSD and will be SNSD's candidate at the upcoming local election in fall 2020.[405]

During the 2014 floods, the Armed Forces of BiH helped Petrovo in the response and relief, as they also did during the week of our third field visit following some flooding. However, no support from the RS or from UNDP programs was noted, though admittedly the 2014 flood damage was not as grave as in Doboj. Elections for the *mjesne zajednice* are held regularly, and the municipality is a participant in a UNDP MZ support program. For a small and neglected municipality in the RS, there are some signs of initiative. In April the local government announced around 117,000 KM to renovate the Dom kulture.[406] And the local community took advantage of a public discussion to successfully prevent the construction of a stonepit/quarry, as they were worried that it would jeopardize the development of tourism, which they hope will be boosted by the nearby Terme Ozren located in the village Kakmuž. The municipality supported this decision of the citizens. However, a respondent noted that there are no candidates with ideas or a vision. The RS Association of Municipalities favors the big municipalities, not the small ones; Petrovo gets less and less money from the entity.

---

[405] "Načelnik Petrova iz SDS-a prešao u SNSD" [Mayor of Petrovo left SDS and joined SNSD], *nezavisne.com.* Available at: https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Nacelnik-Petrova-iz-SDS-a-presao-u-SNSD/614754

[406] "Uskoro početak izgradnje novog Doma kulture u Kakmužu" [Construction of New Culture Center in Kakmuž Soon to Start], SRNA, April 20, 2020. Available at: https://www.akta.ba/investicije/uskoro-pocetak-izgradnje-novog-doma-kulture-u-kakmuzu/116568?fbclid=IwAR2yAbswXZBH4eQx6IKi7V1dUKn5-UJO7JJF8hXYKQAcrqncQkl_wyQ0eE4

It was difficult to find people who would speak to the team; there is not a vibrant civil society, and it is simply a small town (The mayor had promised the team a meeting, but was then out of town when the team made its first trip in February.) One respondent in Doboj (familiar with Petrovo) noted that while the aid received in the region during the 2014 floods was chaotic, and led to theft of humanitarian aid and resources, the situation has been better organized in the COVID-19 crisis. While some scandals have been reported related to COVID-19 aid in the RS, this is also related to different political party games. For example, the Agency for Medical Products and Devices (Agencija za lijekove i medicinska sredstva BiH) did not give permission to import some equipment, and some claim this is because the Head of the Agency is a member of the PDP, which is in opposition to SNSD, and is therefore deliberately trying to jeopardize SNSD's political capital in order to gain political points. In this sense, the aggressive opposition to SNSD could help to explain less misuse of donations.

A municipality web site lists a number of NGOs and citizen associations, many of which are engaged in hiking/outdoors, or agricultural activities.[407] However many of these are small or inactive. There are two KUDs (culture and art societies), and these and other sports clubs participate in activities throughout the local region. (For example, there was a visit to Srebrenik and Gračanica, and sport clubs cooperate (a Petrovo based football club for women draws players from Maglaj, Doboj, Gračanica, and Petrovo). The elementary school is implementing a project to protect the Spreča river, and all of the municipalities that the river flows through are included. A respondent in Doboj noted the rebuilding of a church that had been destroyed during the war; he claimed by the mujahidin. However, the church is actually in Maglaj municipality.[408]

Three respondents failed to note any specific extremist activity in Petrovo, or any groups. In 2016, the Srpska Radikalna Stranka received one mandate. One respondent noted that Petrovo's residents are known to be extremist; that under communism, there were radical communists (atheists), and today they are radical nationalists. Two other respondents did not convey this sentiment. However, they could all agree that Petrovo is emptying out; young people have left or are leaving, and old people are dying. This is part of a regional phenomenon.[409]

The main challenges are related – underdevelopment and emigration. People do not see sufficient reason to stay and are simply leaving this small town for more options. In addition, small municipalities are in addition ignored by the RS Association of Municipalities, which favors the larger municipalities in terms of funds and support.

While Petrovo has always been small and rural, there are reasons for some limited optimism. A pool/bath/recreation complex called Terme Ozren is being developed with funds (5 million

---

[407] Listing of NGOs in Petrovo on the municipality's official website: https://petrovo.ba/en/institutions-and-organizations/ngo/

[408] "Obnavlja se crkva kod Maglaja, pomažu i komšije" [Church reconstructed near Maglaj – and neighbors help], *Oslobodjenje*, July 17, 2019. Available at: https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/obnavlja-se-crkva-kod-maglaja-pomazu-i-komsije-474197

[409] Tim Judah, "Bye Bye Balkans – a Region in Critical Demographic Decline." *BIRN*. October 14, 2019. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/14/bye-bye-balkans-a-region-in-critical-demographic-decline/

euro) from an investor from Bijeljina (Milojević Gilje-gas), is nearly ready to open, and could draw local/regional tourism as well as the diaspora. The thermal spa will serve as a center for rehabilitation and wellness tourism. The Ozren area is known for healing, mineral-rich waters and similar spas that had been discovered by Austro-Hungarian geologists. In the words of their director Slaviša Jović, it counts on the proximity of Doboj, Gračanica, and Tuzla to attract visitors.[410] Mayor Ozren Petković hopes that this investment will spill over to incorporate rural, religious, hunting, sports, and other tourism, as well as restaurant and other service industries.[411] The employment of 50 – 60 people in a season, as well as indirect positive impact of this investment could really serve as a positive economic injection in this undeveloped municipality. The first phase of the project was planned to be finished in June 2020, but due to COVID-19, this is now postponed.[412]

Gavrilo Stevanović, the lead brother/priest (*iguman*) at St. Nikola's monastery, about 15 minutes from the center of the main town, is a charismatic and positive person. Originally from the Doboj area, he spent most of his life as the Iguman of the Krupa Monastery in Croatia, coming to St. Nikola's in 2019. While in Croatia, Mr. Stevanović enjoyed good relations with the Croatian political establishment and the Ministry of Culture – an impressive feat when one considers the frosty relations between Croatia and Serbia in general and the position of Serbs in Croatia. He helped to secure funds from the Croatian government for the renovation of the Krupa monastery, where Mr. Miljenko Domijan, the main "konzervator" of the government of Croatia, played a pivotal role. As a consequence of this friendly and productive relationship, Domijan was the first Croat ever to receive the order of Saint Sava (the highest decoration of merit of the Serbian Orthodox Church), receiving the award at a ceremony at the Krupa Monastery. Brother Stevanović lobbied for this recognition. This reflects his positive approach, as does the annual Saint Sava Youth Camp, which girls began attending the camp for the first time in 2019 as another Stevanović innovation. He would like to bring kids from other religious communities to the camp and involve their religious communities in organizing activities. Stevanović has been promoting the Youth Camp abroad with targeted travel (Switzerland) aimed at involving youth from the diaspora, with a view to increasing the number of the attendees as well as the initiative itself. Such efforts and the potential increased turnout of young participants could have a positive effect on Petrovo and its aspirations to become a touristic destination in the area.

For a small town in a hard-to-reach location, there are people in Petrovo who want to make life better. The Terme Ozren could be promising, and could prompt plans for a touristic village, playgrounds, etc. that could appeal to local residents, Diaspora (which will be fewer this year, due to COVID-19), and people coming to visit monasteries. The Ozren Mountain Marathon has been held for years, offering a three-day festivity. One respondent was pessimistic about BiH's outlook in general, saying that every crisis (floods, COVID-19) unites the community and integrates it, but, nonetheless, after the crisis is over the divisions are even more marked; a great solidarity prevails but then hatred and jealousies resurge.

---

[410] A promotional video aimed at Serb diaspora for Terme Ozren can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWr1J-Yjx-Y
[411] Ibid.
[412] Početkom 2020. otvaranje banjsko-turističkog kompleksa Terme Ozren;
http://mojdoboj.info/novost/pocetkom-2020-otvaranje-banjsko-turistickog-kompleksa-terme-ozren/114334

Another respondent was more optimistic, for Petrovo and the country, saying "dišemo sa istim plućima u cijeloj BiH." ("We breathe with the same lungs in all of BiH.")

A sense of unity is primarily driven by the economic interests of citizens. Petrovo, being remotely linked to the RS, small, and undeveloped, can prosper only if it also cooperates with neighboring municipalities in the FBiH. Apart from economic interests, historical memories could also drive integration among divided groups. There is a legend that the medieval Bosnian king Kotromanić spent summer seasons in the Ozren area. Stjepan polje, a village which is now in the Federation, according to some interpretations carries the name of the king. The highest peak of the Ozren mountain is called Kraljica (the Queen), apparently referring to Queen Katarina. Whether this legend is based on facts or not, there are enough elements that could feed a positive narrative of common historical legacy and common identity among BiH's people.

Srebrenik Snapshot

Driving on the main road towards and in Srebrenik (pop. 39,678; 33,000 in the city limits), cluttered with large block-style construction and home construction/renovation supply stores and other commercial industrial sites, one sees more visible economic activity than in many parts of the country. One can also have the impression that the town (actually, it recently gained the status of a city) is a moderately successful yet soulless place. This is unfortunate, as a short 10-minute drive off of the main intersection, up a hill to the old medieval fortress overlooking the scenic and bucolic greater Srebrenik area, attests to both the city's centuries-long history as a stop along old established trading routes, and the impact of neglect of a solid basis for heritage tourism – in Srebrenik but more broadly throughout this part of the country. Some local investment in the fortress, which, perched on an outcropping of stone is perhaps the most impressive in the country, implies this potential, yet in the absence of a broader strategy for development it is reasonable to suspect it will remain at best an interesting quirk on the agenda of backpackers and intrepid medievalphiles. Spared some of the worst fighting in the war, Srebrenik's potential remains strangled, curtailed by the impact of an incoherent approach to development, and affected by its interior position, inland from international borders but close to administrative borders with both the RS and Brčko District. Srebrenik's relative prosperity has not shielded it from emigration; it has untapped energy for a more functional vision.

While Srebrenik has a rich and long history, in contrast to its military significance during the recent war, it is barely mentioned in recent war historical accounts. Both the ARBiH and the HVO were present, but as there were no different military or strategic agendas, there was little violence, and nothing like what had happened in Maglaj or Tešanj. Spared such violence, the town was able to profit from wartime business and trading, becoming a hub for trade and criminality during the war. The Arizona Market outside Brčko helped to feed this economic lifeline for some time. This fairly quiet recent history could account for the still decent relations with neighboring towns. Instead the broader economic challenges – within BiH but also globally, due to globalization and now COVID-19 – have presented more of a challenge than has the competition for dominance of any ethno-national narrative.

While the broader tapestry of political contestation is muted when compared to places like Mostar, some interesting political developments do speak to the dominant role of the large established nationalist parties in BiH communities more generally. Extraordinary local elections were held in 2014; these results were then confirmed in 2016, with the SDA/SBB candidate securing over two-thirds of the vote. However, in May 2018 the mayor left SDA and went independent; three other representatives who supported him were expelled from the ranks of SDA, and went with him. The Mayor explained his decision to leave the SDA by noting, "…loss of all democratic principles in the work of the party, the private activities of a narrow group of its members, nepotism, the employment of family members without any order and law. I no longer had a place with such people. It is well known that I also warned the highest representatives of the party in Sarajevo about what individuals in SDA Srebrenik do with individuals in KO SDA TK (SDA Board of Tuzla Canton), but everyone was deaf to it. I

do not give my face to anyone's private interests and I definitely do not belong in such an SDA."[413]

This move undergirds the broad legitimacy of Mayor Nihad Omerović who, as a candidate in the 2016 elections, garnered double the votes of the two parties that he represented. Following his departure, the party *ipso facto* lost the majority in the City Council and consequently the local government. However this does not mean there are not challenges with the 29-member local assembly (9 SDA, 2 SBB, 2BPS, 4 SDP, 4 independent candidates "Srebrenik 2016," 2 LDS, 1 SBiH, 5 independent (Samostalni vijećnici)) which requires constant coalition building.[414] The mayor's schism with the SDA also trickles up to the canton and the Federation. Beyond these politics, divisions are not prominent; the population is 90% Bosniak. However, respondents noted that in the recent COVID-19 crisis, there were signs of some ethno-national flavor when there were claims of anti-Croat/Catholic sentiments and motivations around Easter time, when the *Krizni štab* sought to prevent mass gatherings, including mass. (The census noted that 5% of the population are Croats.)

Exhibit 127: Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor	SDP	SDA	SDA	SDP	SDA-SBB
Municipal Council/Assembly					
SDA	7	12	13	10	12
SDP	14	9	7	7	5
SBB BIH				2	2
BPS			1	2	2
SBiH	3	4	3	2	2
LDS		2	2	2	2
NSRzB			1	2	
GS BIH			1		
LGK	1				
LBO	1				
DS penzionera	1				
LISTA NEZAVISNIH KANDIDATA - SREBRENIK					3

Two local officials were very critical of the justice system, noting that there are criminals everywhere but the issue is whether or not there are justice systems. "Every country has a mafia. Here the mafia has a state." Politics is linked to business; they support each other, thus there is no investigation of corruption. This has broader impact, as when people work in the black economy this has the add-on effect of skewing unemployment bureau data, as well as reducing revenue for the already threadbare safety net. And yet no one has the courage to take it on. Another interlocutor involved in veterans' affairs noted irregularities in the registry

---

[413] "Načelnik Srebrenika Nihad Omerović: Ja sam isključio SDA, a ne oni mene!" [Mayor Nihad Omerović: I kicked out SDA, SDA didn't kick me out!], Cazin.net, November 5, 2018. Available at: https://www.cazin.net/vijesti/nihad-omerovic-ja-sam-iskljucio-sda-ne-oni-mene

[414] City of Srebrenik Municipal Council page at: https://www.srebrenik.ba/opcinsko-vijece-2/opcinsko-vijece/opcinski-vijecnici

of former fighters. According to him, and according to data related to a new law/amendment, 620,000 veterans have been registered.[415] Yet during the war, the Army of BiH had 238,000 fighters and the HVO had 38,000 – 276,000 total. The surplus of veterans are political parties' constituencies; therefore, much money has been spent on fake veterans.[416] This is an extension of patronage that is entangled in public administration and public companies.

It was interesting to observe that in spite of the apparent and relative "normalcy" of Srebrenik, it was nearly impossible to identify representatives or participants of civil society organizations there. Phone calls went unanswered and snowballing hit dead ends. Only a veterans' association representative was contacted successfully. One could speculate that the lack of atrocities during the war, and the lack of inter-group contestation after the war, has minimized the amount of external engagement in supporting civic activities, and that to date the lack of burning and controversial environmental issues has negated the need for civic ecological action. There is the "independent" television JATA (https://www.ntvjata.com/), but a respondent noted it is biased and linked to politics.

Environmental protection initiatives are beginning to sprout. As elsewhere in BiH, in the Srebrenik area there are illegal waste dumping sites. One man, a taxi driver by profession, got so annoyed that he personally started to clean illegal sites. In the beginning, everybody laughed at him. He continued nonetheless. He installed cameras on sites he cleaned to detect illegal dumping. Few other enthusiasts joined him. Together, they formed a Facebook group where they announce their activities, but also post pictures of people caught to illegally dump waste. The Facebook group attracted more people to join the initiative; they clean illegal dumping sites and install cameras. Apparently, all sites with cameras in place remain clean.

Further confirming its sleepy characteristics, there is little to note related to extremist activity, with one exception. The settlement of Gornja Maoča (see Brčko snapshot for details as well) is not far from Srebrenik (and is also in Tuzla Canton), though the poor road connections make it feel quite distant. An unplanned visit found macadam and unpaved roads, and a GPS black hole, but lovely and unspoiled nature and small farms. One passes through a surprisingly populated and sizable Maoča, which has a large school. Continuing on to Gornja Maoča, at the end of the road one finds a small branch school, which sits within the main Salafist settlement that has attracted quite some attention. The teacher there noted that they follow the Tuzla canton curriculum, and that the only concessions to the Gornja Maoča community is that they wear headscarves while at school and ensure that classes break for prayers. (Girls with their heads covered prayed in the classroom, boys go to a nearby *masjid* to pray.) Teachers said that the Salafi parents are just like any other parents, but have more children, mentioning a mother who was born in the 1980s and now has had her 8th child. While at the school, within 10 minutes a police jeep blocked appeared to ask the team why we were there, requesting personal identification documents. It was unclear if

---

[415] "Federacija dobila još 30.000 boraca, sada ih ima 605.000!" *Dnevni Avaz*. January 26, 2019. Available at https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/452612/federacija-dobila-jos-30-000-boraca-sada-ih-ima-605-000

[416] Immediately prior to the 2006 elections, rules were changed in the Federation to allow a category of "fighters," reliant on two witnesses to attest to their having been in combat. This pre-election vote-buying scheme by the SDA, flush with infusions from the recently instituted VAT, generated warnings from OHR and others in the international community that the policy was fiscally unsustainable.

they received notification from someone en route that we were there or if they stumbled upon the team in their regular, daily observation of this area. (They seemed to want us to believe the latter, but they were not convincing.) They belonged to the Srebrenik police station of Tuzla Cantonal Police and noted they make regular, daily rounds around Gornja Maoča. They seemed friendly and professional.

Respondents in Srebrenik noted they have good cooperation with Gornja Maoča. In terms of extremism, they noted that while some people went to Syria; the ones who did not, who stayed, are less extreme. They are all people from BiH (e.g., Banovići, Krajina), with no foreigners today.

They agreed that it's better to have the kids in school wearing a headscarf than not being enrolled at all. In election periods, there is a polling station there, but no one votes. They noted no crimes there – neither theft nor alcoholism, as they live as a communal community. According to them, nobody steals there, they have no alcoholics. They noted they don't like that people hear "Srebrenik" and then only think of "Wahhabis" because of the media attention a few years ago. "As we have prejudice against them, they have prejudice against us."

A respondent noted that the demographic decline is tangible, with people leaving because of the lack of money and effective politics. However, the census data claims a population of around 40,000 in 2013, similar to that in 1991. Relatively speaking there are several successful firms: PVC/Stolarija, Tempoplast, JATA (construction materials); Kopex (trucking). There is also seasonal work. But still some businesses are migrating to Brčko due to more favorable conditions. As is the case in many parts of BiH, Srebrenik has a large diaspora, and the impact of COVID-19 is vivid. In one discussion in June interlocutors noted that at this time of the year the large terrace would be full (it was probably 1/3 full).

Compared to Glamoč, Bosanski Petrovac, and Mrkonjić Grad, Srebrenik feels positive and commercially thriving. Compared to Žepče and Maglaj, it seems free from ethno-political propaganda linked to the war. Compared to Bihać it seems blissfully far from the regional migrant crisis. There are some local development efforts of note as well. A regional tourism promotion effort initiated in Živinice (with the help of a Frenchman) includes Kladanj, Živinice, Srebrenik, Srebrenica, Brčko, Doboj, Gračanica, and Gradačac; it is envisioned as a north-east BiH tourism cluster. A Rural Educational Center that sells and promotes rural/agricultural products is working. However, in spite of the relative economic opportunity, there is a sense of stagnation, and a sense that there is no higher level strategy or vision.

Srebrenik is quiet, yet economically in a relatively decent situation. This makes one wonder if the notion – often held by outsiders and promoted by the ruling parties – that the only thing needed in BiH is economic development might not explain the sense of social stagnation. The interesting situation of the local government – with the defection of several from SDA – could signal an interest in a new type of politics. The outcome of the November 2020 elections will be interesting, though a reversion to SDA could speak more to SDA's statewide electoral technology than genuine citizen support for its ideas. A comment from a local official perhaps sums us the situation perfectly: "If our country is an experiment, it's an experiment that has lasted too long."

Žepče Snapshot

Žepče as a town appears wealthier and more bustling than nearby Maglaj, but while the influx of wartime and post-war profits has created a certain amount of development, it has failed to add much in terms of a fertile commons or investment in civic infrastructure. The town, one cannot help noticing, in particular after driving through different towns in BiH, is very clean. While the city has roots going back to the 15th century, such history/antiquity is not evident from the main town center. Military bunkers dating from the Austro-Hungarian era attest to that empire's interest in the area's wood industry in particular, but today languish in ignored disrepair.[417] The most impressive new buildings are large churches, mosques, and retail sites. Due to the war and the nature of this bifurcated city, Žepče stands as a good example of the mafia-state fiefdoms that characterize the country, with the same party in control for two decades, and a mayor who has established himself as a business and political kingpin.

Next to ARBiH/HVO fighting in Mostar, the fighting in Žepče was perhaps the most brutal, and the most transactional. While nearby the HVO and ARBIH fought against the VRS on three sides in the Tešanj pocket, in Žepče the HVO forces allied with the VRS to take the town from the ARBiH in June 1993, leaving a potential opening to the Bosniak stronghold of Zenica, while also potentially cutting off Maglaj and Tešanj, creating yet more enclaves of besieged Bosniaks.[418] In early 1994, the Washington Agreement created an opportunistic truce between the Croats and the Bosniaks, motivated by American/Western interest in simplifying the war, and creating a more unified force that could more effectively take on Serb forces, which had successfully changed the facts on the ground at the start of the war.[419] The brutal nature of the war made post-war redevelopment and return – a right enshrined in the peace agreement – difficult, and the HDZ dug in to maintain their position in Žepče.

The 2013 census reports that the population of about 30,000 is 59% Croat, and 39% Bosniak, compared to a 1991 population of 55% Croats, 35% Bosniaks, and 7% Serbs. The division in Žepče was so significant that there was a special regime there in the post-war period. A 1999 International Crisis Group report early on noted the obstruction and the dynamic that encouraged it: "When the OSCE uncovered massive election fraud in HDZ-controlled Žepče, the Croats boycotted the entire election, fearing an honest vote would unseat them. Their boycott of the entire process, as in Srebrenica by the Serbs, has been rewarded by the international community. In both municipalities, those who lost the elections threatened

---

[417] "Military Bunkers in Žepče, Bosnia and Herzegovina." Web site.
https://ww1sites.eu/index.php?id=35&tx_wwicaheritage_caheritage%5BcaHeritage%5D=45&tx_wwicaheritage_caheritage%5Baction%5D=show&tx_wwicaheritage_caheritage%5Bcontroller%5D=CaHeritage&cHash=df59447db72fe383f4de920344afce56

[418] Chuck Sudetic, "Serbs and Croats Mount Joint Attack on Muslim Town." *New York Times*, June 28, 1993. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/28/world/serbs-and-croats-mount-joint-attack-on-muslim-town.html

[419] The Washington Agreement text can be found on the US Institute of Peace's website: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/washagree_03011994.pdf

violence and subsequently were granted half of all relevant positions in the local government."[420]

In 2001, then High Rep Wolfgang Petritsch issued an order to unify the municipality.[421] Schools remain divided, though 25 years after the end of the war officials will note that the "two schools under one roof" regime is a sign of a "successful" model of diversity, rather than a legacy of segregation.[422] (As part of the Žepče compromise, education is not managed by the canton there as is the usual Federation practice, but by the municipality.) A mixed music school is promoted with pride; it received support from donors, including the government of Croatia. It was noted in an interview that it is the only non-religious purpose-built facility built after the war. And throughout much of the post-war period, the current mayor has maintained control of the municipality's political and also business interests, with the Zovko name emblazoned on everything from petrol stations to car dealerships.[423] Mato Zovko, a member of HDZ BiH since 1990, has been repeatedly elected as Mayor since 2002. In the 2016 local elections he earned 54,58%, followed by Kenan Kahriman (SDA/SBB), who received 28.45%. Prior to this he served as a representative in the Federation House of Peoples, and as a representative in the Zenica-Doboj cantonal assembly.

The current municipal council consists of HDZ BiH (49.86%; 14 mandates), SDA (23.07%, 7 mandates), SDP (8.43%, 2 mandates), HDZ 1990 (5.52%, 2 mandates) and a smattering of others. As noted above, the town is heavily divided as marked by the education sector, which differentiates Bosniak and Croat kids from childhood. There are efforts – being supported in large part by the OSCE – to refurbish what is now a nice but fairly unimpressive monument to all of the civilian victims of the war. Parts of the municipality suffered significant damage in the May 2014 floods, as did neighboring municipalities in the canton and in the RS. The village of Željezno Polje was particularly affected by this natural disaster, as landslides destroyed roads and houses.[424] (The current SDA speaker of the assembly lives in Željezno Polje.) Local government was left to shoulder the burden of emergency response, with little help from the canton, entity, or state (with the partial exception of the Armed Forces of BiH, which would have been able to do more had they had greater capacity, particularly in terms of helicopters and engineering units.) The lack of flood preparation – and misuse of emergency assistance funds intended for those in need – will be a topic of investigation and recrimination for the foreseeable future. In terms of COVID-19 response, according to

---

[420] *Is Dayton Failing? Bosnia Four Years After the Peace Agreement.* International Crisis Group Report Number 80. October 1999. Available at file:///Users/valeryperry/Downloads/is-dayton-failing.pdf

[421] "High Representative Confirms Final Žepče Decision." Office of the High Representative. November 30, 2001. Available at http://www.ohr.int/high-representative-confirms-final-Žepče-decision/

[422] *"Two Schools Under One Roof" – the Most Visible Example of Discrimination in Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.* OSCE Mission to BiH. December 3, 2018. Available at https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/404990

[423] His reported property is detailed at http://imovinapoliticara.cin.ba/profil.php?profil=95 ; however this is just self-reporting.

[424] Cohadzić, Amer. "Renewed floods renew Bosnia's troubles." *Associated Press.* August 98 2014. Available at https://apnews.com/55c6fd60197d48e288cb16fcf42a4703

"Residents of Zeljezno Polje in the New Houses until November?" *Sarajevo Times*. October 30, 2015. Available at https://www.sarajevotimes.com/residents-of-zeljezno-polje-in-the-new-houses-until-november/

respondents, the Croatian government made donations, civil protection bodies contributed, and the remainder of donations were private.

Exhibit 128:Election Trends

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Mayor		HDZ	HDZ	HDZ	HDZ
Municipal Council/Assembly					
HDZ	-	13	11	10	14
SDA	12	6	6	7	6
HDZ 1990	-	-	-	3	1
SDP	4	-	1	3	2
Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu	3	1	2	1	-
SBB	-	-	-	1	1
Hrvatska Koalicija HDZ 1990 HSS-NHI za Žepče	-	-	3	-	-
LDS	-	1	-	-	-
SDP	-	1	-	-	-
HDU	-	1	-	-	-
A-SDA	-	-	-	-	1

It is interesting that few specific examples of corruption were noted in interviews, and few are found in the press, yet everyone senses that corruption is a way of life.[425] And people feel there is nothing that can be done. A quite jaded respondent said, "ne možes pobijediti hobotnicu sa krakovima" (you cannot beat an octopus and its tentacles). He went on to mention the example of Tuzla after the 2014 demonstrations, when that government changed some small things, but nothing substantially changed. A respondent noted that the public administration is too large, but the authorities will not cut it because it is a voting machine that operates according to the equation 1 employee = 10 voters.

While a web site lists a raft of NGOs, few seem active, and even fewer are interested in engaging on matters of policy. Calls and emails went unanswered. When asking a municipal official whether there are any environmental NGOs, the only type that came to mind was fishing and hunting clubs. There have been protests over illegal logging in the MZ of Želeći (an MZ in Žepče municipality) which attracted the interest of 14 local communities from the area of Željezno Polje- a community that was hard hit in 2014, with many homes sliding down the hills as landslides proliferated.[426] One colleague noted that protestors were guarding the woods using their bodies.

---

[425] A team member also asked an investigative journalists very familiar with corruption, who noted that there have been no specific indictments in spite of widely known abuse of power.

[426] "Protesti zbog ilegalne sječe šume u Želeći" [Protests Against Illegal Logging in Želeća], *Federalna.ba*. January 31, 2020. Available at: http://www.federalna.ba/bhs/vijest/303940/stanovnici-strahuju-da-bi-mogli-ostati-bez-pitke-vode

One respondent noted there are no extreme or fascist organizations operating, though he qualified that it is difficult to get rid of old habits from the past, as this respondent considers Fascism, Nazism, and "satanic" Communism all equally problematic ideologies. There has been no sports related hooliganism any more now that Žepče is in a lower football division; before there were incidents during the local derby with Zenica. One respondent said that the real issues in Žepče are economic in nature, and that people do not care or think about radicalization. Economic security (jobs, investment, infrastructure) would guarantee that nobody will engage with extreme/radical activities. This respondent did not engage with the day-to-day division or polarization evident in the town.

On the linked issue of receptibility to propaganda and misinformation, false news and information is circulating regarding the coronavirus. At the beginning of the pandemic, a respondent working in public health held interviews with the media to inform the public about the epidemiological situation and the protective measures in place. At the beginning people were complying with the measures, but they became frustrated with the economic consequences of the lockdown. Further, between this and frustration with the "ventilators affair," she estimates that 90% of people believes in conspiracy theories. Another respondent noted needing to debunk the myth that if somebody dies from corona, the funeral is for free. One educated, employed respondent has zero faith in the situation of government response, noting, "The coronavirus is the greatest hoax in the history of mankind, this is already clear to the sparrows on the branch who laugh at us because we walk like clowns. This has been all long ago well directed and staged, the representation of Orwell 1984!"

The inability of the team to identify any civil society or environmental protection actors created an exceptional situation in which more officials were consulted that average citizens. The lack of independent citizen engagement is troubling, and together with the dominant presence of divided nationalist parties, it is hard to find any seeds of a more common vision for the future. Further, the nearly 20-year reign of the HDZ mayor shows the hold that the party has on the election system, for brain drain continues to be a problem, suggesting that people are dissatisfied with the situation yet the voting results remain the same, and no new politics options emerge.

Žepče should have some recipe for success. While it lacks historical /cultural heritage that might be the basis for more organized tourism, the relatively more vibrant commercial base, links to neighboring Zavidovići and Maglaj, and location not far from a main trucking thoroughfare, should provide the basis for a stronger economic future. However it is easy to see why investors might be skeptical of setting up shop in a town in which it is seen as a 21st century success to divide children based on their presumed faith, a practice which seems to stand in opposition to the norms that should form the core of a country with EU membership aspirations.

One respondent – an educator – noted the following (slightly paraphrased): *Historically in this region we are accustomed to having authoritarian governments/regimes. It is in our genes, as well as the tendency to deceive/fool people, and the warmongering character. He went on to say that there's no energy left and those who might drive change will leave the country.* This is a very pessimistic and dark outlook, particularly from someone who is

employed. It reflects a sense of sclerosis, from seeing the same division, the same politics, the same sloganeering and the same minimal forward-motion, over the course of a generation. As was seen in other towns (but couldn't be tested here as the difficulty in finding interlocutors willing to speak precluded a focus group), many people have stopped even dreaming that some other way of life might be possible.

Community Snapshots: North Macedonia

Chair Snapshot

Chair (Macedonian: Чаир, Turkish: Çayır, Albanian: Çair; meaning "meadow" in Turkish) is an urban municipality in central Skopje, situated on the left bank of the river Vardar. Chair is the municipality where most of Skopje's urban Muslims, including ethnic Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks, and Roma, live. The Old Bazaar in Skopje is part of this municipality. It is the smallest in area and yet the most densely populated municipality in North Macedonia; according to the last population census from 2002, 64,773 residents lived in a territory of 3.52 square kilometers, which is 18,400 people per square kilometer. Ethnic Albanians represent 57% of the population, followed by ethnic Macedonians (24.1%), Turks (6.9%), Roma (4.8%), and Bosniaks (4.6%). The central territory of the modern municipality coincides with the territory of one of the oldest neighborhoods of Skopje, which was until the end of the 19th century inhabited exclusively by Muslim residents. For its Macedonian speaking residents, Chair represents "Skopje's fundament" ("temelot na Skopje"), which is a reference to the fact that the neighborhood represents the core of Old Skopje.

As an urban space, the municipality exists at the junction between various nonlinear historical processes. An aerial view of the landscape shows that roughly two-thirds of its territory is composed of individual houses, and one can hardly avoid the characterization of it being an urban slum, whereby no urban planning standards apply. This holds especially true to the so-called "rural parts" of Chair, such as Gazi Baba, Serava, and Dizonska. The Gazi Baba hills are where the poorest inhabitants of Chair live (part of "rural" Chair).

The other third consists of modern parks and socialist-era apartment blocks, which have attracted settlers from rural Macedonia who arrived seeking jobs in the economically more vibrant 1960s and 1970s. Historical neglect and systemic exclusion of the urban Muslims, who at the beginning of the 20th century formed a 90% majority in Skopje, have taken their toll. This sort of landscape can hardly be seen in any other former Yugoslav capital city and it is today predominantly populated by the urban Muslims, mostly ethnic Albanians. Ethnic Macedonians either formed a majority or plurality of the population in this part of Chair, but their number is nevertheless decreasing.

The current borders of the municipality resulted from gerrymandering following the territorial reorganization of Macedonian municipalities in the first half of the 2000s, when the SDSM was in coalition with the then-new ethnic Albanian party, DUI. This change was part of the wider process of implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which stipulated decentralization and territorial re-organization of the borders of the municipalities. Before 2005, the municipality of Chair encompassed other adjacent settlements and villages (which now form the neighboring Municipality of Butel), and it had an ethnic Macedonian majority. As was the case with other municipalities whose borders were changed to make them predominantly ethnic Albanian – such as Struga and Kichevo – this process in Chair radicalized the ethnic Macedonians in the area, creating a deep feeling of injustice and sense of being betrayed by the state, which VMRO-DPMNE has been manipulating ever since. VMRO-DPMNE is always the leading party among ethnic Macedonians in Chair.

Interlocutors state that the real estate prices in the early 1990s were the same as in other parts of the city, and the number of ethnic Macedonian residents was significantly higher. However, Albanian interlocutors state that there was a stigma against Chair Macedonians by other Macedonians, that of being of "less cultured," since they live among so many Albanians/Muslims, so they started to move out. Some Ethnic Macedonian interlocutors state that people also no longer felt safe, so they left. One member of a Macedonian patriotic organization says that he feared for his life at his security job at a bank outpost in Chair, so he had to move to another one in Aerodrom. At the moment, the majority of Macedonians who live in Chair are pensioners, and there are a few who waited too long and currently cannot sell their property in order to buy apartments in other "nicer" parts of the city.

Ever since 2005, ethnic Albanian, DUI candidates have been elected to be the mayor of the municipality, with Izet Mexhiti being mayor for 12 years (2005-2017). It was not until 2017 that DUI's dominance in Chair was seriously challenged by BESA's candidate,[427] Zekirija Ibrahimi. He was defeated by Visar Ganiu, DUI's candidate, by a margin of less than 1%. Ibrahimi was a victim of internal BESA power games which later led to the split of this party. DUI's candidate won the battle thanks to the endorsement of PM Zaev and the support of SDSM, which, despite high approval ratings among ethnic Albanians in 2017 decided not to run with their own candidate, and instead supported the candidate from DUI, which came at the price of disappointing their ethnic Albanian supporters and sympathizers. One interlocutor even states that SDSM used its affiliated members of the police to aid voter fraud in these elections. As a result of this choice to adopt the Gruevski elite compact approach to interethnic relations, the SDSM began losing ethnic Albanian support – critical to its achieving power to begin with – in its first few months of governance.

Due to the sense of lost status, many members of the ethnic Macedonian minority in Chair feel unrepresented and disenfranchised, which fuels resentment and right-wing populism (see below). Chair is home to the football club Shkupi (which stands for Skopje in Albanian) and its notorious tifosi, the Shvercerat (Albanian) or Shverceri (Macedonian) – (the Smugglers). Shverceri have traditionally been engaged in clashes with their ethnic Macedonian competitors, the tifosi of Vardar sports club, Komiti.[428] In 2018, Shverceri members had beaten to death a young member of Komiti, 20-year-old Nikola Sazdovski – (Sazdo). Sazdo's death is still radicalizing groups as many protests have been organized by the Komiti to seek justice. A very similar event happened last year, when an ethnic Macedonian youngster in the Municipality of Aerodrom was killed in a fight by an ethnic Albanian youngster from Chair. Similar to Sazdo, this raised nationalist protests.

---

[427] BESA, which has been labelled as an Erdoganist party, has in the past year abandoned this approach. Also, there are no longer talks of Erdoganism connected to BESA in the public discourse. BESA emerged in 2013, during the protests against the erection of Tsar Dushan's statue in the centre of Skopje. It was organized as a civil movement through social media, and represented the first public criticism against DUI.

[428] The term "Komiti" is synonymous with Komitadji in Bulgaria or Chetniks in Serbia, but they are not affiliated with Draza Mihajlović. They were nationalist guerrilla fighters against the Ottoman Empire.

One of the most powerful figures from the Chair branch of DUI and current Member of Parliament, Artan Grubi, is a former leader of the Shverceri.[429] The last large group fight between Shverceri and Komiti happened in 2011 on the Fortress of Kale, on the border between the municipalities of Chair and Centar, over the central government's plans to build a Church/Museum, considered to be outside of the "culturally reserved space" for Orthodox Christians. Grubi was an active participant in these events, and it was considered his official entry into partisan politics. This fight is remembered as an "orchestrated event" between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, in order to raise nationalist tensions among their own ranks. Interestingly enough, the fights against Komiti and Shverceri usually happen outside of Chair, and they are often instigated and used by the political parties.

The patterns of corruption in the municipality are comparable to those nationwide. Research conducted by local NGOs demonstrates that focus group participants have reported corruption and favoritism in the process of employment in municipal institutions,[430] and similar findings have been reported by team interlocutors. In interviews, young respondents tended to focus on the problem of pandemic-hastened emigration of young well-educated people - i.e. brain-drain – as people flee a desperate situation. "My main concern is about losing my friends…..they are all just going outside/leaving the country, like when we finished our studies, we were like ten friends older than me, and eight of them are now in Germany, Austria or Switzerland, working there as medical doctors." Local businesses are finding it difficult to survive, due to protection rackets, but they are afraid to publicly speak about it. According to interlocutors, the "construction business mafia" (*urbana mafija*) is very powerful in the municipality with businessmen close to DUI controlling the business of construction by getting privileged access to lots and construction permits. Another interlocutor said: "There is no control over who builds what and where. Everything that is newly built is in fact redundant; there is no infrastructure for all the new buildings. So, with every heavy rain there are floods, in both the urban and the rural parts. Fecal matter comes back and flows in the streets, garages overflow. It used to be the greenest municipality in Skopje, but the urban mafia has ruined it."

There is a very limited liberal civil society in Chair. There were some bad experiments, when promising youth NGOs were instrumentalized by the political parties, and now people do not even expect any independent space for engagement. An interlocutor said, "DUI controls every aspect of public life, and they can use the tax authority to harass NGOs if they wish."

Legis is an NGO based in Chair that belongs to the group of NGOs within the liberal camp, although its leaders promote some form of traditional Islamic lifestyle. Legis focuses on migrant rights and provided direct support to migrants/refugees during the crisis in 2015/16. They were active in the 2016 Colorful Revolution. It is led by a mixed-marriage couple of an ethnic Albanian man and ethnic Bosnian woman. In 2015, the local government supported public debates aimed at the formation of a local youth council in the Municipality of Chair, initiated by the Youth Educational Forum (one of the most active youth NGOs in the country,

---

[429]Артан Груби: од ШВЕРЦЕР - политичар (ФОТОГАЛЕРИЈА). *Vecer*. November 25, 2019. Available at https://vecer.mk/node/461960

[430]"Conflicts of Interest and Corruption at the Local Level – Collection of Research and Monitoring Studies,"*Institute for Democracy Societis Civilis*, Skopje, 2009 (in Macedonian). Available at:https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/CSF-sudir-na-interesi-i-korupcija-na-lokalno-nivo.pdf

with a local chapter in Chair), Civil – Centre for Freedom (another very active liberal NGO), and the Youth Islamic Forum, a Chair-based NGO. It is hard to find information on how active this Council is, suggesting it could be dormant.

There have been some civil initiatives regarding CVE, such as the Mother Schools project by Women Without Borders, or the Educate2Prevent program carried out by the Centre for Research and Policy Making and its partners. The Mother Schools project aims to raise awareness on how to counter extremism; it seeks to enhance the competences and capabilities of mothers by empowering them to help build community-based strategies to counter radical ideologies. Similarly, Educate2Prevent aims to enable parents and frontline school workers to help identify and prevent violent extremism amongst youth. The local government has organized public debates and trainings on CVE in three schools in the municipality.

According to observations and available research,[431] Chair is the municipality with the lowest level of resilience to radicalization and extremist ideologies of all kinds in North Macedonia, both among the Muslim (ethnic Albanian) and ethnic Macedonian population.

Chair has been identified as the hotspot of Islamic radicalism in Macedonia, where several *para-jammats* operate, offering, inter alia, various social welfare services to the Muslim urban poor, thus attracting followers by filling in the vacuum created by the lack of state-funded activities. Three of Chair's mosques, i.e., the Jaja Pasha Mosque, the Tutunsuz mosque and the Abdylkadri Mosque, have been identified in the past as strongholds of Islamic radicalism. All of these three urban mosques are or have been in some point in the past controlled by autonomous groups and imams who are not controlled by the Islamic Religious Community, which is the official representative of the Muslims in the country. In 2015, the police operation called Cell (Kjelija) resulted in the arrest of dozens of individuals across the country for their participation in foreign wars, including several individuals related to the abovementioned mosques.[432] There are rumors that at least two prominent politicians are part of the non-extremist, non-violent, version of radical Islam: Muhamed Zeqiri from SDSM, and Kastriot Rexhepi from BESA.

In the last three decades, there has been a trend of emigration of ethnic Macedonians from Chair. This migration has been coupled with a change in property ownership, as ethnic Macedonians usually sell their properties to their Albanian neighbors, thereby further contributing to demographic changes. In the 1990s, ethnic Macedonians were much more affected by the economic turmoil in the country than their Albanian neighbors, who prospered in private businesses which they had developed due to systemic exclusion from state-controlled jobs in public administration and manufacturing. These trends coupled with

[431]Filip Stojkovski and Natasia Kalajdziovski, "Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Macedonia," Country Case Study 1, Association for Democratic Advancement Democracy Lab/Berghof Foundation, 2018. Available at: https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_CaseStudy1_Macedonia_e.pdf

[432] Kaltrina Selimi and Filip Stojkovski "Assessment of Macedonia's efforts in Countering Violent Extremism, view from civil society." *Analytica*. Available athttps://www.analyticamk.org/images/Files/extremism-en-updated-FINAL-web_ceb98.pdf

the gerrymandering from 2004, reinforce the perception shared by ethnic Macedonians that Chair is being "sold out." This sentiment fuels radical nationalism. Some of the most radical members of the ethnic Macedonian far-right interviewed in this project are from Chair. Their narratives abound with prejudice, hate speech, feelings of moral superiority over their Albanian neighbors, and anti-Islamic sentiments. They also complain of being under constant threat, and of an overall feeling of not feeling safe while in Chair.

As research has shown,[433] residents of the municipality have feelings of isolation, alienation, and/or marginalization, which present fertile soil for articulation of various forms of political identities that don't shy away from the use of violent methods in pursuit of political and moral goals. According to one respondent, "Chair suffers from many forms of extremism – be it Islamist or nationalist – and its inhabitants live in a kind of friction with one another, where political extremism is deeply tied to ideological and religious extremism."

No major inter-ethnic incidents have taken place in Chair since 2017, when SDSM formed a coalition government with DUI on the national level. This has to do with the general political and social climate in North Macedonia and the proclaimed "One Society for All" concept of SDSM, which has inevitably relaxed inter-ethnic relations in the country. However, structural factors haven't significantly changed, making the situation volatile and unpredictable. As previously mentioned, conflict has also simply been moved to other parts of the city.

Chair is the municipality where most of the urban Muslim population in Skopje lives. Economic and political neglect is visible in the ghetto mentality, and coupled with the sense of being a minority in the city where the majority implements its own policies of nation-building, these dynamics have created fertile ground for the emergence of various political identities among the Albanian Muslims. The loss of privileged status in the neighborhood makes nationalism and far-right narratives attractive for some of the ethnic Macedonians in the municipality. Chair is the most paradigmatic case of how reciprocal radicalization operates and how different forms of radicalization can coexist in same spatio-temporal contexts.

---

[433] Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski.

Gazi Baba

The Gazi Baba neighborhood is administratively part of the Municipality of Chair. The name Gazi Baba comes from the Turkish, and means a "war veteran" (Gazi) father (Baba), which was the nickname of 16th Century Ottoman poet and Judge Aşık Çelebi. His Turbe, or tomb, is on the eponymous hill. This neighborhood of interest is on the western hillside of the municipality. In this analysis, it is treated separately from Chair because of its separate dynamics; other analyses of violent extremism have taken a similar approach.[434]

People started moving to this neighborhood en masse in the 1960s. No clear standards for urban planning have been kept there, so it looks like a *favela* (houses on top of houses, very narrow streets). According to one interlocutor, who has had access to a list of COVID-19 infected citizens, over 90% of the infected in Chair come from Gazi Baba, Serava, and Dizonska, where there are many multiple-generational households, with limited access to education, information, and public institutions.

All of the previous policy analyses on violent extremism in North Macedonia reference the Gazi Baba neighborhood as one of the areas most vulnerable to Islamic radicalism. The two most prominent Islamic extremist ideologues, imams Rexhep Memishi and Shukri Aliu, served in the Tutunsuz Mosque in Gazi Baba. They are known to have recruited large numbers of young people from North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania.

The Gazi Baba neighborhood is at the same time the least affluent and the most affected by radical Islam. Interlocutors point to reasons including a lack of life perspective, poverty, and little education, for the radicalization of young people. The family of a young man who was killed in Syria in 2015 reported that he had been having mental health difficulties, which was used by Aliu and Memishi to radicalize him, under the guise of providing mental health services.

Evidence has emerged of an unregistered "kindergarten" named Pčela ("bee") in Gazi Baba which was being housed in a private property, owned by a humanitarian organization of Turkish origin. The "kindergarten" was being used as an educational facility for children ages 6-11 to get an Islamic education.[435]

According to some of our interlocutors, people who dress in the Salafist fashion are not formally organized, and they often go to prayer side by side with other members of the IRC. The Cell Operation radically diminished the space of operation for violent radical Islam, but it has not completely eradicated it. Female interlocutors inform that they suffer verbal harassment on the street for not wearing headscarves, or are denied services in local shops for the same reason. From 2013 on, there have been "NGOs" that were coming to give trainings and promote going to Syria to fight. Another interlocutor (male, ethnic Albanian) reports that the remaining Salafists are not violent, and are careful not to be viewed as such. They claim to be against terrorism in Syria, and wish to be open to the outside world.

---

[434] Perry 2016; Selimi and Stojkovski 2016; BIRN 2016; Stojkovski 2019; Stojanovic-Gajic 2018.
[435] Filip Stojkovski and Natasia Kalajdziovski, "Western Balkans – Extremism Research Forum – Macedonia Report," British Council, April 2018. Available at:
https://www.britishcouncil.mk/sites/default/files/erf_macedonia_report_2018.pdf

Gostivar Snapshot

Gostivar is located in the Polog region, below the beautiful Bistra Mountain. The longest river in North Macedonia, the Vardar, begins its journey just above the town, in the village of Vrutok with its famous springs. The Vardar divides Gostivar into two, but Gostivar is a symbol of unification among three dominant ethnic communities: Albanian, Macedonian, and Turkish. According to the last estimates by the State Statistical Office from 2015, the Municipality of Gostivar has slightly over 83,600 inhabitants.[436] Although not explicitly required by law,[437] the municipality operates in three official languages, those of the largest three communities. The town is rather small and cozy, but still busy enough to host hard-working craftsmen and small local businessmen. The most important municipal buildings such as the court, the high schools, and several small cafes are laid alongside the banks of the river. Still, the urban planning mafia has not been gentle to Gostivar. Many new, aggressively large modern buildings pollute the otherwise harmonious and congenial sense of space, both in the center of the city and in the outskirts. The smell of freshly baked *burek* under *sač* (traditional oven) continuously mixes with the dust from the construction sites.

Even following sporadic political incidents such as the "Flag Conflict" in 1997,[438] the armed conflict in 2001, and the protracted ethno-political crisis, Gostivar managed to attain the image of an "oasis of coexistence." At the community level, one can easily spot multi-ethnic educational events, concerts, ecological activities, and similar cornerstones of resilience to radicalization and polarization. One peculiarity regarding Gostivar is that since independence, local government has changed frequently, and has not been dominated by one political party, such as some other municipalities with an ethnic Albanian majority. Although many citizens of Gostivar still remember and feel the wounds from the past, inter-ethnic and inter-religious differences seem to have been bridged. However, there are individuals that like to resurrect the spirits from the past, awakening the narratives of "Macedonian violence over Albanians." Fortunately, these sentiments do not resonate among the vast majority of Gostivar's citizens.

Since the last local elections held in 2017, the local government has been led by the Alliance for Albanians (AA). Current mayor Arben Taravari was a short-serving Minister of Health at the beginning of the SDSM-led government in 2017. When SDSM decided to support DUI between the first and second round of the local elections, the AA decided to leave the government and move into opposition, becoming the largest ethnic-Albanian party in opposition. This clash further intensified the lack of cooperation between the central and the

---

[436] http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.16.10.pdf p.43

[437] Pursuant to the provisions of the Law on Languages and the Law on the Use of Languages, the language used by a group which constitutes at least 20% of the inhabitants in the municipality, is recognized as an official language. For the official use of languages of communities below 20%, the municipal council decides on the scope of its use.

[438] In 1997, the mayors of Gostivar and Tetovo failed to abide to legislation and the ruling from the Constitutional Court forbidding official use of flags of other countries, and set up ethnic Albanian flags in front of the municipal buildings. The police intervened in the two municipalities. Unlike Tetovo, where the entire operation was swift and smooth, in Gostivar, following a speech by the Mayor Rufi Osmani, the situation became out of control and resulted with 4 civilian casualties and numerous arrests. Both mayors were sentenced to 13 years of prison, but were pardoned one year later. Many ethnic Albanians still feel aggrieved by these incidents, and the memories are usually evoked before every election.

local government, especially in the field of education, when the DUI-affiliated Minister of Education suspended the municipality's competences for a protracted period. This meant that the Gostivar mayor could not appoint principals in primary schools and high schools, and could not exercise other competencies according to the law.

The economic situation in Gostivar is far from perfect, but relatively prosperous in comparison to the average in North Macedonia. Many people employed in the public administration commute to Skopje and Tetovo on a daily basis (around 20 and 45 minutes, respectively). Nonetheless, youth unemployment in Gostivar is considered to be one of the most burning issues. The municipality's vicinity to the Mavrovo Ski Center makes it a potential tourist destination.

Interlocutors report that corruption is omnipresent in Gostivar, particularly related to providing local services to citizens. The regional office of the cadaster agency, the hospital, and court (Gostivar hosts the Court of Appeals which is competent to review decisions of the basic courts in the ethnically mixed cities/towns of Tetovo, Gostivar, Kichevo, and Debar), are just some of the hotspots of local corruption. As one interlocutor highlighted "Corruption exists, and it is everywhere. In the cadastre, for example, where people complained that they cannot have anything done without 'lubricating' the civil servants a bit. In the hospital as well, where it is more delicate because people give it as a reward to the medical personnel." In terms of links between local and higher level corruption, urban planning and construction is the most prominent example. This combination of shared competencies between the local and the central government has been criminalized to a level that goes beyond political party lines. The most powerful figures in the construction sector closely cooperate with both levels of government, rather successfully. An interlocutor explained these relations in more detail: "The urban mafia is probably the most negative issue I would highlight in Gostivar. It has existed, and it will continue to exist. There are cases of usurped land, urbanization, illegal construction, shady dealings with land...the circle is comprised of the local government, the companies, and the central government – in particular, the construction inspectorate."

The Gostivar region has a tradition of being a vibrant scene for local civic engagement. Civil society organizations such as the Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI), which focuses on civic engagement and inclusion, are prominent.[439] ADI is registered in Gostivar, but active in country-wide projects, partnering in consortiums with other NGOs in the country. The municipality tries to establish cooperation with/between local NGOs. The municipality's website provides a list of local NGOs and informal groups containing contact information and representatives. The Youth and Community Center in Gostivar is particularly active, although it was opened only recently. It also hosts smaller local NGOs and provides other support for local initiatives. At a first glance, it looks like a sincere effort by the local government to empower civil society in the municipality. Gostivar is noteworthy for having many registered hiking and tracking organizations that thrive on its vicinity to the Bistra Mountain. Although there is a perception that youth in Gostivar are not particularly active, there are many more cultural and youth activities in comparison to other municipalities. Increased donor interest,

---

[439] See ADI's Vision and Mission page at: https://www.adimacedonia.org/about-us/vision-mission/

good inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations, as well as facilities and spaces provided by the local government are some of the reasons behind this rather positive example.

Gostivar is on the map of municipalities that is moderately affected by religious radicalization leading to violent extremism.[440] Confirmed cases of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from 2015 onward exist,[441] and even cases of entire families moving to Syria have been noted, as two interlocutors confirm. Up to three years ago, these activities were much more noticeable. As the strength of the Islamic State began to weaken, and following concrete police actions by the central government, religious radicalization in Gostivar became less noticeable. On the other hand, as the political crisis in 2015/16 gained momentum, isolated cases of right-wing extremism among ethnic Macedonian citizens became visible. Fortunately, no indications of concrete inter-ethnic and inter/intra-religious incidents were recorded.

The main challenges of the local communities grasped by the research team include intensified emigration, and especially brain drain among youth. As reported, in most cases residents of Gostivar leave in order to join family members that are already working out-of-country, usually in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. Tackling local corruption, and the intertwined corruption between the central and local level, is another main concern of locals in Gostivar. The expansion of corruption into local and deconcentrated institutions is becoming grave, and thus it needs to be thoroughly addressed. Citizens are rather pessimistic about putting order into urban planning and construction, where corruption is most often seen. Lastly, environment protection and waste management is another sphere of public works where authorities cannot propose feasible solutions. The recent protests against opening a landfill in Rusino, and the struggle for clean air, reflect overarching problems in the Polog region.

The good and relatively stable interethnic and inter-confessional relations among citizens is a reason for the residents of this municipality to remain optimistic about their mutual coexistence. The activity of the small local businesses, and the remittances which nurture the local economy, result in Gostivar having reasonable economic parameters when compared to the average living standard in North Macedonia. Lastly, the lively and vibrant civil society in the municipality, strengthened by international and local government support, provides local residents, in particular youth, with opportunities to express their cooperation and creativity.

Gostivar has the potential to be a prosperous multiethnic and multi-confessional municipality, hosting various communities with different backgrounds. The vibrant civil society, with emphasis on youth work and community centers, provide various opportunities for younger generations to express themselves. Yet, flourishing corruption coupled with chaotic urban planning and construction discourages younger citizens to stay in the city and its surroundings, and they instead look for alternatives outside the country. Religious

---

[440] Stojkovski, Filip and Natasia Kalajdziovski. "Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Macedonia." *Berghof Foundation/Democracy Lab Country Case Study 1*, 2018. Available at: https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_CaseStudy1_Macedonia_e.pdf

[441] https://makfax.com.mk/crna-hronika/mvr-vo-damii-nevladini-i-internet-kafulinja-se-regrutirale-borci-za-sirija/

radicalization has been in decline for the last few years, though there are still some remnants. However, this does not diminish the possibility for further political and ethnic radicalization due to pursuit of political power, the influence of organized crime, as well as right-wing nationalist sentiments that can be downplayed.

Kumanovo Snapshot

Kumanovo (Albanian: Kumanovë; Romani: Kumanovo, Serbian: Куманово) is the most economically and socially active city in North Macedonia. Drawing its name from the *Cumans* tribe, Turkic nomadic people coming from the East inhabited the territory of today's city in around the 11th century, making Kumanovo a city with a rich history. It was settled by the Turks in the 17th century, and later by Muslim Albanians. Just 30 kilometers from the center of the city, one of the oldest megalithic astronomical observatories, Kokino, is bedded beneath the stars. It is ranked fourth on the list of old observatories by NASA.[442]

The municipality is surrounded by mountains, situated at the crossroads between the corridors that connect Serbia with Greece, and North Macedonia with Bulgaria. In the vicinity of the city, the Battle of Kumanovo took place in in the First Balkan War in 1912. The Serbian army defeated the Turks, thus opening the rest of the territory which is today known as North Macedonia to their conquest. The Serbian authorities built the famous Zebrnjak Monument in 1937 to celebrate the victims of the Kumanovo Battle. In an attempt to erase any Serbian presence in Macedonia, the monument was partly destroyed in 1942 by the fascist, Axis-allied Bulgarian regime. In 2012, a high-level Serbian delegation visited the monument and organized a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the Battle, a move that generated controversy among the Macedonian public.

For centuries, Kumanovo has been a multi-ethnic city characterized by good inter-ethnic relations that had often been put to test by military and political challenges. According to the last and rather outdated census, over 60% of the inhabitants are ethnic Macedonians, while the most prominent minority is the ethnic Albanians with just over 25%. Two other minorities also play an important role in Kumanovo's socio-political landscape: ethnic Serbs with almost 7% (the mostly autochthonous Macedonia/Torlak speaking population who have a Serbian identity), as well as the Roma community, making up slightly less than 6%. Although it is not legally binding pursuant to the Law on Local Self-Government, the local government promotes a good practice by favoring four official languages in the municipality: Macedonian, Albanian, Serbian, and Romani.[443]

The 2001 insurgency by ethnic Albanian rebels that started in the village of Tanushevci (north of Skopje and west of Kumanovo), spread to the north of Kumanovo, mostly towards the villages of Matejche, Slupchane, and Lipkovo. The heavy and intensive two-month conflict in Kumanovo resulted in numerous casualties, particularly on the side of the NLA. Moreover, probably the largest loss to society was the unprecedented level of mistrust between the two largest communities in the municipality, resulting in previously unseen ethnic segregation and division of the educational system along ethnic lines. Soon after the violent conflict ended with the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), Albanian-language students left their schools and asked for new schools to be opened. Even nowadays, some local actors believe that the problem of distrust between Macedonian and Albanian youth can be solved by separation in educational, cultural, and personal life.

---

[442] https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5413
[443] The law mandates official usage above a threshold of 20%, but communities can decide to do so below it.

The violent conflict gave prominence to several warlords from both sides, promoting them into political, business, and criminal leaders. Current Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Political System and Inter-community Relations, Sadulla Duraku, formerly known as commander *Ventili* (Ventil stands for water valve; Duraku got this nickname because he was complicit in stopping the water distribution from the Lipkovo Lake, which his rebels controlled, to Kumanovo during the conflict) is still one of the most prominent DUI politicians in the region. On the other hand, late police Lieutenant Colonel Goran Georgievski – Mujo – was one of the leading figures in Kumanovo's underground for several years until his death in 2005.[444]

Given Kumanovo's ethnic makeup and its position as one of the centers of hostilities in 2001, a new violent dispute broke out in 2015. During a police raid, a shootout erupted between Macedonian police forces and assailants composed of 18 Kosovars, 11 Macedonians — two of whom had been living in Kosovo — and one Albanian. Police said the militants used assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and hand grenades in the weekend-long, house-to-house fighting in the densely built-up ethnic Albanian neighborhood of Divo Naselje (Wild Settlement). The men allegedly entered Macedonia illegally at the beginning of May and hid out in Divo Naselje, where police say they found a huge arsenal of weapons. Some of the dead gunmen wore uniforms with the insignia of the disbanded ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army, the ethnic Albanian rebel group that fought Serb government forces in 1998-99 for the independence of Kosovo.[445] Although inter-ethnic relations were once again tested, they remained stable, and according to some interlocutors even strengthened, following this incident. Many possible scenarios related to the divisive ruling of the VMRO-DPMNE and the DUI are still echoing regarding the political background to this major incident. There has been no proper independent investigation.

Kumanovo has been continuously governed by the SDSM since the country's independence in 1991. Since the last local elections held in 2017, the local government is run by SDSM mayor Maksim Dimitrievski, a rather popular figure among Kumanovo citizens. Dimitrievski is known for being open, modest, and less affluent than the average SDSM public official, and often at odds with the party leadership. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he faced criminal charges due to violating self-isolation measures; they were later dropped. (He confirmed he had been infected, and violated the self-isolation terms to go to a private clinic for testing.) Some informed persons believe that Dimitrievski could be one of the figures that might bring about positive change in his political party if certain conditions for that are met. He is thought to be a high party official strictly abiding to the main tenets of social democracy, honoring the working class and rank-and-file party members. Additionally, no major corruption scandals have been linked to him so far. In 2018, he was involved in a physical altercation in a restaurant in Kumanovo. VMRO-DPMNE affiliated media had reported that the fight emerged because he was drunk and wanted the musicians to play Serbian songs, as opposed to the Macedonian patriotic ones favored by another group of patrons. Other sources denied this.

---

[444] https://makfax.com.mk/svet/1895/

[445] "Macedonia charges 30 alleged ethnic Albanian militants over weekend battle that killed 22." *Fox News*. May11, 2015. Available at https://www.foxnews.com/world/macedonia-charges-30-alleged-ethnic-albanian-militants-over-weekend-battle-that-killed-22

In general, the perceptions of interlocutors are that in recent years the situation in the municipality is less stable when the VMRO-DPMNE is in power on central level. Instead of cohabitation between the central and the local government, tensions rise and the "underground" becomes more visible in its fight for power and influence.

Throughout the years, the local structures in power had created a web of malpractice resulting in systemic corruption. Most of these actions are related to the municipality's competences in urban planning. Similar to other parts of North Macedonia, corruption is omnipresent and plays a relevant role in the day to day activities and lives of Kumanovo's inhabitants. Conflicts of interest and cronyism, paired with pre-arranged public procurement procedures given to companies close to the parties in power, amplify the sense of inequality facilitated and maintained by political affiliation. Lack of trust in the judiciary, especially following the case of "little Almir,"[446] in 2016, further underlined frustration with the justice system. Being a border region town, interlocutors note that corruption dynamics in Kumanovo often include smuggling, bribery of customs officials, money laundering, and counterfeiting money. Illegal migration and human trafficking is also a popular criminal activity in Kumanovo, given its geographical location. Local villages in Kumanovo and nearby Municipality of Lipkovo are used as checkpoints and resting houses.

There are many non-governmental organizations that promote local activism and support civic engagement and inter-cultural dialogue. Most of them are supported by funds coming from EU and US donors. One such organization is the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID), which operates a youth support system in the municipality known among youth as the "MultiKulti" Youth Center. The main aim of the center is to establish grounds for sustainable multiethnic cooperation by fostering intercultural learning and communication among children and young people. In addition, this is facilitated through promoting democratic citizenship and fostering the active participation of youth within the community's decision-making processes. In addition, CID runs a youth work program in Kumanovo. The youth work offered by CID annually benefits over 2000 beneficiaries.

Kumanovo is the hometown of the controversial former police General Goran Georgievski – Mujo – who was very active during the 2001 conflict. Enjoying a reputation as a "local sheriff," likely involved in extortion and other illegal activities, Georgievski was shot and killed in front of a night club in Kumanovo in 2005. He is considered one of the greatest heroes from the 2001 conflict by Macedonian veterans, nationally but especially locally. He is constantly commemorated on nationalist Facebook pages. Recently, a photo of Mujo with Republika Srpska soldiers was published on one of these online pages, and commentators indicated that he had organized the involvement of Bosnian Serb fighters in the conflict of

---

[446] The controversial "Little Almir Case" refers to the murder of 4-year old ethnic-Albanian boy Almir Aliu from Kumanovo by an ethnic Macedonian, Boban Ilikj. The murder, which is widely believed to be a hate crime, occurred following a banal quarrel between Almir's father and Ilikj related to the queue in the public hospital. Ilikj was attacked by Almir's father and his relatives. In the attempt to escape, Ilikj hit Almir with his car while stepping on the gas peddle. Protests seeking justice for Almir's death occurred on several occasions, both in Kumanovo and Skopje. They were supported by representatives of the ethnic Albanian political parties, as well as prominent ethnic Albanian public figures. Former DUI Minister of Justice Bilent Saliu resigned due to a "lack of faith in the judiciary," after the public prosecution changed the grounds for prosecution of Iliki. Iliki is currently in prison.

2001.[447] His killer, Goran Stojkovski – Linka, was executed six years later in 2011; the word on the street was that this murder was a revenge killing. These incidents caused further political polarization in Kumanovo. The ethnic Albanian population had - and still has - a strong say in Kumanovo's underground. Famous tobacco boss Bajrush Sejdiu was arrested in 2008 as part of the police action "Ash" and later "Ash 2," and sentenced to 12 years in jail in 2011. His arrest triggered a social and economic shock in Kumanovo because around 200 people became jobless. He was released from jail earlier than expected, in 2018. Allegedly, he is *now* deemed to be close to the SDSM.

Kumanovo was also widely mentioned during the incidents in Parliament in April 2017. One of the most visible and violent protesters that stormed the parliamentary building, Igor Jug (currently imprisoned) originates from Kumanovo. He is the child of a retired JNA military officer of Croatian descent. Jug is also one of Mujo's best friends from the past, as photos on social media commemorating Mujo suggest.[448] Jug is the (former) President of the Vlado Chernozemski Macedonian Patriotic Organization (MPO). The reference to Chernozemski, member of the IMRO, known for the assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia in Marseille in 1934, is opaque - he personally was unconnected to Kumanovo or the region. Members of the Vlado Chernozemski MPO publicly reacted, claiming that Jug was unjustly prosecuted, convicted, and imprisoned for the April 27 incidents, and also falsely accused for alleged involvement in drug trafficking, rape and murder.[449] In spite of these elements, interlocutors in Kumanovo could not identify a significant influence of this MPO in local political life.

The above mentioned case of Divo Naselje should also be highlighted in the context of ethnic-Albanian nationalist extremism. The alleged terrorists were provided with shelter and informants, and other logistics as well.

Religious radicalization can be noticed mainly among the Muslim Roma population, and to a smaller extent among some ethnic Albanians in certain villages. Interlocutors commented that this phenomenon is not widespread, and that the local population does not perceive it as one of their main grievances. Nonetheless, Kumanovo was mapped as being one of the municipalities hosting illegal mosques, outside of the jurisdiction of the Islamic Religious Community.[450]

Basic security remains one of the key concerns of local citizens, taking into consideration the recent history of incidents. Furthermore, people are concerned about the lack of will and ability to tackle issues such as corruption and organized crime. As in other municipalities, brain drain and emigration constitute a part of Kumanovo's daily struggle. For years, a high

---

[447]https://www.facebook.com/edinica.lavovi/photos/a.1070592626302512/3620101218018294/?type=3&theater

[448]
https://www.facebook.com/komandantgorangeorgievski.mujo/photos/a.1083271285033641/37187090648231 70/?type=3&theater

[449]http://tvplus.mk/%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80-%D1%98%D1%83%D0%B3-%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%9A%D0%B5-%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2/

[450]http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Extremism_in_macedonia_402663.pdf p. 15

number of young unemployed people, mainly ethnic Macedonians, have been working in American military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, making remittances a significant source of the local GDP. Lastly, discussions suggest that bringing order into urban planning and construction processes could alleviate the grievances of locals in Kumanovo.

The relatively good and stable inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations keep hope alive that better days might come in the foreseeable future. Additionally, the economic parameters are reasonably high compared to the average Macedonian living standard. This could provide the needed base for sustained resilience to radicalization and/or political polarization – if accompanied by meaningful structural changes aimed at supporting greater governmental accountability. In terms of youth engagement, Kumanovo should be considered a vibrant municipality with cultural activities and good cooperation among young people.

It appears that political polarization, organized crime, and religious radicalization are not taken as seriously as they should be in Kumanovo. While inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations are stable for the time being, smaller critical junctures might trigger an undesired effect. Many of these social phenomena are neglected and have not received the attention needed. Thorough and substantial work needs to be done in Kumanovo in order to remain a good example for multi-cultural cooperation and co-existence.

Shtip Snapshot

Shtip (Macedonian *Штип*), also known as the *City under the Isar (Pod Isarot)*, is the largest city and educational, industrial, and medical center of the Eastern region of the country. It lays along the valleys of two rivers: Bregalnica (the second largest river in North Macedonia), which cuts the western part of the city, and Otinja (a smaller river) which passes through the center and divides it into half. The nickname derives from the Hill of Isar, along with its medieval fortress, which is the city's symbol. The second, more colloquial moniker is the Macedonian "Windy City," due to the two river valleys, historic deforestation, and the dryness of the terrain, providing for constant and strong flows of air throughout. It has had a very rich history since antiquity, and important archeological sites, such as Astibo and Bargala, can be visited in its vicinity. It is the city of textile, the "Yugoslav Manchester," due to the fact that Shtip was home to Yugoslav textile industrial giants Makedonka and Bargala, and it still hosts the densest concentration of textile factories in the country. It is the home of the University of Goce Delčev formed in 2007, one of the five state universities in the country, which has somewhat revived social life and the economy. In particular, students from the less affluent, eastern part of the country are coming to study here. Turkish students used to come from Turkey, but after some changes in accreditation laws in Turkey, their numbers have fallen.[451]

Shtip was not directly affected by the wars of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent conflict of 2001. However, many members of the armed forces (both police and military) participating in the 2001 conflict came from Shtip. For example, one of the more prominent police generals and current politicians, Stojanche Angelov, is from Shtip; he was wounded in the conflict. According to the 2002 national census, Shtip had about 47,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom ethnic Macedonians, with Roma and Vlach (Aromani) less than 5%, and Turks less than 3%.

Historically, the city is deeply intertwined with the developments of the revolutionary organization IMRO. Goce Delčev, arguably the most respected revolutionary and ideologue in Macedonian history, used to be a teacher there. Furthermore, some interwar (WWI and WWII) leaders of IMRO and some of today's icons of the political right, such as Todor Aleksandrov and Vancho Mihajlov, were also born there. They are controversial in their affiliations with pro-Bulgarian elements, but are nevertheless respected by the contemporary Macedonian right-wing. The most important World War II Macedonian partisan leader and later national historian, General Mihajlo Apostolski, was also from there, along with Kiro Gligorov, the first President of independent Macedonia. World War II is also significant for Shtip as it contained the third largest Jewish community after Skopje and Bitola, all of whom perished in the Holocaust.

---

[451] The following was common: students who hadn't passed entrance exams for university in Turkey would come to study the Macedonian language for one or two years, and then would transfer back to Turkey. There was a lot of shady activity, as students would pass courses without learning the language properly, etc. Ultimately, Erdogan decided not to recognize Macedonian credits and diplomas, because Macedonia wouldn't deliver FETO activists to Turkey.

Due to the historical prominence of politicians and leaders hailing from Shtip, it is considered to be one of the cities that enjoys its own "lobby" at the central level. About one half of the first Macedonian government after independence, along with court judges, academics, etc. was from Shtip (the Prime Minister, Nikola Kljusev, was also from here). The famous Mijalkov family is from Shtip: Jordan (the father) cooperated with Yugoslav security services and was the first Macedonian Minister of Interior; one of the sons, Sasho, was head of the State Security during VMRO-DPMNE rule, while his brother was deputy director of the Customs Bureau, and his cousin, Nikola Gruevski, was the Prime Minister. Lastly, the late archbishop of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, g.g. (*Gospodin Gospodin – Archbishop's title)* Mihail, who played a significant clerical and political role during the first years of the country's independence, was also born in Shtip.

In spite of the strong IMRO/VMRO connections in and to Shtip, VMRO-DPMNE does not always win elections. In fact, local support and subsequent local governments have been switching between the two main parties since independence. At the moment, mayor Blagoj Bochvarski is from SDSM, whose coalition also holds a slight majority on the local council. However, as several interlocutors noted, SDSM rules politically, but VMRO-DPMNE, through local businesses and affiliated state employees, dominates life. Even though the tensions between the two parties at the national level are high, an interlocutor from the City Council told the team that VMRO-DPMNE councilors are "unusually compliant." In the last year, at least 27 automobiles have been set on fire, and the majority of interlocutors believe that these cases of arson are the result of tensions from political and criminal networks. An interesting recent development is the political party called GDU (Civil Democratic Union), formed in 2018, headed by Petar Kolev, a Shtip resident, former president of the Bulgarian NGO "VMRO for Macedonia" and a returnee from Bulgaria. He holds strong connections to the Bulgarian IMRO, and GDU is considered to be a "Bulgarian" party, even though they are not particularly vocal about it.

There is virtually no unemployment in the city (about 1000 jobs remain vacant at any moment), but salaries are low and people barely make ends meet. Perhaps the most potent social conflict arises from labor-capital relations. 7,700 workers are employed in the textile industry (out of 12,000 in the industry in general) and there is a consensus among interlocutors that employers underpay and do not care enough about their workers. Two instances showed this to be evident: first, when *employers* threatened to go on strike after the government sought to enact more favorable provisions for workers; and second, when large clusters of COVID-19 infections happened in factories, revealing serious malfeasance and neglect for workers.

Locals complain of some of the most common types of corruption seen throughout the country, mainly partisan clientelism and cronyism. Public institutions are full of unqualified employees who have gotten their jobs through the political parties. The local government is overstaffed: the number of public administration workers has *tripled* in the past 15 years, according to an interlocutor, who is the oldest journalist and member of the local council in Shtip. Offices are overcrowded and, often people have nothing to do. A notably corrupt institution is the Forestry authority. During the VMRO-DPMNE administration, the local House of Culture was forced to employ seven people who had been employed by the Forestry, with nothing for them to do.

Besides providing employment, the Forestry authority has also been noted as a highly corrupt institution, with particularly sophisticated ways of fixing public tenders, or illegally selling timber, with police protection. Urbanism/construction/infrastructure is another sector with high corruption, since building plans can be changed overnight, or structures are unsafely built, with no repercussions among those responsible. The previous (VMRO-DPMNE) mayor implemented the "Asphalt Macedonia" project, whereas many green areas were covered with parking lots (or historical cobblestone streets were asphalted), while also skimping on the contractual thickness of asphalt, then pocketing the difference.[452] The mayor was closely connected to a construction company – Kole Trans, which won over 60% of all public tenders during his rule, and which was accused of illegal exploitation of natural minerals.[453] A policeman has admitted to buying his employment spot for 5,000 Euros, therefore he is not accountable to his police superiors, but to those who have "employed him," i.e., the political party. Local private security agencies are weak, but bigger ones from Skopje have been pointed out, working as personal henchmen for Ilcho Zahariev, the previous mayor from VMRO-DPMNE.

In terms of civil society, there are several Roma and youth organizations in the city, with significant involvement in their areas of interest. Another liberal CSO is the Local Community Development Foundation, which deals with social protection, education, and citizen empowerment. However, the most notable local organization is *GlasenTekstilec* (Loud Textile Worker), which serves also as a cultural center. The organization was formed by a former textile worker, and it arose due to the obvious necessity for someone to speak for the workers (the majority of them women). It has been effective in communicating and raising awareness about their problems. They have been funded primarily by foreign sources, such as by Kvinna Till Kvinna, a Swedish women's foundation, the Olof Palme Center, and others.

There is very limited extremist activity in Shtip. Interlocutors noted that there used to be, but that those people have either been removed or are dead. IMRO's historical role comes to mind when speaking of political violence, and there are speculations that one person has been killed in recent years due to factional disagreements within VMRO-DPMNE. There was an unsuccessful attempt to radicalize the local citizenship against migrants in 2017. A VMRO-DPMNE affiliated CSO, *Budenje* (Awakening) started an initiative in support of a local referendum, following rumors that 5,000 apartments for migrants would be built in Shtip.[454] The referendum, however, was not allowed by the State Electoral Commission. There is one Macedonian Patriotic Organization, bearing the name of famous local IMRO leader, Mishe Razvigorov. According to social media from the leaders, it is obvious that they are VMRO-DPMNE activists, but it does not seem that they have been active since April 27, 2017. There are two groups who participated and entered the parliament on 27 April, for which

---

[452] "Дождот ги разоткри импровизациите на Захариев." *Istok Press.* May 23, 2017, Available at https://istokpress.mk/%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%82-%D0%B3%D0%B8-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0/

[453]"Преткривична пријава за штипската фирма „Коле Транс."" *Pravdiko*. November 11, 2016. Available at https://www.pravdiko.mk/pretkrivichna-prijava-za-shtipskata-firma-kole-trans/

[454] The question would have been: "Do you think that migrants should be allowed to come and live in Shtip?"

interlocutors claim they were paid 100 Euros per day. There is no evidence they participated in the violence.

Respondents in Shtip note little concern about Islamic radicalism. There is talk that such ideology can penetrate the Roma communities, but not the Turkish ones. However, as in other places, locals believe it is only a sort of current fashion, and is related to receiving money from abroad. At least one interlocutor (a Roma man) has shown some sympathy for ISIS, saying that religious aspects of the caliphate are good, leading the team to believe that there might be some chatter on these issues within the community.

Collusion between political parties and big business seems to be the largest problem, as can be seen through corruption in forestry and urbanism, but also in the low level of worker's protection. Industrial relations, however, are identified as a conundrum that is difficult to solve: if factory owners were to respect all laws, pay taxes, and increase wages, foreign clients might leave, and everyone is afraid of what would happen if 7,700 workers would lose their (admittedly poorly paid) jobs. It would be a disaster for the city. In terms of extremism, risks exist mainly due to political polarization. If rumors about the car burnings being related to politics are true, then it means that polarization has already taken on a violent form.

There are some positive developments in the business sector, as Kit Go (a chain of supermarkets and other businesses) and Robi (a TV Cable Company and investor) have shown signs of corporate social responsibility. Interlocutors believe that people in the city are peaceful, but are amazed that no one has "snapped" or engaged in serious violence, considering the injustices that have been brought upon them by political parties over the years.

Shtip is the most important city for the Eastern region, and many of the "ailments" of this impoverished region can be seen. People long for the days when the industrial giants were working, and are deeply disappointed in how transition was handled and unfolded. Business and politics are intertwined. As in other cities of the country, emigration to Skopje and abroad is very high. Both parties have been pointed to as being involved in fixing tenders and shady business. Although there is an historical legacy for extremism, risks of extremism exist mainly due to political polarization and turf battles, as evidenced from the car burnings. Currently, it seems that there is no active patriotic organization, or that any that do exist are dormant.

Struga Snapshot

Struga is a municipality in the Southwest part of the country. Situated in a picturesque environment, it lies in the plain of the Struga Valley on both banks of the river *Crn Drim* and on the northern shore of Lake Ohrid. Bordering with the Municipality of Vevchani, known for its rebellious spirit and the beautiful Vevchani springs, the city of Struga is characterized with a timeless combination of natural beauty, cultural heritage and intriguing socio-political history. The ancient name of the city is *Enhalon* which in ancient Greek means eel, for the eels and its hunters inhabit these waters from the Neolithic era to present day, in a continuous cycle of life and death. The name of Struga derives from a Slavic word describing the open geographical position of the city: a place of constant winds. Struga might also come from the Slavic word for riverbed - struga. Although the city is small in terms of absolute size, it exemplifies and reflects the multicultural and multiethnic character of the country and offers diverse cultural experience. Struga is known to be one of the most important cultural centers in North Macedonia, and a few examples clearly justify that statement, such as the Struga Poetry Evenings (a large poetry gathering, attended by poets, writers and artists from across the world), churches, and early Christian basilicas dating from 4th Century and onwards, possessing a great deal of historical importance, such as mosaics, frescoes, etc. Struga is also the birthplace of the poets Konstantin and Dimitar Miladinov, who are key figures in the national awakening of the Macedonian Slavs in the 19th Century.

Even though the Municipality of Struga was not directly affected by the conflict in 2001, the changes brought by the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) resulted in inter-ethnic tensions among its diverse population. The perception of orthodox ethnic Macedonians that they should be dominant, amplified by the "sense of loss" to their fellow Albanian citizens during the economic transition, was additionally strengthened by the implications stemming from the law on territorial division adopted in 2004. The attendant gerrymandering resulted in Struga having its first ethnic Albanian mayor in 2005. On the eve of the adoption of the new legislation and the referendum trying to oppose it, former Minister of Defense and later Prime Minister Vlado Buchkovski, was on the verge of being lynched by a crowd of ethnic Macedonians, after coming to Struga to try and calm down the situation. The violent clashes in Struga that night left dozens of protesters and police officers injured[455]. Prior to the change of municipal borders (a follow-on from the Ohrid Framework Agreement), ethnic Macedonians had a slim majority that was later shifted in favor of ethnic Albanians and Torbeshi, Macedonian-speaking Muslims who are divided on their ethnic and national identification. Arguably, Orthodox Macedonians felt sidelined in the decision-making and political power-sharing process, and the situation with the usage of languages was assessed as most alarming, as there was a serious conflict in relation to the official usage of the Albanian language. In 2009, a debate organized by the informal group "Citizens for European Macedonia", a Soros-funded liberal initiative, was disrupted and cancelled due to threats of violence by local activists, due to the fact that the event organizers were seen as "traitors.[456]" However, despite its recent turbulent past, in recent years, Struga has been

---

[455] "Osum godini od nemilite nastani vo Struga," *A1on.mk*, July 23, 2012. Available at:
https://a1on.mk/macedonia/osum-godini-od-nemilite-nastani-vo-str/
[456] "Поради закани откажана трибина," *Time.mk*, February 19, 2009.
https://time.mk/arhiva/?d1=01&m1=01&y1=1991&d2=31&m2=12&y2=2012&all=0&a1=1&fulltext=2&timeup=
2&show=1&q=%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D

pointed out as a positive example in terms of policies regarding use of local languages, as well as relatively stable inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations.

Struga can be defined as a post-transitional city that has undergone many urban, sociological, economic, demographic, and political changes. As a border city, Struga is experiencing population growth that is predominantly multiethnic. However, migration to Europe is also noticeable, bringing the investments, remittances, and new seasonal consumerist habits into the city from the diaspora. This trend has contributed to increased local economic development, including further expansion of the city into nearby rural areas. Struga seems to be the outlier amongst other ethnically diverse municipalities, as polarization amongst ethnic groups has not been systemic, but rather episodic, with polarization as a driver of extremism most emphasized during election periods. In this context, election periods have been characterized with hijacking of ethnic narratives by some parties in the support of their political agendas. The stirring of nationalism amongst both ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian voters undoubtedly impacts upon the amount of political capital that is awarded to extremist narratives, leaving little space for moderate dialogue.

In general, the crime rate of the city is lower than in previous years. However, the proximity to the border with Albania makes the region vulnerable to international organized crime. Dilaver Bojku was a notorious local resident, a convicted crime kingpin suspected of forcing hundreds of women from several Balkan and European countries into prostitution. He was murdered in August 2017, on the Struga beach "Aqua Blue," after which the attacker immediately fled.[457] The motives behind this murder were unclear; some argue it is a case of a vendetta, whilst others claim it was a quarrel of Balkan mobsters. The interviewees in this research refrained from commenting too much on issues of sex trafficking and prostitution in this region – some argued that it is still present in the nearby villages, such as Veleshta, the home village of the late Bojku, while others claimed that they have not heard of such incidents recently.

The local government in Struga is led by Ramiz Merko, a controversial senior DUI official and local fixture who was mayor 2005-2013 (succeeded as mayor from 2013-2017 by Alliance for Albanians leader Zijadin Sela, now an MP). Struga since 2005, has become a constant political battlefield between DUI and DPA, and later the AA (Alliance for Albanians, formed in 2018). This stems from the popularity of Struga-born Sela, founder of the AA who is one of the most prominent political figures in the country, continuously overshadowing DUI's otherwise dominant position. His status as a martyr among the ethnic Albanian population following the "Bloody Thursday" incidents on April 27, 2017, in which he was beaten unconscious and presumed by many to be dead.[458] This resulted in his gaining a level of support from the citizens similar to that of DUI founder (and former KLA/NLA guerrilla leader) Ali Ahmeti, hitherto the uncontested "Bard of Politics" among the ethnic Albanian voters in the country.

0%BD%D0%B8%20%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D1%82%D1%8 0%D0%B8%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0&read=a88aa1d6838e520

[457] "СО КУРШУМ ВО ЧЕЛО УБИЕН ДИЛАВЕР БОЈКУ – ЛЕКУ НА ПЛАЖА ВО СТРУГА," *Sakam da Kazam*, August 14, 2017. Available at: https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/kurshum-vo-chelo-ubien-dilaver-bojku-leku-na-plazha-vo-struga/

[458] "Села по тепањето во Собранието, во понеделник за првпат се појавува во јавност," *Fokus*, May 19, 2017. https://fokus.mk/sela-po-tepaneto-vo-sobranieto-vo-ponedelnik-za-prvpat-se-pojavuva-vo-javnost/

In May 2020, The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption asked the state Government to take away the Municipality of Struga's competencies in urbanism matters, and to demolish illegally constructed buildings. According to the municipal register, 1076 illegal buildings have been identified, of which 409 are in the protected area. The mayor of Struga, Ramiz Merko, claims that there are *no* illegal buildings on the Struga lake shoreline. Interviewees also seemed to be unaware (or unconcerned) of any problem with illegal buildings, or the harmful practices of burning down the lakeside reeds to make room for construction and artificial beaches.

However, some of the interlocutors did recognize the chaotic urban planning and the usurpation of the lakeside by irresponsible concessioners that had both not paid their concession fee to the municipality, but also "stretched" the normative standards for development and setting-up urban equipment on the main beaches in the epicenter of the city; in essence building more structures than was allowed. Ethnic Macedonians tend to associate the urbanistic chaos with their ethnic Albanian neighbors. Misuse of political power and trading with influence, especially regarding employment in the public sector is also one of the main grievances of Struga citizens. Smaller communities such as *Torbeshi*, roughly around one quarter of the population, are stigmatized by both ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians and often abused for political and clerical purposes. They remain the most disenfranchised community in the municipality.

In the municipality of Struga there are officially 69 NGOs which carry out activities that, directly and indirectly, have a limited impact in the area of inter-ethnic relations. However, only a few have proper working conditions for their daily activities. The NGOs have generally not been able to effectively address inter-ethnic issues, because they themselves reflect the ethnic divisions of Macedonian society. They tend to deal with similar issues, but their efforts are each targeted at a specific ethnic community. This problematic trend was spotted by the major NGOs on the national level, and the UNDP established a Center for NGO Support in 2004 with an aim to uphold the civil sector in areas of Struga, Ohrid, and Vevcani. This center aims to enable the NGOs to overcome their technical difficulties, and to provide opportunities for a better exchange of information and cooperation with their peers on local and national levels. The most notable NGOs from Struga are: Local Development Agency-Struga (LDA); Creative Center – RURBANKULT; Association for Democratic Culture – Tolerance; Association "Ecological Society – Enhalon"; Association for Equal Opportunities "Ezerka"; Association for Development of Interethnic Dialogue "Etniteti." In general, sports in Struga are very developed, and many sports, scouting, and mountaineering associations are registered. However, the local NGO sector is overall weak and underdeveloped. In regard to civil society, Struga was in the midst of a large corruption affair related to Erasmus+ funding. The former director of the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility, originating from Struga, was investigated for allocating more than 110,000 euros to local youth NGOs, many of which didn't have a valid address or email address, but allegedly gravitated around the Struga region.[459]

---

[459] "Evropski pari zbogatija somnitelni mladinski organizatsii." *Prizma*, January 22, 2014. Available at:
https://prizma.mk/evropski-pari-zbogatija-somnitelni-mladinski-organizatsii/

Although the interviewees describe interethnic relations as "peaceful," there have been multiple cases of interethnic tensions in Struga since 2004. Ethnic tensions resulted in youth violence in 2008 and 2009 between Macedonian and Albanian high school students. As one interlocutor reports, students usually fought when incited by political parties, usually before elections or when public distraction was needed. The local government temporarily resolved the situation with an allotment of students into different shifts[460]. However, the introduction of "ethnic shifts" did not provide credible means for resolving the interethnic issues, or peace building.

In January 2012, during the carnival in the nearby village of Vevchani, the locals wore masks deemed offensive to Muslim Albanians, and sparked protests in Struga. This led to an arson attack on St Nicholas church in the religiously mixed village of Labunishta near Struga, along with other incidents including burning of Macedonian flags, and the destruction of transport vehicles and local buildings. The political actors condemned the violence as did the Islamic Religious Community. Moreover, the predominantly Macedonian-speaking village of Labunista has been identified as home to a small group of radical Muslims of the Saudi Wahhabi persuasion, and the village Podgorci has become a central point of the Islamic movement Tablighi Jamaat. There are several individuals who have been identified by the Turkish government as being members of the Gülen movement in Struga, and there are allegations that Gülenist schools in Struga and Gostivar provide lessons outside the curriculum about radical Islam, and praising fundamentalism. This seems unlikely to the authors.

The Active Islamic Youth, which was created after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina by local Muslims who had fought together with the foreign Islamist fighters from the mujahedin units and which popularizes fundamentalist Islamic teachings,[461] has affiliates in Struga. The security services have detected that the members of the Active Islamic Youth in Macedonia coordinated the transfer of a substantial sum of money for Kosovo, and that they have close links with the members of the Islamic Jihad Union. In 2015, the Macedonian police undertook Operation Cell in Skopje, Kumanovo, Struga, and Gostivar, which resulted in 9 arrests, mostly of returned foreign fighters. A total of 36 individuals between 19 and 49 years of age had been suspected, but 27 had remained in Syria; among those arrested was Rexhep Memishi (a leading Salafi recruiter).[462]

There is one registered Macedonian Patriotic Organization in Struga, Nepokor (Defiance/Disobedience). The initiators are known local VMRO-DPMNE activists. At the local level, the activities of this organization are hardly visible.

---

[460] "Етнички смени во две струшки училишта," *DW*, February 9, 2009. Available at:
https://www.dw.com/mk/%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B8-
%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%B4%D0%B2%D0%B5-
%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D1%83%D1%88%D0%BA%D0%B8-
%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0/a-4015692
[461] Panovski, A. (2011). *The Spread of Islamic Extremism in the Republic of Macedonia*/ Naval Postgraduate School. Cited at p. 44.
[462] Filip Stojkovski and Natasia Kalajdziovski, "Western Balkans – Extremism Research Forum – Macedonia Report," British Council, April 2018, p. 21. Available at:
https://www.britishcouncil.mk/sites/default/files/erf_macedonia_report_2018.pdf

There are numerous examples that point to ethnic and religious polarization as well as radicalization and extremism in Struga. The proximity of extremism (referring to physical and virtual access to extremist materials, ideas, and propaganda) is perceived as a facilitating factor that makes the populations in the municipality prone to violent extremism. Moreover, the existence of radical Islamic communities and organizations provides for physical interaction between a recruiter and vulnerable individual creating an environment in which a kind of extremist socialization can flourish. Moreover, members of communities that perceive alienation, isolation, or marginalization (social, political, ethnic, or religious) are vulnerable to extremist ideologies. This indicates an over-arching environment conducive to the proliferation of extremism and violent extremism in Struga, including through reciprocal radicalization, and it is a pressing issue that demands a holistic strategy for prevention and countering violent extremism.

Struga is a tourist destination with renowned tourist value which has significant potential, and supporting this should be an imperative for overall development. Through cross-border cooperation and European regional connectivity programs, Struga would be able to become the center of this micro-European region. In Struga, there are examples of peaceful coexistence between the Albanian and Macedonian ethnic communities in the past, which was preserved even during the 2001-armed conflict. Therefore, it is of particular importance that development takes place through strategies and action plans which will contribute to a balanced and sustainable development and preservation of the city's identity.

Intriguingly, Struga as a municipality remained peaceful during the 2001-armed conflict. Interethnic tension was spurred by the process of decentralization in 2004. This suggests that the interethnic issues have a strong political dimension, while the local population has enjoyed peaceful coexistence for years. In the case of Struga, citizens would like to be free of the overweening power of ethnic political parties. There is a need for a more proactive approach to the promotion of coexistence and interethnic reconciliation, through overcoming existing tensions and deeply entrenched prejudices, and promoting common values and mutual respect, to further strengthening municipality-wide resilience toward the factors which contribute to an extremism-enabling environment.

Tetovo Snapshot

Tetovo (Albanian: *Tetovë, Turkish: Kalkandelen)* is the largest city in the Polog region and is located in the foothills of the famous Shara Mountain (Shar Planina / Шар Планина in Macedonian and Serbian, Sharri in Albanian), which is considered to be the ancestral land of the famous shepherd dog *sharplaninec*. Known as the unofficial capitol of the ethnic Albanian community in North Macedonia, Tetovo is one of the country's youngest and economically most active cities, whose vivid construction and trade driven consumer economy is fueled mainly by remittances of the large Tetovo diaspora in Western Europe and the strong local entrepreneurial spirit, which historically resulted from the policies of systemic exclusion of the ethnic Albanians from access to jobs in the state owned companies and public administration. Tetovo is home to the first Albanian language instruction university in the country, and it was in Tetovo that the first serious battles in the inter-ethnic conflict between the Macedonian state and Albanian rebels started back in 2001. The river Pena, which divides the city into two, represents in the imaginary of the ethnic-Macedonian minority an ethnic-border dividing communities. Ethnic Macedonians refer to the other side of the river as "preku reka" (i.e. "on the other side of the river"). Urban planning and environment protection in Tetovo are paradigmatic examples of how local level corruption and state capture practices can have a detrimental effect on the overall quality of life.

In the 1990s, Tetovo was a harbinger of the inter-ethnic struggles that eventually resulted in the 2001 conflict and the internationally brokered Ohrid Framework Agreement that put an end to the armed struggle by envisaging constitutional changes guaranteeing complex power-sharing arrangements between the communities.[463] Many of the political struggles of the ethnic Albanians in the 1990s centered on the right to higher education in the Albanian language, reflecting the struggles around Prishtina University from the 1980s where, according to the explanation of one of the interlocutors, many of the political leaders in Tetovo got their formal education and politically socialized. In 1995, instruction in Albanian language started at the illegal/unregistered Tetovo University located in the village of Mala Rechica,[464] prompting radicalization of ethnic Macedonian youth in the form a long-lasting protest cycle and instrumentalization of the their grievances by political elites who had ideological affinities and financial connections with Milosević's regime in Serbia. These protests reached their climax in 1997,[465] when a nation-wide nationalist mobilization of Macedonian youth took place against the introduction of otherwise limited Albanian language instruction at the state University in Skopje. The leaders of these nationalist protests represent the core of some of the most powerful and still active politicians coming from the ranks of the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE and far-right political groups that gravitate around this party. Shortly prior to the outbreak of wider violent conflict (in and around

---

[463] See "Minorities at Risk Project" report at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38b7a.html
[464] Video of clashes with police – posted by an obviously pro-Albanian site – show UNPREDEP's APCs in the background. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fj2JkCPQEx8
[465] Stojan Stojanov, "Само кај нас на студентите секогаш им е таман," RFE/RL, October 17, 2014. Available at: https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/26642114.html

Tetovo) in 2001, OSCE intercession helped gain agreement to found the international South East European University, which began programs in September 2001 – just after Ohrid was signed.[466] It was not before 2004, during the SDSM-DUI coalition government, that the state university was recognized by the Macedonian state and made legal. To sum up, the political struggles between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians were very much an echo of the respective struggles in Kosovo between the Kosovars and the Milosević regime in Serbia, as ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians identified with those opposing sides in that conflict.

Since the local elections held in 2013, the local government has been held by the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), a party that was founded when the guerilla fighters from the 2001 conflict decided to pursue their struggle for equality using political means. The city had previously been the stronghold of the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). Current mayor Teuta Arifi is a member of the intellectual wing (the other wing being comprised of the warlords from the 2001 conflict) of the party and served as Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs in a VMRO-DPMNE and DUI coalition Government, between 2011 and 2013. In 2017, Arifi's bid for re-election was challenged by Bilall Kasami, the leader of the political party BESA, a newcomer to the political scene with alleged ties with Islamic movements from Turkey and the Middle East. BESA came in second after DUI among the ethnic Albanian parties' contenders in the 2016 early Parliamentary elections. Due to intra-party DUI struggles that became visible before the elections, Arifi was very close to losing the elections. It was only thanks to the support of SDSM and particularly the endorsement by the then ascendent (and among ethnic Albanians) extremely popular Prime Minister Zoran Zaev that Arifi and DUI succeeded to defeat Kasami with a very small margin of votes. In the 2020 elections, BESA ran in coalition with SDSM. Arifi and DUI are increasingly unpopular among the local population in Tetovo. The last population census from 2002 estimated that Tetovo has around 54% Albanians, and 35% Macedonians; it is very likely the balance has shifted even further towards a strong Albanian majority.

Field work conducted in this project demonstrated that both Albanians and Macedonians in Tetovo are embittered with the way DUI/Arifi run the municipality, listing corruption in the provision of public services and issuing of construction permits, waste management, air pollution, urban planning, extreme patronage favoring party members when it comes to employment in municipality-controlled organizations, and destruction of public spaces ("the commons") as the main sources of their grievances. The environmental issue needs to be underlined here, particularly the problem with the lack of a proper landfill, which citizens relate to what they see as high-level corruption. Air pollution, as ethnic Macedonian participants in our focus group reported, is one of the reasons why many ethnic Macedonians from the city move to the nearby, ethnically Macedonian village of Brvenica, where "the air is cleaner," as one of the participants put it.

People have also reported dissatisfaction with the general political climate in the country. The reactions are rather passive as a feeling that nothing can be changed pervades their narratives. As a reaction to the lack of local opportunities, ethnic Macedonians opt for moving to other cities such as Skopje, whereas ethnic Albanians rely on networks of relatives

---

[466] "History of SEEU," *South East European University*. Available at: https://www.seeu.edu.mk/en/about/history

and friends who have already formed new lives abroad to leave the country. The image of corrupt (local) government is coupled with a feeling of general insecurity and is exacerbated and easily transformed into general distrust towards ethnic Albanians among the ethnic Macedonians. This is because of the sense of lost status among ethnic Macedonians, who once ran the city and had access to jobs and privileges. Ethnic Macedonians tend to identify corrupt practices with the Albanian nation in general and not with the political elites. This sentiment represents a fertile ground for manipulation by populist and nationalist politicians.

Loja (which means "game" in Albanian) is one of the most active established NGOs in Tetovo focusing on multicultural and inter-cultural education. Loja's premises, which are conveniently located in the center of the city, serve as a hub for various cultural and community events including seminars, exhibitions, conferences, etc.. Eko Gerila is a grassroots NGO that emerged out of environment related protests of the local population against waste management practices and the extreme air pollution that makes Tetovo one of the most polluted cities in the world in the winter. LGBT United is another visible NGO from Tetovo and is run by Bekim Asani, one of the handful of members of the otherwise conservative Albanian community in the country who publicly proclaim their homosexual orientation. Finally, the Community Development Institute, which has a vision to promote a "diverse and harmonious society without prejudices," is one of the established NGOs in the community working particularly in the field of capacity building. The OSCE has a field office in Tetovo; no other international body has such a presence.

Ethnic Albanian interlocutors stressed that no significant religious radicalization of the ethnic Albanian community has been noted in the last several decades.[467] Rather, radicalization in the past had always taken the form of ethnic Albanian nationalism, which is essentially secular, liberal, and inspired by enlightenment ideals in nature, which is visible in the topics it focuses on such as integration, inclusion, equal access to jobs and education, etc. Interlocutors reported rumors about some activity of foreign-funded religious groups which, according to them, has not drawn any support from the local population. Ethnic Macedonian interlocutors, on the other hand, believe that some sort of religious radicalization activity is taking place in the city among the ethnic Albanian community, yet they were not able to list any concrete examples or provide any verifiable data apart from reports on uncharacteristic dress codes being displayed by some people. However, previous research points to a limited number of FTFs who went to Syria.[468]

Tetovo (to be more precise the village of Brvenica, located near Tetovo), on the other hand, is home to some of the rhetorically most radical and violent right-wing groups in North Macedonia such as the Christian Brotherhood, run by Zharko Grozdanovski. The leader of this group came to prominence when he publicly threatened then-PM Zoran Zaev in 2019 and was subsequently arrested. Our interview with Grozadanovski demonstrated that his radical, anti-Albanian and anti-Islamic views are fundamentally inspired by a feeling that no ethnic

---

[467] Florian Qehaja and Skender Perteshi, "The Unexplored Nexus: Issues of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Macedonia," *Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS),* March 2018. Available at:
http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Extremism_in_macedonia_402663.pdf p.29
[468] Ibid, p. 29

Macedonian party protects the interests of the Macedonian nation which he perceives as fundamentally endangered and threatened.

According to our interlocutors, it is virtually impossible to get a public service in the municipality without a bribe. Most of our interlocutors reported that it is impossible to get employment without paying 3 - 5,000 Euro to the local leaders of the political parties, depending on the ethnic origin of the hopeful, with prices for Albanians being higher. There is a perception among younger ethnic Macedonians that their prospects of upward mobility is hampered by corruption at the local level, from both the Albanian and Macedonian political elites (the former local party chief from the ranks of SDSM was identified as particularly notorious). Ethnic Macedonians feel left behind and many of them opt to move to Skopje, where there are more employment opportunities, or to emigrate. Another problem are the occasional fights and provocations between the football fans of the largest clubs in the city, Shkëndija's *Ballistet* and Teteks' *Vojvodi,* who have been involved in mutual clashes in the last several years.[469]

In the last years, no major inter-ethnic incidents have occurred in the city of Tetovo, even though political elites usually don't shy away from playing the national and polarization card, especially before parliamentary and local elections.[470] The good old game of playing both "arsonists and firefighters" that VMRO-DPMNE and DUI mastered during their nine years uninterrupted joint rule appears to have become less resonant with the citizenry, not just in Tetovo, but in other ethnically mixed cities across the country as well. Citizens have become less prone to believe identity entrepreneurs and politicians who are "patriots by profession," with the downside being that they have become cynical toward politics more broadly.

Tetovo's socio-economic and political environment is full of contradictions, emerging at the intersection of a long lasting "transition" to a market economy and liberal democracy. The political and economic emancipation of the once neglected Albanian majority came with the simultaneous decline of the Macedonian community. Widespread corruption and predominance of private interests over the public ones, fast and unprecedented economic development and chaotic urban planning, etc., affect everyone. Ethnic Macedonians, which represented a significant minority according to the last population census from 2002 are more susceptible to radicalization because of the widespread sense of lost status coupled with feelings of moral and intellectual superiority over their Albanian neighbors.

---

[469] "Поднесени кривични пријави против седум „Балисти" и седум „Војводи," *Gol.mk.* Undated. Available at: https://www.gol.mk/fudbal/podneseni-krivichni-prijavi-protiv-sedum-balisti-i-sedum-vojvodi See also: "Национализмот уште еднаш го победи фудбалот," *Okno.mk*, May 23, 2013. Available at: https://okno.mk/node/28434

[470] "Се ближат избори, во игра меѓуетнички инциденти?" *RFE/RL*, August 14, 2015. Available at: https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/27188572.html; See also: "Helsinshki: Ima tajni koalitsii megju partiite za megyuetnitchki itscidenti," *A1on.mk*, July 22, 2015. Available at: https://a1on.mk/macedonia/video-helsinshki-ima-tajni-koalicii-megju-partiite-za-megjuetnichki-incidenti/

Veles Snapshot

Veles (*Велес* in Macedonian, *Köprülü* in Turkish, *Qyprill* in Albanian) lays in the center of North Macedonia. The city stands as an amphitheater in the hilly area over the river Vardar, which cuts the city into two. It is also known as the City of Gemidzis, a revolutionary and terrorist group formed in the wake of the 1903 Ilinden Uprising, most of whose members hailed from here. The city was founded during antiquity, as the Paeonian city of Vilazora.[471] The current name derives from the Slavic god Veles, and between 1945 and 1996, the city bore the name of Titov Veles, to honor the Yugoslav leader. Besides the Gemidzi, the most popular historical figure is the poet and partisan hero Kocho Racin, considered by many as the greatest poet in Macedonian history.

Veles prides itself as a city of culture, since the first dramatic text in the Macedonian language was written here by Jordan Hadzikonstantinov-Dzinot. The first gymnasium in the Balkans was opened in Veles, as was the first library.

In 1945, Veles was targeted in a Communist purge, known as Bloody Christmas Eve (Krvava Koleda). 53 (out of 1200 around the country) members of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO)[472] and other citizens were executed without trial, either labeled as collaborationists, or alleged to have independent and anti-Yugoslav attitudes. The mass grave was revealed in 1996. The wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s did not affect Veles. While it did not see any fighting during the 2001 armed conflict, there were, however, many soldiers and policemen from Veles who took part on the side of the armed forces. Many from Veles were concentrated in the "Veles Brigade," six of whom lost their lives in the conflict. Veles was in the news in recent years due to two phenomena. The first was the activity of the "Frankfurt Mafia," an organized crime group whose members distributed drugs in Germany and Austria, working with other former Yugoslav immigrants.[473] The group was arrested and disbanded in 2013. The second one, with much more international coverage, concerned its status as a hub of "fake news websites," rising to prominence during the 2016 US presidential elections.[474] While it was primarily teenagers who were involved in this activity, it was nevertheless a significant injection of finances into the city.

With the exception of 2009-2017, when mayors were from VMRO-DPMNE, Veles has been largely considered an SDSM stronghold. The current mayor, Ace Kocevski (formerly from the

---

[471] "Paeonia – Historical Region," *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, 1998. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/place/Paeonia

[472] Although they share the same name, we differentiate between IMRO-the historical organization, and the contemporary VMRO-DPMNE. There is no direct lineage between the two; rather, it is ideological branding.

[473] "Huge 'Macedonian-led' heroin ring broken up in Europe." *BBC,* December 23, 2010. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12069014/ See also Kerry Skyring, "Police in three countries take on 'Frankfurt Mafia' drug ring." *Deutsche Welle,* December 24, 2010. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/police-in-three-countries-take-on-frankfurt-mafia-drug-ring/a-14735371

[474] Samanth Subramanian, "Inside the Macedonian Fake- News Complex." *Wired*, February 15, 2017. Available at https://www.wired.com/2017/02/veles-macedonia-fake-news/ See also: "The Fake News Machine: Inside a Town Gearing Up for 2020," *CNN Money*, September 2017. Available at: https://money.cnn.com/interactive/media/the-macedonia-story/

League of Communists of Macedonia - Party for Democratic Change, then the Liberal Democratic Party, but currently with SDSM), began his third term in 2017, having been mayor for two terms from 2000-2009. During the VMRO-DPMNE rule, there were serious accusations of electoral fraud in Veles, especially during the 2013 elections, when he lost by a very thin margin. The local council is currently also dominated by SDSM. Veles is the birth town of Ilija Dimovski, a highly influential MP from VMRO-DPMNE, and Dimitar Apasiev, the leader of Levica (The Left), a radical left party. Even though there are some Albanian, Bosniak, Turkish, and Roma minorities in the city and nearby villages, there are no noticeable inter-ethnic tensions.

Perhaps the most significant recent controversy and example of civil activism in Veles was related to the zinc and lead smelting factory, opened in 1973, and called the "Chernobyl of Veles." The air, water, and ground were severely polluted, which resulted in genetic anomalies in many children in the city. Even though it was officially closed in 2002, there was an attempt to restart it in 2011, which failed due to massive civil disobedience.[475] According to the leadership of Green Coalition, the protest organizers (whom we interviewed) and activists faced threats during this period from unidentified sources, but they assume it was from the local stakeholders affiliated with the foreign investors.

Veles was a highly industrialized city which was severely affected by the transition. Almost all industrial capacities were later bought and embezzled by magnates connected to both political parties. In terms of the construction business, the period of local VMRO-DPMNE rule was particularly noted as being the most problematic, as building permits in the central area were given to partisan investors without following procedures.

There is high unemployment and outmigration, and salaries are low. There are reports that workers get minimal wages and then have to return part of their salaries in cash to their employers, who are protected by the political parties. Partisan, patronage-based employment is high, as in other places. The team heard of one case in which a member of the current City Council managed to have her husband employed in a public institution. As a result, other Council members, even though from the same party, decided not to vote on a motion, because "their people" had not also been employed. An interlocutor, local journalist gave the team insights into the corrupt repercussions on local businesses. Some business owners have reported that they need to pay protection money to SGS, a security company owned by former State security chief (and PM Nikola Gruevski's cousin) Sasho Mijalkov. Another business owner was not given a permit to renovate his restaurant for one year, until he paid a bribe to VMRO-DPMNE members, who later fixed the deal for him. At least two journalists and a civil activist with whom the team has spoken reported that they faced threats from VMRO-DPMNE and affiliated business owners when trying to address these issues.

The main migrant route (along the train tracks connecting Greece and Serbia) passes through Veles. Thus, the majority of migrants, especially during the summer of 2015, passed near the city, and local activists, in particular Lenche Zdravkin, who is a journalist and heads the CSO

[475] Antoanela Dimitrievska, "Велешани се против рестартирање на Топилницата." *Deutsche Welle Macedonian*, September 11, 2011. Available at https://p.dw.com/p/12Wut

"House of Hope," (and who owns a house near the tracks), became famous for organizing shelter and food.[476] As a result, she had faced criticism and threats from xenophobic circles. The local government currently has good cooperation with the local civil sector. In 2018, it gave free space to 36 CSOs, which greatly helped their sustainability. In May/June of 2020, it cooperated with a cultural CSO, the "Faculty of Things that Cannot Be Learned," giving them the opportunity to draw murals on walls in prominent public spaces, as part of the project titled "Youth, Public Spaces, Murals." One of the more famous CSOs is the Foundation for Local Development Focus, which works on a variety of projects. For example, they work together with Zdravkin ("House of Hope"), and in cooperation with all local religious communities, to map out families facing social risk and to provide assistance. Due to their critical work in the period of VMRO-DPMNE, Focus faced pressures from the central government in the form of onerous financial inspections. Finally, as a response to the right-wing activism of Kjoseto (see below), a non-formal group was formed under the moniker of the Eighth Veles Shock Brigade, named after a World War II partisan division. They are former activists in the Colorful Revolution, and even though they are considered a counterweight to Kjoseto, they mostly deal in ridiculing them.

One of the most famous Macedonian Patriotic Organizations, Andon Lazov Janev Kjoseto, was formed in Veles. It is named after an IMRO assassin from the late 19th/early 20th century. Several historians with whom we talked indicated that this person was virtually unknown until VMRO-DPMNE decided to revive him in the early 2010s. Reflecting Kjoseto's notorious cruelty, in a speech PM Gruevski said that Goce Delcev, if he were alive today, would send Kjoseto to deal with the traitors. Thus, Kjoseto has become a symbol of "doing away with traitors." The MPO from Veles has been very active in all counter-protests, including, of course, during the Unified Macedonia movement and April 27, 2017 violence. Its leader, Goran Angelov,[477] is currently serving time in prison for his role and attacks. Interlocutors point out that the majority of "Kjosevci," as Kjoseto members are known there, were problematic even before, and that VMRO-DPMNE has found ways to control them and use them to instill fear in its opponents. In a nearby village, Golozinci, one real estate owner was forced to give them a space for their offices for free. The peak of their activity was definitely the April 27, 2017 events. Afterwards, according to our researchers, the group sporadically appears in right-wing protests in Skopje, but in very low numbers. As an organization, it has been inactive for the past two years. The leadership of Christian Brotherhood from Brvenica near Tetovo notes that a significant number of people from Kjoseto have become their members. One member of Kjoseto (residing in Germany) regularly posts pictures with weapons on Facebook, threatening "the traitors and communists."[478]

Veles is the city of the Macedonian Orthodox Church Bishop Agatangel, who serves as a VMRO-DPMNE mouthpiece, and has drawn his followers to pro-VMRO-DPMNE rallies and

---

[476] Stefanija Tenekedjieva and Emilija Petreska, "From Gevgelija to Tabanovce – the Macedonian trains took undiscovered stories and human lives," *Radio MOF*, December 5, 2017. Available at: https://www.radiomof.mk/od-gevgelija-do-tabanovce-makedonskite-vozovi-odnesoa-nerazjasneti-prikazni-i-chovechki-zhivoti/

[477] "Горан Ангелов е приведен, протест пред полициската станица во Кисела Вода," *Fokus*, May 5, 2017. Available at: https://fokus.mk/goran-angelov-e-priveden-protest-pred-politsiskata-stanitsa-vo-kisela-voda/

[478] See Gjorgji Stojkov Kjoseto on FB: https://www.facebook.com/gyorgi.stoykov

counter protests. There are reports that he is in open conflict with members of his congregation, due to his openly political speeches.

Regarding Islamic extremism, no known fighters have gone to fight in the Middle East from this area. Very few men and women are reported to wear Salafist clothes, and contacts point to the commonly related (but uncorroborated) story that it is Roma people who are paid to do so, as is commonly (though without evidence) believed. However, there was a scandal in May 2020,[479] when an imam was threatening jihad over some insults made on Facebook. He later retracted and apologized, but he had a notable presence in Roma and Turkish rural areas around Veles.[480]

The notoriety of Kjoseto is present, and Macedonian nationalist extremism definitely exists. They have worked as enforcers for VMRO-DPMNE affiliated interests and have radicalized in the process. Even though the organization is formally dormant, the fact that a large number of them joined the Christian Brotherhood indicates the potential for further development of right-wing extremism. It seems that they are currently at odds with the current leadership of VMRO-DPMNE; it is likely that this might contribute to the development of a new, right-wing party following the July 2020 parliamentary elections. They feel sold out by Mickovski, because, a) the party has not done enough to work out a pardon for the 'imprisoned patriots,' most notably Goran Angelov, and b) the party has not been radical enough to prevent the new Law on languages, the name change, or the Agreement with Bulgaria.

Even though they were from Veles, all of the crimes committed by the Frankfurt Mafia happened in Germany and Austria, and not in Veles. Still, a lot of finances are concentrated in businesses owned by former Frankfurt Mafia members. Besides threats from Kjoseto, no political violence has occurred in the city itself. Albanians have started moving from the villages into the city, and no conflicts have been reported so far. The citizens were united and persistently against opening the smelting factory, despite the economic hardship.[481]

Veles is known for its smelting factory, the Frankfurt Mafia, fake news, and Kjoseto. The city is suffering from unemployment, low wages, and emigration. Deindustrialization during transition has deeply hurt the city and there remains a large number of unemployed workers with few prospects. Political corruption, in particular related to fixing tenders, the construction business, and general impunity from the rule of law, runs rampant in Veles. As proven from the activities of Kjoseto, the combination of low employment, partisan manipulation and weaponization of young unemployed men, and a radical religious leader, together seem to be fertile ground for Macedonian nationalist extremism.

---

[479] "ЗАСТРАШУВАЧКИ: Повици за Џихад кај велешката Црна џамија, среде Македонија,"*Kurir*, May 31, 2020. Available at:
https://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/zastrashuvachki-povici-za-dzihad-kaj-veleshkata-crna-dzamija-srede-makedonija/
[480] See Benan Macev on FB: https://www.facebook.com/benan.macev
[481] Antoanela Dimitrievska, ibid.

Analysis

Kurt Bassuener and Ljupcho Petkovski

> ### *Key Takeaways*
>
> - The structural political conditions broadly described by Chayes are evident in both countries, resulting in unaccountable systems that function more as captured states than as accountable, functional democracies.
> - The "resource curse," as defined by Richard M. Auty and described by Chayes in several of her cases exists in both countries. But instead of a tangible domestic commodity suborned by kleptocrats (like oil in Nigeria), in BiH and North Macedonia the curse is both material and moral support from liberal outside actors (akin to Egypt's infusion of aid dating back to Camp David peace with Israel), as well as the (more recent) material and opportunisitic transationalism of illiberal outside actors. The models which follow depict these interrelated dynamics.
> - The frustration, lack of justice, historic and recent grievance, and lack of vision are all conditions that *could* foster violent extremism. However, this has not been evident to any significant degree.
> - This lack of radicalization – *freaking out* – (negative or positively directed) is due to other safety valve options with lower barriers to entry; it is easier to sell out, tune out, or get out than to freak out.
> - However, a *positive* freak out is what is needed to put both countires on a sustainable path towards accountable democracy; however, domestic state capture mechanisms and external complicity render this option highly difficult.
> - A negative freak out may hold increasing appeal if citizens grow even more frustrated and are unable to take advantage of the noted safety valve options, or feel their efforts for a positive freak out are being actively suppressed.

This chapter synthesizes the conceptual framework with the findings in their totality. The team analyzed all the findings within the framework of the Chayes models – both narrative and visual. The aim was to understand the positioning, the inter-relationships, the drivers, and the dynamics among the various elements of the systems in BiH and North Macedonia. The team had been uncertain at the outset whether each case study country would have its own distinct model or would turn out to be somewhat different expressions of the same model. The latter turned out to be true, as illustrated by the diagram below.

Exhibit 129: Model I
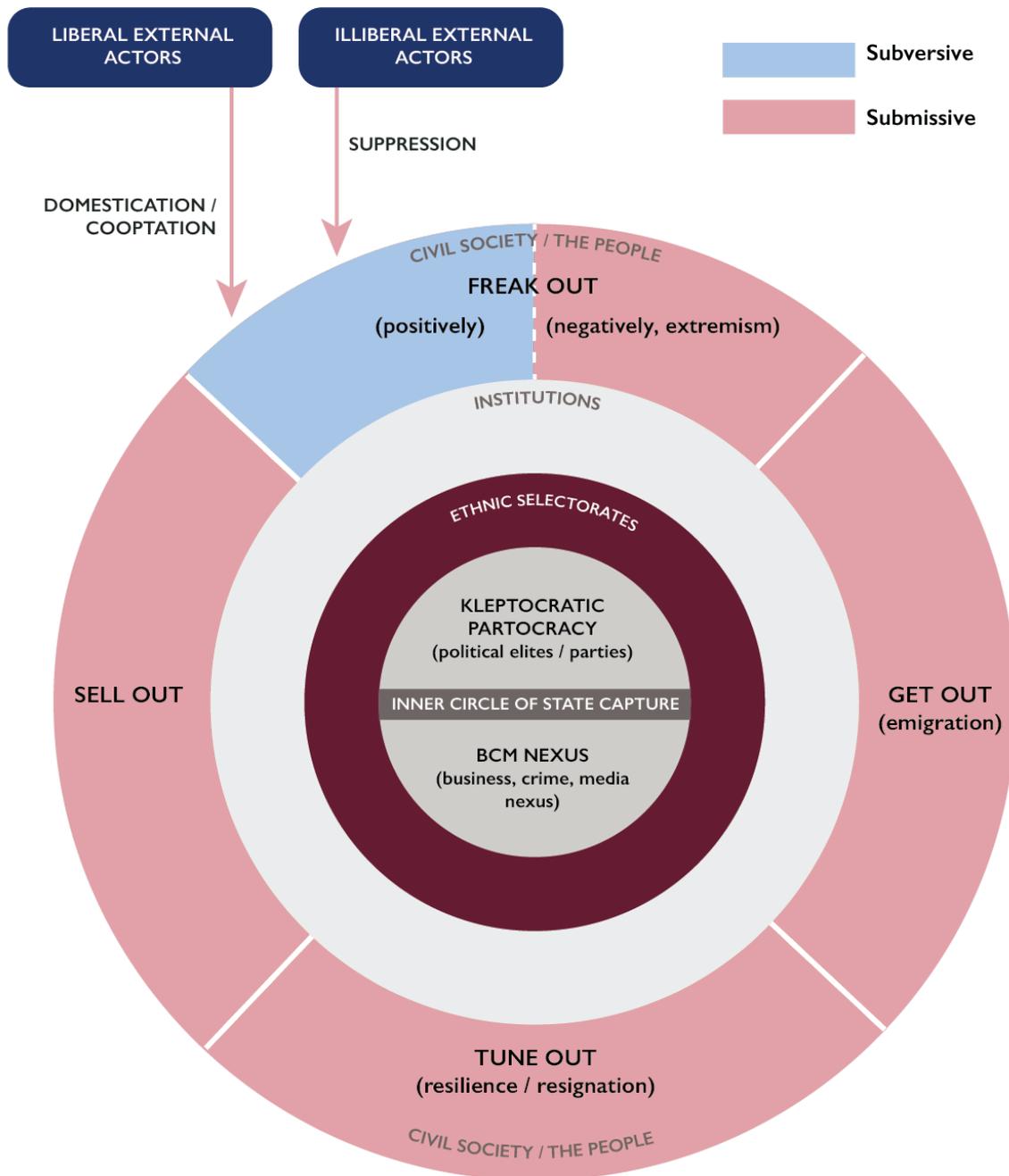
This chapter explains the various elements portrayed in the model above.

First, the four key layers of the model are described. This is followed by a description of four key dynamics or interactions among these elements that demonstrate the relationships at work. The descriptions of these four kinds of dynamics is in each case followed by a summary findings chart, indicating selected elements of both the data collection and literature review

that fed into this analysis; when reviewing the full findings sections and snapshots, the linkages become clear. (Not all of the literature noted has necessarily been noted in the Introduction or Conceptual Framework chapters.)

Layer One:

The Central Node – the Power Conglomerate

The central node of the model is what we call the Power Conglomerate. For heuristic reasons, we can think of it as consisting of: 1) political parties (political elites), i.e., the Kleptocratic Partitocracy, and 2) the nexus of business, crime, and media (BCM Nexus).

The Kleptocratic Partitocracy is composed of established political parties that compete intra-ethnically (from different potential bases of voters) for power, i.e., control over the various government apparatuses. The control over government structures allows the actors who compose the Kleptocratic Partitocracy to control state revenues collected via taxation of the population, funds generated from public/state-owned assets, land and licensing fees, the ability to borrow, and coercive power. Political parties see this as a for-profit enterprise, in which they are naturally supposed to organize winning coalitions consisting of representatives of all layers of the model (businesses, media outlets, selectorates, criminal networks, and civil society).

Although the model is applicable to both BiH and North Macedonia, certain variations do exist and are based on their political structures which affect the relative gradations of power in each country's political system.

North Macedonia's simple, centralized, two-layer state structure and deeply divided society has effectively created an insider/outsider dynamic for political parties. Those out of power at the center are effectively in the wilderness and cut off from their resource base, with which they maintain their cadres and constituencies. This goes for both the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political ecosystems. The system is effectively pyramidal. Power at the center is an all-or-nothing proposition. The fact that municipal elections have been seen to follow the vector at the center (as in 2017) demonstrates that the determinative factor is the state level. And while fiscal decentralization was supposed to follow in OFA implementation, that has effectively been short-circuited from the center.

In BiH, the state structure, divided into entities, complicates this picture. The power is vested in the "middle layers," which in the RS constitutes the entity and in the Federation is divided between the entity and cantons, though weighted more towards the latter. The state and municipalities are largely disempowered. The Republika Srpska is highly centralized and pyramidal; the Federation, with its ten cantons, is more politically pluralistic – a hydra in structure, yet centralized among the cantons through the dominant role of leading parties – particularly HDZ, and SDA or its various SDA-centered coalitions. The cantons and the Federation have much the same relationship. Fiscal decentralization to municipalities should in theory give them more latitude. But this is subverted through the strong centralized control in the RS, and the partitocracy reality in both entities. The FBiH is a more forgiving ecosystem than the RS, insofar as the diffusion of power creates more slots to fill and places

to land, as well as some odd coalition partner bedfellows. Defining "opposition" in North Macedonia and the RS is simple; in the FBiH and in BiH as a whole, it is harder. This also has an impact in terms of the coercive power that can be wielded by governments. It is not coincidental that demonstrations in BiH in 2014 were much more prevalent in Bosniak-majority cantons of the FBiH, despite the universal popular sentiments of humiliation and injustice. Police in the RS has a single command, and Croat-majority areas were already largely politically depluralized by this stage. The fires at the BiH Presidency and Centar Sarajevo municipal offices were a product of disaggregated command. While this creates a more forgiving space for civil mobilization, the hydra-like diffusion of responsibility (though not decision-making on the most consequential issues) makes mobilizing and targeting protest and other accountability-seeking measures difficult.[482] Furthermore, the destruction on the first day of the Sarajevo protest was widely seen to have been double-edged: it generated attention to the depth of popular dissatisfaction, but it also created a ceiling for civic mobilization, the firebombings giving many Sarajevans war trauma flashbacks.[483]

But both are effectively isotopes of the same element, with BiH's being slightly more stable overall (almost similar to the stability of a three-legged stool). While parties compete viciously with one another, the rules of the game are never seriously confronted, though occasionally they get questioned in electoral campaigns to temporarily attract votes from a perennially disappointed electorate.[484] These are "parties of power," whatever their purported/titular ideology. The contestation among them is intra-ethnic; these erstwhile adversaries need to agglomerate to form governments, sharing a common interest in systemic entrenchment.[485]

The lower part of the central node is occupied by the BCM Nexus which captures the business, media, and criminal networks whose survival and success in the ecosystem of the captured state is dependent on its connections with the political elites. These networks are usually run by individuals who have interests in various sectors. In North Macedonia, most of the national TV outlets are owned by individuals whose primary business interests lay in other business sectors, whose success depends on having access to public tenders and money. They use the otherwise un-profitable media outlets as mechanisms for buying political support and generating opinion conducive to their business interests and not as a business *per se*. Like the traditional news operations of broadcast networks in the US, these media outlets are a "loss leader."

The lifespan of the political elites is by definition shorter than that of the other component elements of the nucleus of power, the BCM Nexus. The latter is itself is divided along ethnic lines like the former. This nexus is divided by the parameters of the system, but unlike the

---

[482] Kurt Bassuener, "Peace Cartels," 2020 op. cit.

[483] This is consistent with a theme in Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, op. cit. – that violence can deter participation in an opposition mobilization.

[484] For example, BiH in 2010 (SDP's "Platform Coalition"); NMK in 2016 (Zaev's "One Society").

[485] In a related model and schema by one of the authors of this report, these assemblages are defined as "peace cartels." This project's analysis has a different focus, based on Chayes' conception of state capture and the relationship between corruption and drivers toward extremism. The model herein is a specific variant based on this frame and the resulting fieldwork. See Kurt Bassuener, *Peace Cartels: Internationally Brokered Power-Sharing and Perpetual Oligarchy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia*, Doctoral Dissertation, submitted July 2020, University of St. Andrews (forthcoming).

political kleptocrats, they never need to *perform* division. Like the political kleptocrats, the interest in maintaining the system, with its lack of accountability, is essential to these more durable and stable interests. Also like the former, they cooperate when profitable. They occasionally switch parties (hosts), but only to preserve and further expand their economic interests, as well as jointly benefit from the perquisites of power in a for-profit political ecosystem.[486] These interests will only endure the inflated transaction costs of changing hosts when essential; it is far less costly to help established political power shore-up its architecture of power.

These elements, together, are more stable as a composite nucleus than the individual elements are alone – though decay is possible, there has never been a chain reaction in either BiH or North Macedonia to split the nucleus in fission. The rules of political physics remain constant; the rulers may change.[487]

The Central Node and Its Transactions

Within the Conglomerate, we have two-way relations as sometimes individuals change roles. Fahrudin Radončić, originally a businessman (a media magnate) from the BCM Nexus, invested in becoming part of the Kleptocratic Partitocracy. Former PM Zaev's family in North Macedonia is a business family that sees politics as a way of protecting expanding business interests, originally at the municipal level (where Zaev held the position of Mayor for more than a decade) and later at the national level. Sasho Mijakov, the notorious chief of the secret police in Gruevski's government, was allowed under Zaev to legalize/launder the money he had appropriated in return for securing a promise that defectors from the Parliamentary group of VMRO-DPMNE would vote for constitutional amendments related to the name change in 2018. In so doing, he moved from the upper to the lower part of the central node of the system. The BCM Nexus is reactive, flexible, and adaptive, dispersing risk by typically betting on more than one player to ensure its stability. The tycoon-owned TV outlets in North Macedonia change loyalties easily and remain more or less consistent in their support of those in power. What they share is the fundamental conservatism – they are interested in keeping the rules of the game untouched. A captured state is the only ecosystem in which they can survive.

The Power Conglomerate retains good symbiotic relations with the *selectorates* (described in more detail below).[488] The selectorate basically represents the infantry of the political elites in the state apparatuses. Generally party members (though this can come before or after

---

[486] To paraphrase Lord Palmerston, this class has no permanent allies, only permanent interests. See "Henry Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston," *Wikiquote*, at:
https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Henry_Temple,_3rd_Viscount_Palmerston
[487] In Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*, a character says, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." Two illustrations of this that come immediately to mind are Zaev's taking over Gruevski's rackets (Orce Kamčev) and Dodik's assimilation of the interests once aligned with SDS. Jasmin Mujanović defines this highly developed adaptive capacity "elastic authoritarianism." See Jasmin Mujanović, *Hunger and Fury – The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*, Hurst, London, 2018. Cited at page 2.
[488] We borrow the term *selectorate* from game-theoretical and rational-choice political theory. For more see: Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce and Smith, Alistair and Siverson, Randolph M. and Morrow, James D. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

receiving a position), members of selectorates enjoy access to privileges, good jobs (including for their family), and positions of power in institutions, in return for support and votes. They are allowed a margin of impunity and protection which allows them to 1) get privileges, 2) distribute state (non)material resources to citizens and the businesses in return for support. They make sure the institutions work for the benefit of political parties.

Power conglomerates are suspicious of the islands of integrity that do exist within institutions for obvious reasons. They place members of the selectorates in powerful positions so that they can use institutions for their benefit. There is competition within institutions between members of different selectorates, which becomes evident whenever there is change in power. They gravitate in particular to "power ministries" (such as justice, finance, or interior – in North Macedonia's case) and those ministries and agencies with large budgets or licensing authority.

The Kleptocratic Partitocracy cannot rely on support of the selectorate alone. They use ideological appeals to reach out to voters (i.e. members of civil society, in the broadest sense). In North Macedonia, ethnic Macedonians are presented with brands of nationalism (VMRO-DPMNE) and pro-European social democratic liberalism (SDSM). In the 2016 elections, SDSM had to reach out to constituencies beyond their traditional selectorate – particularly ethnic Albanians – to win the elections, by promising justice, fundamental change of the captured state, etc., and they managed to put together a coalition with formerly-VMRO-DPMNE ally DUI.[489] In July 2020, they got only the votes of their selectorate. In the captured states that we observed, political parties become increasingly dependent on selectorates as mistrust in the system grows.

Exhibit 129: Dynamic 1: The Inner Circle Interaction with Domestic Funds and Resources (including employment/patronage)

Selected Relevant Literature

- "How Partitocracy Puts Limits to the EU's Transformative Power" (Kleibrink)
- *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies – The Resource Curse Thesis* (Auty)
- "Grants in Brčko to Friends and Voters" (CIN)
- *Hunger and Fury – The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans* (Mujanović)
- *Post-Communist Mafia State (Magyar)*
- "The Rule of the Cartel" (Blagovčanin)

---

[489] DUI's shift to SDSM was not a given – and was widely believed to not have been desired by party founder and leader Ali Ahmeti, who had developed a modus vivendi with VMRO-DPMNE's Gruevski. But Gruevski was so politically radioactive to most Albanians that Ahmeti was compelled to shift. The so-called "Tirana Platform," forged with other ethnic Albanian parties following the election and convened by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, was also a factor – both making Zaev a more appealing partner with his vows of "One Society," as well as providing a grievance for many ethnic Macedonians who saw it as another cave to ethnic Albanian blackmail. See Fatjona Mejdini, "Macedonian Albanian Leaders Plot Join Strategy in Tirana," *Balkan Insight*, December 30, 2016. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2016/12/30/tirana-gathers-leaders-of-albanian-macedonian-parties-12-30-2016/

<u>Selected Findings</u>

- Throughout the media review, the following forms of corruption have been reported and covered by the surveyed media outlets: tax evasion, influence peddling, money laundering, conflict of interest, bribery, embezzlement, abuse of power or authority, corruption in public procurement, forgery of documents, nepotism, clientelism and all other possible cases of political corruption – particularly by online investigative site Žurnal and the -traffic *Klix.ba.* "(T)he average combined number of news items published on corruption and state capture every month is 25, which amounts to more than half of *Žurnal's* monthly content output."
- At a first glance, in May 2020 there was a tremendous peak in news items published on relevant topics in May 2020. "The explanation behind this spike is twofold. Firstly, it accounts for the full unfolding of affairs regarding corruption in public procurement, which received exceptional media coverage, especially following the detention of the main suspects of the 'ventilators' affair, most notably the PM of the FBiH, Fadil Novalić." Meanwhile, party-aligned outlets, such as SAFF (aligned with the SDA), underreported the 'ventilators' scandal. "The few existing articles were mostly aimed at relativizing the involvement of SDA officials."
- A large majority of respondents recognize incompetence in state and public institutions as one of the biggest social problems. Nepotism, employment, and promotion through the party system at the expense of professionalism and meritocracy is taking its toll. Respondents spoke about a related degradation in the quality of public services. "A key issue is the presence of incompetent people within the institutions."
- In Shtip, respondents note corruption in the form of public investment and tenders (putting less asphalt in streets and roads then reported and billed, for example), or through private construction, including receiving unlawful building permits as a result of briberies and/or partisan loyalties. Also in Shtip, during the VMRO-DPMNE administration, the local House of Culture was forced to employ seven people who had been employed by the Forestry agency, though there was nothing for them to do.
- "300 people are employed in the municipality administration. (This is) way too many considering the needs. In the city council, SNSD and SDA collaborate behind the curtains and they are uneducated people. They are both thieves." (Bosanski Petrovac)
- While in Tetovo, the research team heard some exact fees to secure employment in public institutions through the political parties in power: 3,000 euros for a position where a high school degree is a prerequisite, and up to 5,000 euros for a position where a university degree is needed. Ethnic Macedonians are given "lower prices" for briberies than ethnic Albanians; a perverse demonstration of the law of "supply and demand" as there are fewer Macedonians there to fill the proportionally-prescribed number of positions.
- "Most of the money from the cantonal government goes to 'administration,' intended as the political/electoral machine. We have administration that is too large that the authorities will not cut because it is a voting machine that operates according to the equation 1 employee = 10 voters." (Žepče)
- Throughout North Macedonia, the lack of environmental protection is a statewide problem, in particular, corruption in waste management procurement.
- Organized crime still flourishes, in particular in border regions, and it is still largely tolerated by authorities

- In a concrete example, interlocutors in Maglaj reported that the SDP mayor and factory owner colluded to maintain production during height of COVID first spike, leading to a number of infections of workers.
- <u>The online poll shows that</u> in North Macedonia, there is a high proportion of respondents who do not believe that the domestic and foreign aid funds were rationally allocated. The aggregate "not confident" was 47% (over 23% each not confident and very not confident), versus 23% confident (17% confident + 6% very confident). The proportion of those responding neutral was nearly equal – 22% – to those expressing confidence. 8% responded "don't know."

Layer Two: The Inner Circle: Ethno-Party Selectorates

The ruling parties (and by the transitive property, their business/organized crime allies, who own media outlets to generate consent and stoke fear and uneasiness) have enormous leverage over the economic sphere through dominance of the levers of government, the size of the public sector, and the margin of state intervention in the economy through public procurement and regulation. As interviewees in prior research have stated, the state is the biggest purchaser of goods, the biggest creditor, the biggest debtor, biggest employer, and so forth.[490] It leverages governmental legitimacy transactionally, both internally and externally. According to a 2017 study, around 13% of the total population of North Macedonia are members of one of the three largest political parties: VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, and DUI - six times above the European average which stands at around 2%. Both VMRO-DPMNE's and SDSM's membership individually exceeds that of the Communist Party from the one-party system in terms of numbers. These figures are instructive of the role of political parties in the system of state capture and resonate well with the narratives of ordinary citizens we have collected during the fieldwork.[491]

One dynamic function of this organic relationship is the maintenance of a selectorate, as introduced above. These constituencies are bound together by a transactional relationship, much as the nucleus of power described above. Members of the selectorate expect benefits for the services they render to those at the center of power: employment, status, contracts, funding, impunity, access, privileges, visibility, and respectability. In other words, selectorates get access to a vertically integrated margin of acceptable corruption in which they can operate. These assets are also transactionally transferable; affecting coercive power – where one might actually land in jail – is correspondingly more expensive. So those benefitting from this status are not merely the core of the voter base and therefore the backbone of support of the party, but they also have agency. Their backing is rented, not bought in perpetuity. However, to date loyalties have been relatively stable, mostly due to repression and/or ostracism of defectors. It can be possible that well-intended people join   the party/selectorate system   believing that they could affect positive change from within. However, the system is sufficiently resilient and sophisticated that such internal

---

[490] Kurt Bassuener, "Peace Cartels," op.cit.

[491] Jovanovska, Slobodanka and Zana P. Bozinovska. "Компаративна студија за изборните недостатоци во Македонија и искуствата во регионот." (Comparative Study on Electoral Shortcomings in Macedonia and the Experiences in the Region) *Civic Mobilitas*. Available at:
https://www.mkd.mk/files/article/2017/11/17/studija.pdf

democratization and liberalization is not possible. Parties who are cast out of power into outer orbits have less gravity/atomic weight/weaker valence and lose their satellites/electrons – often to the new rulers of the power core.[492]

This places a premium on non-monetary methods of maintaining fealty to a party, which are less fungible. Nationalism is the most common of these, though there are other elements of political tribal cohesion, including a cohort of those who remain wedded to selected elements of nostalgic socialist-era imagery and values. In North Macedonia, this has largely (though not exclusively) accrued to the benefit of VMRO and SDSM, respectively; in BiH, the "classic lineup" of nationalist parties was the SDS, HDZ, and SDA. In 2006, the SNSD began its absorption of many SDS clientelist networks and the nationalist mantle. The SDP had been the primary refuge for those rejecting nationalism, but now this is fragmented among DF, Naša Stranka, and others.

Selectorates are recruited from the citizenry and are by definition part of the clientelist and transactional networks of the political parties. In North Macedonia, the number of members of VMRO-DPMNE only in 2012 was larger than the number of members of the Communist Party in the one-party system in 1989. While the rulers are the godfathers of the system, the selectorate might be seen as the prime beneficiaries.

Relations between Selectorates

All established political parties maintain their selectorates within the apparatuses of the state. These different selectorates often exhibit competitive relations within institutions, which normally becomes visible during transfers of power. Only part of the selectorate members shift allegiances when their patron party loses power, primarily because of fear of revenge against defectors which has become a normal feature of party discipline. (This dynamic further undercuts any semblance of the rule of law or an independent judiciary.) These (ethnic) selectorates are linked at the hub of government – which gives party leaders agency.

Selectorates vs. Institutions

The implantation of selectorates into institutions is part of the strategic behavior of the political elites, representing the backbone of state capture. This is the antithesis of the meritocratic staffing of a civil service seen as central to an accountable democracy. Political parties ensure placement of loyal individuals even in institutions that are supposed to serve as a buffer zone between the public interest and the predatory particular interests of the political elites. States are captured when the judicial, regulatory, and administrative mechanisms and bodies cease acting professionally within their statutory remit and function arbitrarily, by political fiat and individual whim. The concept of illiberal democracy has many similarities with the concept of state capture; *rule by law* instead of *rule of law* describes this situation accurately.

---

[492] This is effectively what happened to the SDS in BiH after Dodik's arrival in power in 2006. Over the intervening 14 years, those interests which had aligned with it when it was the (founding) party of power of the RS transferred their allegiance and support to Dodik's SNSD.

Within institutions, selectorates also compete with islands of integrity of professional and competent public servants. They have an ambivalent relation towards professionals, both fearing their independence and depending upon their competence and institutional knowledge. Some public servants are co-opted into selectorates by the political elites to ensure their reliability.

Selectorates vs. Civil Society

Many observers have noted that political parties in the Balkans serve as employment agencies – gatekeepers controlling access to state jobs, a fact that has been undoubtedly confirmed in our field work in BiH and North Macedonia. By civil society, we are not using a common narrow interpretation referring to formal civil society organizations. Rather, we refer to all actors in society that (might) exhibit a certain level of autonomy in their operation. Civil society is the sphere where consent is being forged, and contestation takes place. These actors include citizens in the various roles they play in consolidated and accountable democracies, including labor-capital relations, businesses competing on the market, organized CSOs, independent media outlets, etc.

In political economies with limited private employment opportunities such as the ones of North Macedonia and BiH, selectorates are the only actors offering access to survival to citizens. Many citizens are pulled into playing this game and become members of the lower classes of the selectorates of political parties. As our research has demonstrated, jobs often come at a price that needs to be paid to local party bosses, the chiefs of the local selectorates, who collect rent on behalf of the political parties.

Exhibit 130: Dynamic 2: The Inner Circle Interaction with External Funds and Resources

<u>Selected Relevant Literature</u>

- "Money, Power and Glory: The Linkages between EU Conditionality and State Capture in the Western Balkans" (Richter and Wunsch)
- "Comparative Study of Electoral Shortcomings and Experiences in the Regions" (Jovanovska and Božinovska)
- "The Rise (and Fall) of Balkan Stabilitocracies." (Bieber)
- *Peace Cartels: Internationally Brokered Power-Sharing and Permanent Oligarchy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia* (Bassuener)
- "Izvještaj o Realizaciji Sredstava za Sanaciju Posljedica Poplava u BiH iz 2014. Godine." (Mreža Brana)

<u>Selected Findings</u>

- Respondents in Maglaj/Bočinje respondents didn't see many concrete results from the international flood aid in 2014.
- Shortly before the first field visit Mrkonjić Grad in February, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić visited the town, and together with Milorad Dodik announced plans for creating new jobs in the municipality.

- This is an interesting spot in the BiH research: while there is a broad sense of misallocation of foreign funds, people are not familiar with details. The team notes that if we did this research 10 or 15 years ago, the abuse of foreign donations in construction would have certainly come up. At the moment, what seems to be the biggest problem is external support, financial and political, to the BiH political structure, either from liberal or illiberal sources. For example, investing in training of judges in a system where judiciary is controlled by political parties and is not independent amounts to a waste of resources, reflecting uninformed weakness on the part of the donor. If Russia merely speaks on behalf of Dodik, it is perceived in public as his strength.
- In terms of perceptions of how COVID-19 resources – foreign-derived and domestic – have been allocated and used, 85% of BiH respondents in the online poll were not confident (60% extremely not confident and 25% not confident) that this aid would be rationally allocated.
- In the online poll for North Macedonia, there is a high proportion of respondents who do not believe that the domestic and foreign aid funds were rationally allocated. The aggregate "not confident" was 47% (over 23% each not confident and pronounced not confident), versus 23% confident (17% confident + 6% very confident).

Layer Three: Public Sector Institutions and Budgets

The third layer includes state institutions – for this analysis meaning ministries, agencies, regulatory bodies, police agencies, and welfare service providers (education, health care, etc.). Courts and institutions of justice are supposed to be politically independent. Under the formal liberal-democratic rules of the game, these institutions are supposed to play statutory roles in the business of accountable checks-and-balances, whose day-to-day operation is run by politically independent and competent public servants, who have become members thereof based on individual merit and personal/professional integrity. Under state capture, the informal rules and norms of their operation very often prevail. Although, as noted, islands of integrity in institutions in both BiH and North Macedonia exist, institutions are as a rule captured by selectorates, who run them on behalf of political elites (Layer One in the diagram). Corruption is vertically integrated in the work of institutions, to use Chayes' words, meaning that players within an institution are allowed a certain margin of impunity and protection as long as they deliver to political elites.

Institutions vs. the power conglomerate

Impunity is one of the key resources that lubricates the machinery of state capture, especially its corrupt transactions upon which the sustainability of the system hinges. It is the most sought after good which comes at a high cost.[493] Control over institutions that are supposed to enforce the law and administer justice is therefore part of the spoils that belong to the winners – and a major transactional good.[494] North Macedonia and BiH have endemic

---

[493] It is also a renewable resource – it is rented. It can also be withdrawn.
[494] The ongoing scandal with the State Prosecutor's Office in North Macedonia illustrates these mechanics in lurid fashion. See Siniša Jakov Marušić, "North Macedonia Arrests Outgoing Chief Special Prosecutor." *Balkan*

problems when it comes to the independence of the judiciary, the public prosecutors and courts of justice included. As well as securing impunity, control over this institution by the political elites is important for punishing defectors, controlling political opposition and incipient challenges, and general self-dealing. The power conglomerate controls all the major processes and decisions of the branch of power that is *supposed* to serve as a check on the power conglomerate. Coercive power is physically housed here, but the levers of control run direct to the center. That linkage is the control rod of the reactor of power.

Institutions vs. Selectorates

Institutions recruit from – or are staffed by those selected by – the selectorates. As our research has demonstrated, no position or contract is too small to be decided on political party membership. In both countries, there is a saying that "not even the position of a cleaner in state institutions is accessible to those without a party membership card," as statements of our interlocutors demonstrate. This ecosystem is self-perpetuating; the masters may change, but this is the prize of power. Those employed or who benefit from government funding or largesse could be termed subsidiary beneficiaries. They are captured by definition as they work for the captured state, literally or figuratively, although embattled islands of integrity do exist in the institutions of both North Macedonia and BiH. This would include those thousands who may not be philosophically aligned with the parties of power but have reason to fear losing what lower order benefit they might gain from the system. The marginal transition costs for those in this circle are extremely high or are at least subjectively perceived as such. For unlike the BCM Nexus, they have little leverage to seek alternative hosts.

Exhibit 131: Dynamic 3: The Outer Circle Interaction with the Inner Circles

<u>Selected Relevant Literature</u>
• *Hunger and Fury* (Mujanović) • "The Republika Srpska as a strong nationalizing state and the consequences for postethnic activism." *(Touquet)* • *Peace Cartels* (Bassuener) • "Priebe reports" (North Macedonia 2015, 2016; BiH 2019) (EC)
<u>Selected Findings</u>
• Politically aligned media outlets serve the purposes of their respective parties. *SAFF* magazine, for example, serves as a transmitter from the inner circle to its ethnic constituency, avoiding coverage of matters like corruption or state capture, since this could harm the SDA. Instead, outlets like *SAFF* in the content they carry aim to maintain and exacerbate ethnic and political polarization. This is a top-down dynamic. Media with a strong political and ethnic bias include *Glas Srpske, RTRS, HMS, SAFF, Slobodna Bosna*, to mention a few.

Insight, August 21, 2019. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/21/north-macedonia-arrests-outgoing-chief-special-prosecutor/

- Online investigative media such as *Inforadar* "covers corruption and misgovernment cases that are generally absent in the mainstream media and would be otherwise highly under-reported." Similarly, *Žurnal* online magazine provides "extensive high-quality content on topics of political corruption, state capture, polarization, corporate wrongdoing and misgovernment cases in BiH." In that regard, both media outlets implicitly and consistently point to this non-relationship where the only interest of the inner circle towards the outer circle is to polarize it and thus expand its constituency.

- Some of the articles published by non-nationalist media outlets effectively acted as transmitters from citizens in the outer circle about the nature of their lot. They "focused on the structural causes of bad governance in BiH and often inferred the existence of a captured state, where state institutions and the power therein become instruments of the ethno-centric political elites, used to pursue their narrow interests and prevent any structural change." For example, *Inforadar* published an article by U. Sarajevo academic Asim Mujkić, "The Little Jubilee of Dodik, Čović and Izetbegović: How we turned from people and citizens into sheep." He writes that the three ethnic leaders "have been convincing us for 15 years that we are in mortal danger from one another and that we must be Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks and only then citizens (…) and while they were doing that, we became poorer and poorer, and they became richer and more powerful." In a follow-up piece, "We are on the threshold of pure autocracy led by three people's leaders," Mujkić made another point in conjunction with our analysis: that dominance by the three main ethnic party leaders is a goal in October 2020 local elections, so they can "push for an authoritarian governing system" and ensure a more rigid structure and "verticals of power," already evident in the RS and areas of HDZ control in the FBiH.

- In Glamoč a respondent noted starting voluntary initiatives the start of the pandemic. While a journalist was interested in covering this effort, the mayor showed no interest in highlighting citizen efforts. An "effective" and unaccountable partitocracy rejects and repels independent initiatives, thereby undercutting civic agency and the sense of belonging and purpose that can come with it.

- The ethnic principle in public employment was raised by most respondents as a problem, nowhere, however, as strikingly as in Brčko. We heard at length how ethnic representation has to be at every level of government. Every party has their own piece of pie; "it's like written in stone."

- In Tetovo, there was a "protest initiative" to close betting shops and casinos in Recica, a Tetovo suburb. However, an interlocutor (a former police chief) notes that the protest was organized only to force the casino investors to pay for protection to the local mob. After they paid, the "protests" stopped.

- In general, respondents are dissatisfied with the state of governance. This is particularly the case among opponents to VMRO-DPMNE who had been active in the Colorful Revolution in 2016, who indicate disappointment with the current SDSM-led government, and frustration with "broken promises" related to bringing corrupt officials to justice.

- The merit system in public employment is virtually non-existent; political parties act as the main "hiring agencies." MKD

- In North Macedonia, 33% of respondents reported such voluntary efforts in their community, with only 3% reporting their own direct engagement in such activities. 18% reported there were no such efforts in their community. Almost 47% responded "don't know." In BiH, voluntary initiatives (43%) outstripped those of any public institutions in terms of respondent views of effectiveness in confronting and responding to COVID-19.

Layer Four: The Outer Circle: Autonomous Civil Society

This dynamic basically explains a non-relationship, as the Inner Circle is only responsive to the Outer Circle to the extent needed to try to co-opt them to join the selectorate. This stifles civil society in the broad sense, incentivizing co-optation (selling out), resignation (tuning out), and emigration (getting out), while still building popular frustration which can lead to radicalization (freaking out) of either positive or negative cast.

The Resource Curse

The outer circle can be termed civil society – in the broad meaning of the term. Civil society is the reservoir for recruitment of both the business/media/crime networks from the first layer and the selectorates, with which civil society in our model has dynamic relations. The less civil society is captured, the wider and more autonomous it is. Absolute capture is never possible.

This common denominator of the actors who belong to this circle is that they do not perceive themselves to derive any appreciable benefit from the parasitic and predatory system, though they help to finance it through their taxes. These actors harbor pronounced discontent with the entire political and economic architecture of power, which denies them agency and dignity – and a loss of trust in those who inhabit it, particularly those in the nucleus and the prime beneficiaries of the selectorate. This discontent only sporadically transforms into challenge to the system through protests and political action. More often, many of these actors are resigned as they have lost hope in effecting meaningful improvement to society or their own lot through electoral politics. Those who have given up voting at all (a large proportion of the electorate in both countries according to the turnout statistics from previous elections) are found here.

The demands of civil society directed towards the political elites are often not met, resulting in various responses such as resignation, cynicism, contestation, consent, emigration, and most infrequently – political radicalization.[495] Contestation and challenge coming from civil society happens seldom, as the elites, through the media and the ideological apparatuses of the state, rely on an internalized sense that change is not possible. The institutional power symmetry created with the peace agreements only further benefits the elites in perpetuating this perception. During the popular mobilizations against the captured state in North Macedonia (2014-2017), the largest challenge that social movements faced was the deeply entrenched cynicism of the population about the possibility of change through protest. This stems from the political culture of the population, which has not been encouraged to be participatory, and has not seen any substantial tangible positive fruits of past civic initiatives; negative learning reinforces long-accumulated skepticism. Nationalism is a very handy mechanism elites use to pre-empt or deflect challenges to the rules of the political game coming from civil society. The ideal civil society in the eyes of the ethnocratic political elites is

---

[495] Albert O. Hirschman addresses the choices facing citizens – and consumers – when dissatisfied with a relationship, either voicing their discontent to seek to preserve the relationship or exiting the relationship altogether, in his seminal work *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty – Responses to Declines in Firms, Organizations, and States,* Oxford University Press, 1970.

one which is deeply divided along ethnic lines, which prevents larger popular identities emerging that would pose a more serious threat to the kleptocratic system.

Five broadly defined responses of the civil society to the perceived injustices and the discontent-producing political systems can be defined, with violent extremism being only one of the responses to the same structural factors. Some of these responses perpetuate the system, while others hold the potential for changing it. We argue that enabling and investing in the most radical democratic manifestations is the best prophylactic against the emergence of violent ones, as well as holding the greatest hope for meaningful progress. We graphically represent these responses in Model 2 below.

Exhibit 132: Model II
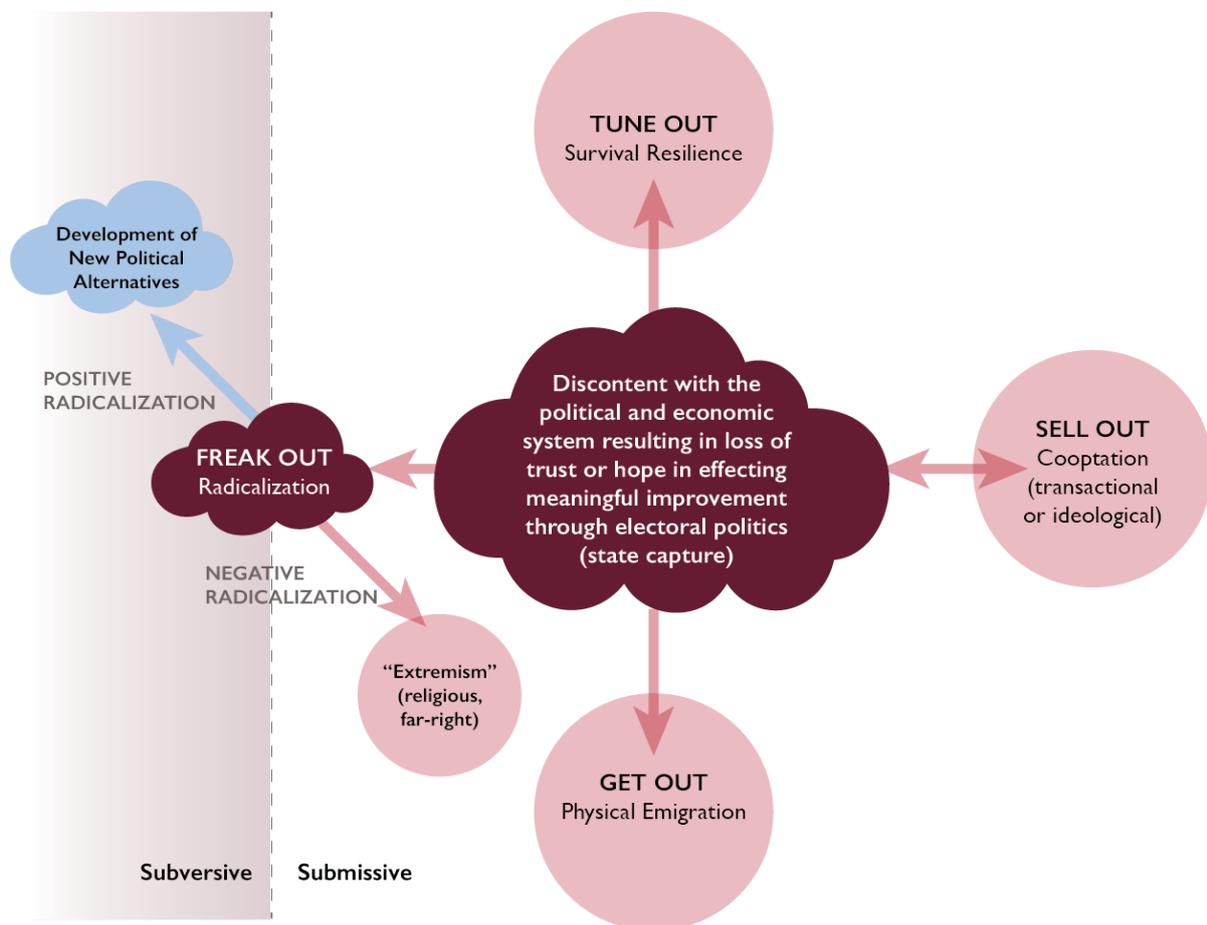
Exhibit 133: Dynamic 4: The Outer Circle Interaction with the External Actors

<u>Selected Relevant Literature</u>

- *The Rise and Fall of Peacebuilding in the Balkans* (Belloni)
- *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty – Responses to Declines in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Hirschman)
- *Hunger and Fury* (Mujanović)
- *Surviving the Peace – The Struggle for Postwar Recovery in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Lippman)
- *Assessing the potential for renewed ethnic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Security Risk Analysis* (Azinović, Bassuener, and Weber)
- "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving" (Schultz)
- *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (Stenner)
- *Twilight of Democracy* (Applebaum)
- "Lal Ded, mystical Kashmiri poet" (Schelling/BBC World Service)
- "False Consciousness" (Little)
- *Why Civil Resistance Works – The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (Chenoweth and Stephan)
- "Pushing on an Open Door: Foreign Authoritarian Influence in the Western Balkans" (Bassuener)
- "The Eurasian Wings of Serbia: Serbian Affinities of the Russian Radical Right" (Dević)
- "Whose is the Energy Sector in BiH: Gas and Oil to the Russians, Electricity to the Chinese" (Golubović)
- "Primed Receptors: Synergies between Western Balkan Political Elites and Chinese Economic Actors and State Media" (Bassuener)
- "Where Do We Go from Here? The Western Balkans between State Capture, the Illiberalism Pandemic, Values-Neutral Geopolitics, and the Climate Emergency: Navigating the New Entropy" (Bassuener)

<u>Selected Findings</u>

- Youth in Bosanski Petrovac receive funding from the OSCE and other donors to do micro-level youth and reconciliation activities; however, they are largely unable to address the structural problems
- Proni (Brčko) has received an influx of P/CVE funding for youth work, including to set up youth centers around the country
- People are hearing that a lot of money is being spent to address the situation that migration is causing in Krajina, but they don't see it, and they don't see the situation improving. The international community is seen as a part of the problem by many, for not addressing the bigger picture issues, and for not addressing the problems that migration is having on the local community.
- Veles, Struga, and Gostivar have vibrant and progressive civil society organizations that are the result of local initiatives, but largely dependent on international funding.
- In a number of conversations in Bihać we heard that people are angry at the international community because it is telling them that they should be humane to migrants, implying they are treating them in a bad way. "If the international community wants to treat migrants well, why don't they put them on airplanes and fly them to European

countries?"

- Awareness of foreign influence varies among citizens. When asked in the online poll who provided the most aid to North Macedonia, the EU was far and away top-rated (60.7%), China came in a solid second place (41.6%), and Turkey in third (35.5%). These were followed by the US (29.3%), the UN (19.5%), Russia (13.2%), Serbia (7.8%), and Croatia (1%).

A Selling Out, or the Co-optation of Discontent – the Elites' Desired Scenario

There are two types of mechanisms that the inner circles use to forge consent among the outer circle: 1) transactional co-optation, and 2) ideological and hegemonic mechanisms.

For many of those seeking agency, the gravitational pull of the system regularly draws in and delivers rewards to new recruits, however minimal in the grand balance sheet of kleptocracy. This is enough to forge consent among large swaths of the population.

Transactional cooptation means that the system distributes small rewards to citizens, particularly through the selectorate and the institutions they control, in return for tacit consent. To put it bluntly, selling-out and cashing-in remain draws for those on the outside looking in. But with minimal bargaining power, the costs of entry, both financial and in terms of self-esteem (and the esteem of those who do not choose this path) are high. This, together with physical emigration and *survival resilience* in all its guises, together account for an overwhelming majority of those citizens consigned to the outer circle.

Elites in the Balkans have mastered the game of using ideological and hegemonic mechanisms to forge consent among their populations. By hegemony, we mean the capability of the elites to present their particular interests as a public good, through the media, the education system, and pervasively political propaganda flooding the public space through allied media and unfettered propagation in the social media sphere. Hegemony has a lot to do with the political and symbolic capital political elites have accumulated in the past, particularly during recent war and violent conflicts. Hegemony in both North Macedonia and BiH is mostly nationalist and based on the political capital the ruling elites created through their role in the wars/conflicts, which projected by design an image that they alone are protectors of the state and the nations.[496] A few examples from North Macedonia will illustrate these points, but they apply to BiH as well, in conformity with the ethnoterritorial fiefdoms in that system and their control.

Though perceived as fundamentally corrupt by the vast majority of the ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) has been very successful in garnering stable support from a considerable proportion of the ethnic Albanian community. This has a lot to do with the fact that they are perceived as the political actor that brought about political change to the benefit of the Albanian community (in terms of sharing public

---

[496] In Milorad Dodik's case in BiH, a variant of this role is being perceived the strongest defender of the "deliverables" of the war – the Republika Srpska as a "permanent category," as he often puts it.

resources), and is still best suited to oppose the unitarist impulses coming from ethnic Macedonian nationalists. DUI has hijacked ethnic radical language and doesn't shy away from using it whenever they need it for political survival. In BiH, Mostar-headquartered HDZ operates in much the way DUI does, with even greater relative control over Croat-majority areas than DUI. The recent deal between the HDZ and SDA show a similar power dynamic in the Federation context,[497] though HDZ can compensate through its alliance with Dodik's SNSD, which it emulates.

On the ethnic-Macedonian side, VMRO-DPMNE has accumulated the most political capital, particularly through their investment in the revision of historiography in the 2006-2016 period and the nation-building "Skopje 2014" vanity project. For many ethnic Macedonian constituencies, particularly among the losers in economic transition, the impoverished working class, and the population outside of the large urban centers, VMRO-DPMNE is not a symbol of corruption, but a symbol of agency of the Macedonian nation in a hostile international and domestic environment. VMRO-DPMNE is the master of radical ethnic, anti-Islamic, anti-Albanian language that resonates well particularly with the segment of the population which experienced a sense of loss in the post-socialist transition.

As described, in 2014 and 2015, VMRO-DPMNE encouraged the formation of far-right civic associations, the so called Macedonian patriotic organizations, which gathered the most extreme and militant national activists under the banner of protecting the country from real and imagined foes. According to the words of an interlocutor coming from VMRO-DPMNE, the militant activists were attracted by the ideological appeal: "Gruevski gave jobs to some people and made them loyal. He gave access to public tenders to the tycoons and made them quiescent. The *kjosinjata* got nothing from him, no jobs, no privileges, except for t-shirts with nationalist insignia giving them a sense of purpose that they are the patriots who defend the nation." The ideological zealousness of these groups and their militant nationalist political ethos were instrumental in VMRO-DPMNE using them as foot soldiers during the April 27, 2017 violence in the Parliament to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. Many of these activists were arrested and sentenced to long-term sentences, and most of them didn't ask for a presidential pardon, as high ranking VMRO-DPMNE members did. The BiH context doesn't include a true equivalent to such organizations, though some top-down and Serbia-linked groups such as Srbska Čast are seeking to play a similar role.

A fundamental differentiation between Bosnia and Herzegovina's society and North Macedonia's is the nature and manifestation of the societal division. The conduct and trajectory of their violent conflicts reflect this. BiH was indeed "one society" prior to the 1992-1995 war; dividing it was an explicit top-down aim of the conflict, and helps to explain why it had to be so bloody to disentangle. Preserving those "won" divisions was a *sine qua non* of the structures negotiated in the Dayton Peace Accords (and the Washington Agreement which preceded it).

North Macedonia was not an integrated single lived social order (hence the – sadly unrealized and unpursued – revolutionary potential of "one society"), but one of – at best –

[497] Dervišbegović, Nedim, "Bosnia Parties Strike Landmark Deal on Governing Mostar." *Balkan Insight*, June 17, 2020. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/17/bosnia-parties-strike-landmark-deal-on-governing-mostar/

suživot: coexistence (literally: "living together"). The language divide, which largely corresponded to a religious one, helped preserve this, as did policy.

So BiH only became a "divided society;" North Macedonia had been one. The 2001 conflict was, in essence, a violent attempt by the ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) to renegotiate terms of an increasingly scratchy and inequitable ethnic coexistence in independent (North) Macedonia, calling for integration of ethnic Albanians into public life. It was many, many orders of magnitude less sanguinary (an estimates 200 killed vs. 100,000) and shorter (half a year vs. nearly four years). Like "cracking" complex hydrocarbon molecules,[498] it took a lot more energy to divide BiH's society – and it takes a great deal of energy to *keep* it that way. Hence the highly disparate death toll in the two violent conflicts (among other factors). BiH was indeed "one society" prior to 1992, albeit with numerous self-defined ethnic and religious identities within it (diversity stretching far beyond the dominant "three constituent peoples" post-war narratives). North Macedonia was decidedly not. What it became after Ohrid was a less inequitable model of elite-dominated coexistence, with managed tensions. *Actual* societal integration (as opposed to ethnic Albanian proportionality in the public sector and patronage opportunities) would be an *existential challenge* to the inner circle of state capture – breaking the monopoly on which its business model is based. Summarized simply, in North Macedonia, the center of gravity of division is social (reinforced in the structures and elite behavior); in BiH, it is political/structural (projected downward into society by elites).

Getting Out - Moving Abroad

There are multiple avenues that members of this large group seek to travel out of the outer circle. One road frequently traveled is the increasingly one-way, multi-lane autostrada of physical emigration.[499] Our research has demonstrated that one of the main grievances of the youth is not so much poverty, but the lack of feeling of upward mobility based on merit. Political parties are identified as the primary source of this injustice because they are considered as actors that prevent upward mobility based on merit.

Emigration seems to be the first resort for the youth. But it is far from only youth who turn to this well-worn path. In BiH many interlocutors differentiated today's migration from the *Gastarbeiter* phenomenon of the past; today entire families are packing up to leave. The benefits to the ruling nucleus are twofold: 1) potential threatening discontent is less likely to reach critical mass, with the outflow of those more likely to buck up, and 2) remittances (when some family members remain in country) feed into the economic system in which they remain the apex predator.[500]

---

[498] Cutley, Robert, "Cracking – chemical process," *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/technology/cracking-chemical-process
[499] Judah, Tim, "Bye-Bye Balkans: A Region in Critical Demographic Decline." *Balkan Insight*, October 14, 2019.
[500] At the local level, police in some North Macedonian municipalities saw the migratory patterns of diaspora coming home for the summer as recurring seasonal earning opportunity for traffic fine corruption.

Tuning Out - Survival Resilience

The other frequently traveled road might be called resigned, survival resilience. This can involve bare subsistence, but it need not reflect economic standing. One pathway demonstrated in prior research conducted this year[501] is effective insulation from the formal (captured) economy through enterprises plugging into work not dependent on local conditions, requiring minimal interaction with the powers that be – in this example a web-based firm with clients abroad in Mostar, and flourishing semi-legal digital businesses in North Macedonia which evade the tax authorities and are tolerated in doing so. Others have the luxury of tuning out if they have a coveted job at an embassy or international organization. But citizens engaging in white collar ways, or in lower levels of economic subsistence, such as subsistence agriculture, often engage in what was termed "internal emigration" in Soviet-occupied Europe: checking out of the system to the extent possible, seeking life satisfaction in areas the system cannot control.

Freaking out – Negative and Positive Radicalization

Negative Radicalization – Going to Extremes, Adopting Dogmatism

Both the fourth and the fifth responses are result of what we call radicalization.

When the mechanisms for cooptation of the population fail, the people can develop a sense of solidarity and seek systemic change by challenging the political center, i.e. the Kleptocratic Partitocracy. Those whose dissatisfaction has been activated – not content with or able to pursue the pathways depicted above – can choose alternatives to seeking systemic change. The first, which generates the greatest concern outside these countries (and therefore itself provides a reliable infusion of funding to first or second-order captured CSOs, benefitting the power nucleus), is "extremism," which we call Negative Freaking Out. Negative radicalization can have nationalist or religious manifestations. Furthermore, both can be subcategorized.

Violent extremism is inherently militantly identitarian – but that identity can be nationalist, political/ideological, or religious. And these are ideal types – they can be amalgamated. But religious extremism – that is, extreme interpretations of religious doctrine – can have quietist schools, as those described in the Maglaj and Brčko snapshots in BiH, and the Chair Municipality snapshot in North Macedonia. Functionally, these are inert, and amount to "internal emigration" (as described above) with a religious label. At the other end of the spectrum would be those motivated enough to take action, at home or abroad. This was seen during the foreign fighter phenomenon in Syria.

Freaking out negatively is usually prompted by the same causes as positive freaking out (described below): corruption, a sense of injustice, state capture, a feeling of not being treated with dignity by those in power.

The problem with negative radicalization in all its forms is that it misses the target: instead of tackling the sources of the grievances (which is usually the elites or the system they maintain)

---

[501] BiH Political Economic Assessment for USAID, submitted February 2020.

it targets minority and vulnerable groups which have nothing to do with the original source of grievance. Freaking out negatively is a false consciousness, to use a Marxist metaphor.[502] Both the far-right and the religious violent extremists are underpinned by their fundamental incapacity to identify the real targets. Therefore, both ideologies are susceptible to being hijacked and manipulated by the state captors for their political interests. There is nothing subversive in negative radicalization. It is, in fact, counterproductive and serves the established hierarchy.

Negative radicalization is depicted in Model II as a solid circle, to reflect a component in the belief structure of those who pursue this path: it is dogmatic, simple, and rigid, and this clarity is seen to provide a source of security. While this study did not aim to further develop this conceptually, recent publications and statements from a wide range of sources undergird this assessment – not only in political science and psychology.[503] Speaking on the legacy of a Kashmiri mystic poet, Naropa University Professor Andrew Schelling said the following, which is on-point for this philosophical divergence: "I don't think the most significant conflict is between the various systems of thought or sectarian creeds. The real conflict has always been between dogmatists, who believe a system is solid or true, and experimentalists, who try things out against the world they encounter."[504]   Those frustrated with injustice and predisposed toward simplicity may have a stronger gravitation toward going the negative path when they freak out.

Positive Radicalization – Accepting Uncertainty While Actively Building Alternatives

But there is another avenue of radicalization which has been sporadically visible in both BiH and North Macedonia in the past decade: this is extra-institutional advocacy for systemic political alternatives. Thus far – and perhaps by definition – this is the most unstable, least durable element of all. If it does not continue to grow exponentially and visibly, it dissipates, leaving little in its wake. It can, however, be a potent propellant with real impact.

The flipside of a dogmatic, fixed approach – as referenced above – is embracing complexity and uncertainty, open-endedness. Positive radicalization is *inherently* "experimentalist"[505] – and an active, participatory work of reactive synthesis. It pursues a *constructive instability*,[506]

---

[502] "Members of a subordinate class (workers, peasants, serfs) suffer from false consciousness in that their mental representations of the social relations around them systematically conceal or obscure the realities of subordination, exploitation, and domination those relations embody. Related concepts include mystification, ideology, and fetishism." Daniel Little, "False Consciousness," *University of Michigan – Dearborn*. Available at: http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/iess%20false%20consciousness%20V2.htm

[503] Anne Applebaum cites Australian psychologist Karen Stenner's concept of authoritarian predisposition: "(It) is not exactly the same as closed-mindedness. It is better described as simple-mindedness: people are often attracted to authoritarian ideas because they are bothered by complexity. They dislike divisiveness. They prefer unity… They seek solutions in new political language that makes them feel safer and more secure." See Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends*, Allen Lane (Penguin UK), London, 2020. Cited at page 106. See also Karen Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[504] Professor Andrew Schelling, "Lal Ded, mystical Kashmiri poet," The Forum, *BBC World Service*, August 27, 2020. Cited beginning approximately at 27:00. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3cszjvt

[505] Ibid.

[506] See Kurt Bassuener, "Stop Funding BiH Politicians' Irresponsibility," *Bosnia Daily*, January 16, 2014. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/e-bdaily%203194.pdf

as opposed to a destructive one, as negative radicalization tends to produce. For this reason, positive radicalization is encompassed by an irregular shape, resembling a cloud. It is potent with possibility, but not with certainty as to whether it will precipitate anything – or what that will be.

The following example is the most effective and visible example of positive political radicalization in the two case studies, despite the fact that the breakthrough it helped facilitate was subsequently stunted by the Zaev government.

The 2016 Colorful Revolution in North Macedonia was precipitated by the pre-emptive pardoning[507] of a number of prime beneficiaries not yet indicted by the internationally mandated Special Prosecutor's Office for crimes by President Gjorge Ivanov. The conscious decision to be radical and manifest popular outrage without engaging in physical violence or destruction of property led to a novel, popularly participatory method of conveying their discontent. The activists procured industrial grade rubber tubing and constructed large catapults to launch paint bombs at the new neo-classical facades of government buildings, leaving their (still visible) splashes of paint on the often absurd and archetypally kitschy symbols of Nikola Gruevski's money-laundering-meets-national identity fraud project, "Skopje 2014." This drew nationwide attention and popularity, giving those who felt robbed of personal agency a sense someone was finally sending a message they could metaphorically sign to the very symbols of arbitrary, unaccountable power.

The Colorful Revolution also took place at a liminal political time – early elections, as yet unscheduled, were being negotiated among political leaders with the mediation and pressure of the EU and US, since the political crisis escalated radically in Spring 2015. The then-opposition leader, SDSM leader Zoran Zaev, was thus able to tap into this manifest civic energy – which was clearly anti-government, pro-justice, and anti-system – but not necessarily aligned with him personally or the SDSM, for which there was still manifest base skepticism. Support for the Colorful Revolution, but even more for the end of the Gruevski regime, from ethnic Albanians was also vital to the assembly of critical mass needed by Zaev. Zaev had reached out to civil society – then largely also avowedly anti-government, pro-justice, and anti-system – to forge an alliance to push for the upcoming election and his entry into power. He therefore made justice and change central to his campaign, benefitting from all the efforts hitherto pursued by established CSOs and ad hoc civil society efforts, such as the Colorful Revolution. As is often the case in such scenarios, civil society and the political opposition had a common interest in unseating the authoritarian leadership. So Zaev and the SDSM availed themselves of this civic energy and expertise like a booster rocket to propel him and the party into power.

After achieving an electoral result which allowed the SDSM to assemble a governing coalition – and being seen to bravely resist violent provocation along with ethnic Albanian political allies in the Parliament on April 27, 2017 – Zaev became Prime Minister. Local elections that Fall demonstrated the pronounced shift in political winds to a far greater degree than the margins in the general election. But by then, the fix was in. Zaev and the SDSM had already

---

[507] This concept, sadly, now has traction in the established democracies – to which much of the model described herein also increasingly applies.

settled on a path of duopoly with Gruevski's partner in crime since 2008, DUI leader Ali Ahmeti, engaging in a rebranding exercise rivalling Gruevski's refacing of old socialist buildings with cheap materials, asking citizens to suspend their disbelief and be proud of a government including Ali Ahmeti, Gruevski's former ethnic Albanian subsidiary. Already by summer 2018, when the Prespa Agreement with Greece was signed – an undeniable and long overdue diplomatic achievement – popular hopes for justice and systemic change had already dissipated, as the weak turnout demonstrated. It has been all downhill since.

The above phenomenon has had less decisive manifestations in BiH. In the election of 2010, when the Social Democratic Party-led "platform coalition" with the SDA, Radom za Boljitak, and HSP BiH came to power and then-SDP member Željko Komšić was elected to the Croat seat on the BiH Presidency, many voters suspended disbelief in thinking this time there might actually be change. They were quickly disabused of such hopes, seeing the further *reductio ad absurdum* of the "progressive/non-nationalist" political spectrum into the bargain. Bottom-up efforts – the 2013 JMBG protests, 2014 protests, and follow-on plenums, and the allied 2018-2019 Justice for David (in Banja Luka) and Justice for Dženan (in Sarajevo) allied civic movements, were all motivated from a base of popular rage at unaccountable, self-dealing, and self-protecting power, despite their disparate origins and triggers. Each successive effort manifested greater and more explicit trans-ethnic solidarity. But none achieved a durable political impact. And even in North Macedonia, the achievement of appreciable political impact was ephemeral and squandered, as its prime beneficiaries – the incoming members of the power nucleus (for they were not "new," but returning after unjust exile to where they felt they belonged), demonstrated their promises of change – never fully developed or articulated – were all evidently insincere. There would be no justice and dignity dividend for citizens who had vested hope in them. The overwhelming dividends would be for the SDSM and DUI cadres of long standing, those who aligned with the new power, and those willing to do so. The system's functionality changed not an iota. Its beneficiaries changed, as did the branding.

The enervation of the body politic by repeated betrayals by ostensibly progressive political forces cannot be overstated. Citizens feel like Charles Schultz's cartoon character Charlie Brown, faked-out once again by Lucy while running at the football to kick it, landing violently – and humiliatingly – on his rear.[508] The worst pain is not from yet another fall, but rather the self-loathing that attends having fallen in (often suspicious) hope for what in retrospect was an obvious con. Unlike Charlie Brown in *Peanuts*, who never develops manifest or sustained anger, only a pronounced sense of injustice and diminished self-esteem, citizens of BiH and North Macedonia, so repeatedly cheated, harbor particular venom for those who have betrayed them – even more than for their transparently war criminal successor rivals, for whom they never had hope. The fact is that little such rage has catalyzed in a violent fashion to date – despite the means widely available to do so.[509] But the potential is there. Revenge fantasies against the ruling elites are highly developed, across the board.

---

[508] See two-minute clip "Charlie Brown, Lucy, and the Football," from "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving" at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RieABEtmpUg

[509] See Vlado Azinović, Kurt Bassuener, and Bodo Weber, *Assessing the potential for renewed ethnic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Security Risk Analysis*, Atlantic Initiative/Democratization Policy Council, Sarajevo, 2011. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/DPC-AI_BiH%20Security_Study.pdf

The SDSM, SDP BiH, and DF are all rightly derided as having been false flags for change, hiding a desire to return to dominant positions in the systems. Even Naša Stranka in BiH, while not yet fully discredited, has never even deigned to articulate an alternative vision for BiH or run as a statewide party. It has never mooted an alternative to Dayton BiH. At best, its agenda is reformist – changing the system through the system (and falling victim to it even with this lack of overarching ambition) – not advocating radical change. This was seen acutely in the scuttling of the Naša Stranka-led governance of Sarajevo canton in early 2020, when the cantonal government was shifted based not on the decision of voters but on politics purely linked to politics at the entity and state levels.[510] In North Macedonia, Levica, a party that uses militant rhetoric against the establishment and the perceived injustices the multi-ethnic state captors have inflicted on the people, has emerged as a vehicle for discontent and for a protest vote against the corrupt establishment, winning 4% of the vote in the 2020 parliamentary election and terrifying the established political parties. The strategy of the center-left SDSM against Levica was moralistic, blaming its leadership for fascism, and failing to understand the broader structural factors that make radical political language attractive for so many people. These factors have a direct link to the perception that the system is fundamentally corrupt. Levica's success is instructive of the fact that radical democratic impulses can erupt in many ways and emerge in various political manifestations. In neither country was there any hope evinced by interlocutors in meaningful change via electoral politics, let alone via EU or NATO membership or other external factors.

No development of new alternative political systems or visions has followed these developments. It is fair to say that in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, the very idea of systemic change *through* the political system – that is, via elections, or through court proceedings – is now considered impossible by a majority of the population. The only avenue could be confrontation with the existing structures of power extra-institutionally – nonviolently or violently. But successful liberal democratic transitions are far less likely to follow from violent methods of resistance – and not simply due to difficulty in mobilizing a critical mass of people to make the effort.[511] The recent history of violence in both countries makes a violent path unlikely to attract many adherents.

As our research demonstrates, the depth and breadth of the demand – and therefore of a potential constituency for radical change – is massive. But absent a radical new alternative offering convincing systemic change – not mere incremental reform – nonviolent political mobilization will remain mere trapped potential. And this potential is consistently degrading with the other avenues previously described.

---

[510] "Sarajevo Canton's government ousted by new majority." *N1*, January 29, 2020. Available at http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a406951/Sarajevo-Canton-s-government-ousted-by-new-majority.html
[511] Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works – The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia University Press, 2011.

The Role of CSOs and Foreign Players[512]

Power conglomerates have relations with foreign players. The foreign player with the most developed relationship with local elites is the European Union. Yet power conglomerates have relations with other players as well. Despite differences among them, the common lowest denominator of foreign players is the fact that none of them behaves as if it is interested in genuine change of the rules of the kleptocratic game. There seems to be genuine interest in progress, but an unwillingness at both the bureaucratic and political levels to make the necessary policy choices and resource investments to achieve real change. In addition, there is a deep-seated default aversion to disruption. The posture might be summed up as: liberal actors want progress (greater governance efficacy, reduced corruption, etc.), but not at the cost of any risk or uncertainty – or even tacit admission that their policies have been part of the problem. The graphical representation of the dynamics of relations between external actors and the players from the domestic model is outlined in Model III below.

---

[512] Much of this section draws on work done recently, outside the scope of this project, by one of the authors, Kurt Bassuener, for the Swedish international women's network/CSO Kvinna till Kvinna ("Women to Women") – Western Balkans "Context Analyses." These can be made available upon request. They include: "Where Do We Go from Here? The Western Balkans between State Capture, the Illiberalism Pandemic, Values-Neutral Geopolitics, and the Climate Emergency: Navigating the New Entropy," March 31, 2020; "Some Reflections on the Covid-19 Crisis in the Western Balkans," May 11, 2020; "From Enlargement Laggard to Pioneer of Illiberalism in Europe," August 24, 2017.
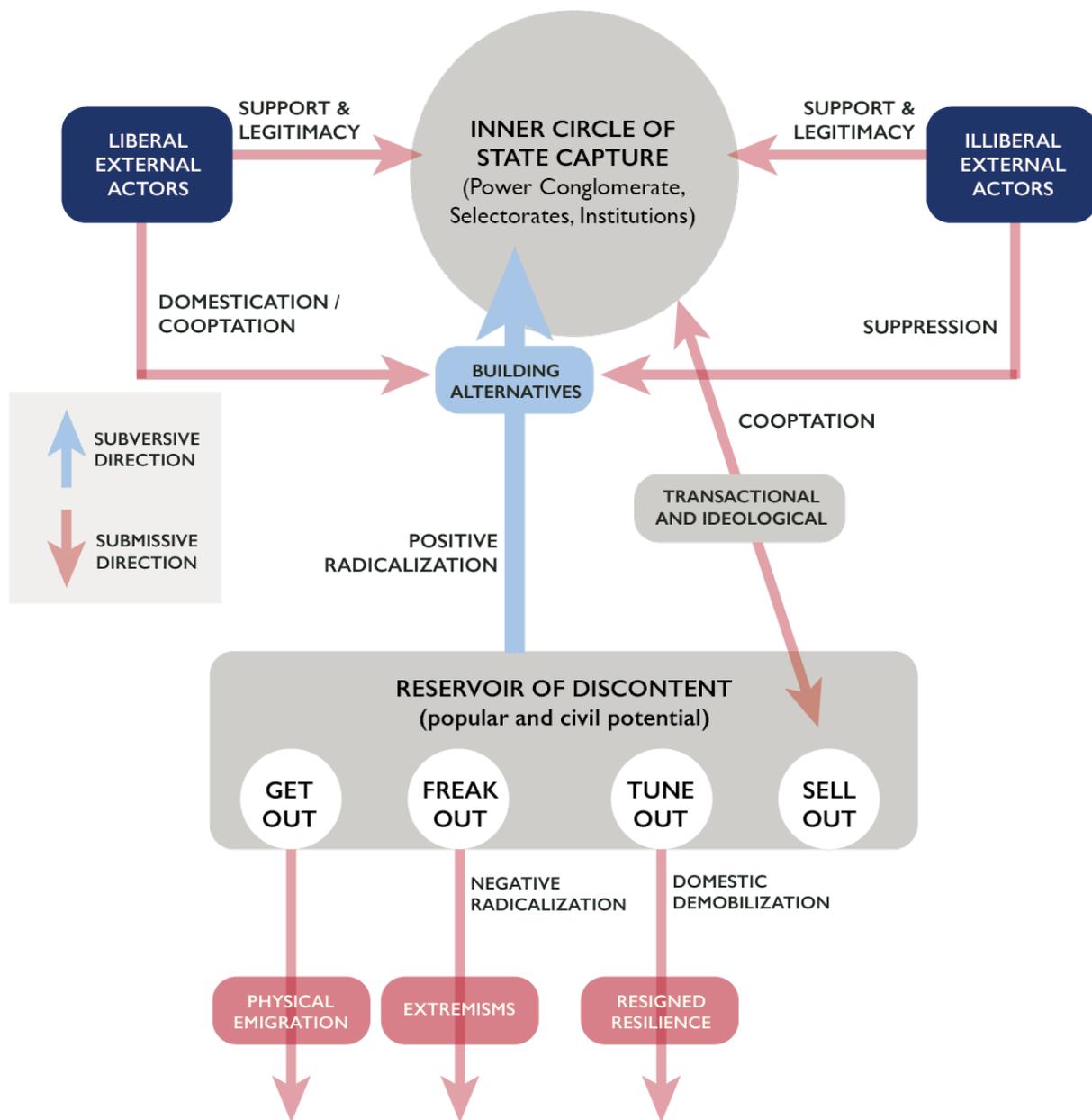
Paradoxically, the same dynamic is seen with an overwhelming majority of what is commonly called "civil society" – by which most mean grant-funded NGOs and CSOs – who are effectively subsidiary beneficiaries of the political systems, either directly or by the transitive property, depending on who's paying.

In normal liberal democratic circumstances, policy-oriented civil society organizations should articulate civic/popular concerns – particularly those at a disadvantage or under-leveraged through electoral politics – to political decisionmakers, to inform and drive policymaking to address these interests thus rejuvenating the democratic process. But in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia (and not just there), this is far from the reality. Since the entire political system is designed to insulate those at its center from any accountability – political or legal – the concerns and interests of citizens are irrelevant, beyond the confines of

the structures in place to manufacture (media/nationalist narratives), rent (patronage in its many guises), and coerce (utility of fear) consent. CSOs cannot connect from the civic to the political sphere to articulate popular interests. For even if they transmit, there is nobody in government willing to receive – let alone respond – in a meaningful way.

This is the result of a civil society ecosystem that is not funded through personal memberships/donations, corporate social responsibility contributions (from properly regulated firms), a domestic charitable/philanthropic base, or competitive and transparent government grants. With some limited exceptions, there are two options for sustenance.

The first option, seeking funding from government (any level) effectively makes CSOs self-organized GONGOs. Reliance on public budgets can be called direct capture. (The example noted above about how this has been done in Brčko is instructive.) Such CSOs serve to further the agendas of those bodies that pay them – and those who control them and the interests they serve. Thus, such CSOs are at best inert in terms of meeting civic/popular needs; at worst they actively undermine them.

The second option, most common for "respectable" CSOs, is to seek grant funding from external governments or foundations. Since there is differentiation among these, we delineate them. But it should be noted that most policy-oriented CSOs rely on multiple donors and grants, for project-oriented work. This composite factor has an impact, discussed further below.

The EU Constellation

A large complement of CSOs rely on EU member state foreign donors for their funding, in whole or in part. The policy posture of the EU is therefore a determining factor. The pronounced and consistent policy of the EU can be summarized as:

- Pacification ("stability" seeking) – this is especially pertinent to BiH and North Macedonia, as the primary attention in regional policy is on reviving the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue and the EU's primacy in brokering it

- Promoting the reputation of the EU as the premier/leading external actor in the Western Balkans – this impulse has become even more pronounced as geopolitical contestation, including with the US, becomes a factor.

- Ensuring migration from points east and south via the Balkan route does not reach the EU.

It also may be inferred, though it is not stated as policy, that many EU members aim to partially remediate their own demographic deficits, particularly in high-demand skills, through active recruitment in the region.[513]

---

[513] See Ivan Vejvoda's point in "The Balkans are Getting Short of People." *The Economist*, August 22, 2020. Available at: https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/08/22/the-balkans-are-getting-short-of-people

There is no interest in supporting radical, systemic change to the dynamics – or even significant reform, if that might entail disruption that affects the priorities listed above. This pacification "strategy" amounts to alliance with the ruling elites. The EU therefore demonstrates preference for CSOs choosing to color within the lines and eager to promote the EU "brand," to demonstrate its relevance to itself.[514]

This posture is manifest in the current encouragement that CSOs in North Macedonia engage in a "structured dialogue" with the government – a corporatist approach. Since the EU's interests are so evidently aligned with those of the system, CSOs drawing significant funding from the EU and its member states are indirectly captured. While technically not beholden to the regimes, their patron is – and algebraically this amounts to the same effect. And in North Macedonia's case, the EU is encouraging these CSOs to bridge even that gap by directly "cooperating" (i.e., supporting) the government in its policy processes. Quasi-governmental organizations – such as political party foundations – also largely fit the template above.

The US

Numerous CSOs similarly rely on US Government funding (USAID, other government agencies, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), etc.). The policy of the US, up until mid-2018, was effectively aligned with the EU's policy, albeit with some different local emphases – and "on the ground" largely still is, as in BiH and North Macedonia. Therefore, CSOs receiving these funds could be said to have been indirectly captured as well.

Since mid-2018, the US has become a disruptor (one of two geopolitical disruptors, along with Russia, interestingly enough), as evidenced not only by embrace of Serbian and Kosovar Presidents Aleksandar Vučić and Hashim Thaçi's proposed land swap (a.k.a. "border correction," or "demarcation"), but also the seemingly central effort of US Special Envoy Richard Grenell (and until recently Ambassador to Germany) to undercut the EU, and particularly German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Chancellor Merkel was the loudest voice objecting to partition – including before the US embraced it in summer 2018. The US disruptive role was on full display in Kosovo in 2020, when US pressure was pivotal in topping the Albin Kurti government.[515] While official US Government policy on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of BiH and North Macedonia have not been changed, the fact remains that America's Kosovo-Serbia shift has whet the appetites of those – particularly in BiH – who harbor ethnoterritorial ambitions: in Banja Luka, Mostar, Belgrade, and Zagreb. It also has unnerved North Macedonia and Montenegro. The lack of the US speaking with one voice – long a demand levied by the US and EU of BiH – has fueled both retrograde ambitions and popular concern.

---

[514] Projects can be given "edge" by taking on topics such as LGBT rights – a legitimate and sorely needed issue, but which does not threaten the systems of power, but rather allows those within it to posture on values without changing the mechanics of power allocation at all. Issues related to the Roma are similarly used, particularly in BiH, to demonstrate purported interest in national minorities, while avoiding discussion that give all power to the three constituent peoples, ignoring "others" in general.

[515] See Kurt Bassuener and Bodo Weber, "US Burns Credibility in Grenell Quest for Foreign Policy Win, as Kosovo Government Falls." *Just Security*, April 2, 2020. Available at: https://www.justsecurity.org/69489/us-burns-credibility-in-grenell-quest-for-foreign-policy-win-as-kosovo-government-falls/

What this new posture means for CSOs remains unclear. If continued into 2021, it will likely clarify, generating potential frictions among and within the CSO community.

Non-EU, Non-US Western Governments (e.g. Norway, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, etc.)

While not EU members or subject to new disruptive inclinations from the commanding heights in Washington, these actors have largely operated in the same EU-led Western consensus in terms of priorities and appetite. In theory, each has wider latitude to support more radical democratic efforts to seek systemic change. But to date, none has acted to do so – in fact, it is unlikely that any has had its will tested to do so, as the existing CSOs, reliant on consortia of donors, moves in the direction and speed of its lowest common denominators. So they themselves dull their "asks" of other donors which might have greater appetite for – or less aversion to – nonviolent radical democratic projects. Each country has interesting characteristics that could be capitalized on if there was support for truly using these untapped resources. Norway has the deepest pockets and represents Scandinavian functionality. Canada benefits from its respected position and freedom of maneuver by not being in the EU, but suffers the impediment of not having an embassy in either Sarajevo or Skopje. Switzerland should have potential, and is home to many in the Diaspora, but has an ingrained tendency to look at multiethnic states through the lens of the *sui generis* "Swiss model." Japan has a risk-averse foreign policy culture and a propensity to align with the United States unless there are compelling reasons not to.

Western Foundations

Like Western governments summarized above, foundations should in theory have wide latitude to support radical nonviolent democratic efforts aimed at systemic alternatives, but none have evidently done so. As above, it may well be that none has received an application seeking such support. But even were that to happen, there are a number of systemic imperatives militating against this. First is the homogenization and denaturing via consortia – either actual donor consortia on individual projects, or effective consortia of donors for a particular CSO. This dulls any impetus within a CSO to push the envelope, for fear of losing support of its most conservative/risk averse donor. And pacification with a light seasoning of non-disruptive reform is the limit of a majority of governmental donors' ambitions. A second factor is the evident conformity and groupthink among donors. This can be driven from below – CSOs inform donors' views of these countries, often with minimal alternative sources of information, especially if without local offices. But it also comes from the foundations themselves, who evince a great deal of commonality in their approaches to BiH and North Macedonia, as well as the wider region. Seeing the governance dynamic as an organic and unreformable problem is not a prevalent view among donors, who in essence share much of their list of priorities and concerns with donors in the official sector.

All of the above factors make the CSOs who benefit from the EU, US, or other Western donors – the lion's share – complicit in maintaining the virtual reality that the EU in particular likes to portray in the Western Balkans: of reformable, redeemable governments that can be changed by activated voters and fine-tuned institutional machinery. The yawning and ever-widening gap between the lived reality of citizens and the declarative reality of the governments in BiH and North Macedonia and their external patrons has devastated the

credibility of those patrons – the EU especially – in citizens' eyes. The CSOs, in helping maintain the holographic universe of "partner governments" with a "membership perspective," have thereby gutted their own credibility with the citizens whose interests they purport to serve. *Strani plačenici* (foreign hirelings), an epithet leveled at them by domestic illiberal politicians, is largely what citizens think of them as well.

In effect, the entire CSO sector (albeit with some exceptions proving the rule – like the institutional islands of integrity previously discussed) is captured. It is only a fictive mechanism to convey popular interests to political power. They serve as a maintenance mechanism for the existing architecture of power, by helping maintain consent (or the illusion of it to Western democratic patrons). In essence, their resources become fungible – an alternative public resource, subject to the same conditions pertaining to public revenues and institutions. The functional differential to direct infusions to state budgets, as done by IFIs, the EU, and other bilateral donors, is nil. The difference is cosmetic, useful for marketing purposes. This represents a loss, as there are some good people in some of the CSOs who, if enabled to use their knowledge to produce real ideas for change rather than logframes, could actually rise to the occasion.

This leads to the issue of foreign illiberal actors.

Foreign Illiberal Actors

China

China is a relatively new player in most of the Western Balkans; its footprint has magnified exponentially with the Belt and Road Initiative in the past five years. Beijing's way of doing business – and the economic level comes first for China – is to go directly to the local powers that be to seek what it wants: to offshore its expeditionary capital seeking immediate-term deliverables and long-term economic gain. Its time horizons are longer-term on developing political leverage, though it has already exacted compliance among local governments on issues it considers vital – including Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and its expansionist efforts in the South China Sea. It also has major inroads in the regional telecoms networks.[516]

While the Chinese have been stability-oriented and habitually inclined to support those in power, the durability of its economic leverage is considerable – both via debt and the codicils in contracts which give equity stakes as collateral. In addition, the very nature of non-transparent and unaccountable engagement with elites gives the buyer permanent leverage – what Russians (on whom more below) call *kompromat* – compromising material. But as evidenced in BiH, where China has longstanding ties with the RS authorities, they have no

---

[516] While illiberal powers only entered this study tangentially through our COVID poll and broad background literature, they do figure as an integral part of the state capture ecosystem preservation mechanism. The observations in this section also draw heavily upon Kurt Bassuener, "Pushing on an Open Door: Foreign Authoritarian Influence in the Western Balkans," *NED/IFDS Working Paper*, May 2019. Available at: https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Pushing-on-an-Open-Door-Foreign-Authoritarian-Influence-in-the-Western-Balkans-Kurt-Bassuener-May-2019.pdf and "Primed Receptors: Synergies between Western Balkan Political Elites and Chinese Economic Actors and State Media," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, 03/2020.

problem doing business with ruling elites in the Federation, such as on the Blok 7 thermal power station in Tuzla, or EU-funded funded highway construction in Herzegovina. Their interests, once established, are to the durable business-organized crime nexus, even though their avenue of approach runs through the political elites in the power nucleus. They can change partners without unbearable transaction costs.

Russia

Russia shifted from being an *opportunistic spoiler* of Western agendas in the Western Balkans after its seizure of Crimea and inducement of war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. It is now an *aggressive disruptor* – it seeks to foment fragmentation and friction in the Western Balkans and to EU, NATO, and US interests there. Disruption itself, rather than durable dominion, is its primary goal – though Moscow would surely be happy to gain a state client in the region. It is also deeply entwined in the region's energy sector, as an arm of the Kremlin's foreign policy. As Serbia's Vučić leads the class in extractive arbitrage among multiple geopolitical suitors, insulating his entrenchment of his regime (and others emulate him less successfully), the star for Moscow is Republika Srpska's Milorad Dodik.[517] While Moscow has made long-term investments in numerous politicians – Ivica Dačić is another favorite – Dodik has paid the greatest dividends for the least outlay from the Kremlin. Both sides have an interest in flagrantly showing off the relationship, while the internal dynamics of the pair remain opaque. Russia has sunk costs in investments in the region, including in the RS oil sector, but these were evidently politically motivated to keep Dodik on a drip feed.[518]

In contrast to China's more sanguine, long-term confidence (with occasional bullying of media),[519] Russia's timelines are more short-term – disruption now is preferable to later. There is also uncertainty as to what is the better bet for a "long tail" of influence. Russia's influence at present is more personality dependent than China's, so is more vulnerable and may have a shorter shelf-life. Yet it also can tap into the narrative of Orthodoxy (however contrived and convoluted the actual history) as a legitimizing/harmonizing delivery system into societal influence.

To contrast these two illiberal titans, the direction of travel of influence differs, though both make approaches through established political elites. China makes long-term investments in the economy, anchoring its influence and rendering it durable, regardless of political change which might follow. These facts on the ground are indeed the point – a pre-existing condition should these countries join the EU, which it would like to see. Russia, in contrast, uses political and economic means to seek political gains – defined as Western losses of influence, prestige, presence, and leverage. Its investments are in political leaders and movements, usually incumbent, but occasionally insurgent. The latter are high-risk, potential high-return –

---

[517] Ana Dević argues that among the radical-right in Serbia Dodik is portrayed as more "pure" than Serbia's own leaders due to his consistent willingness to "stand up to" the west. "The Eurasian Wings of Serbia: Serbian Affinities of the Russian Radical Right." *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21-st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge.* Valery Perry (ed.) Ibidem Press/Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 115-146.

[518] Golubović, Slobodan. "Whose is the Energy Sector in BiH: Gas and Oil to the Russians, Electricity to the Chinese," *Žurnal*, July 17, 2020.

[519] Bassuener, Kurt. "Pushing on an Open Door – Foreign Authoritarian Influence in Western Balkans," *NED-IFDS Working Paper*, May 2019. Available at: https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Pushing-on-an-Open-Door-Foreign-Authoritarian-Influence-in-the-Western-Balkans-Kurt-Bassuener-May-2019.pdf

but utterly disposable should they fail. Janko Bachev and his United Macedonia party could be viewed as one of these failures – the equivalent of a political junk bond.[520] In this frame, China's footing is stronger than that of Russia.

An Integrated Ecosystem – Change Must Start from Below

In sum, both Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia represent a form of state capture that is both in keeping with Sarah Chayes' conceptual template, but also a development of it. While these societies have important differences explained above and displayed throughout this study, the self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating nature of state capture is so similar as to be represented faithfully in both cases by the graphics herein.

Furthermore, each demonstrates perpetual fine-tuning and optimization for the domestic and international environment. Like a gyroscope, the inner circle of state capture is self-righting and stays level, so long as it can balance the internal and external forces. Only when confronted by concerted pressure from multiple directions (above and below) does it truly struggle.

The models developed to demonstrate these dynamics illustrate the integral nature of external actors in the equation. To date, both liberal and illiberal actors have effectively collaborated with the inner circle of state capture, albeit for different ends.

The impetus for fundamental change is far more likely to manifest from below than above. The example of the 2014-2017 protest and electoral cycle demonstrated that bottom-up nonviolent civic action – positive radicalization – can achieve a breakthrough. This bottom-up action forced liberal external actors to choose sides and engage against erstwhile "partners" in the Gruevski government.[521] But unfortunately, the system's established interests re-stabilized the situation through the seduction of illicit gain through governance. The inner circle of state capture is alive and well. But the failure was not one of failed positive radicalization, but rather of unwillingness of its political beneficiaries to uphold their promise to those who put them in office. The dissatisfaction now evident is the result.

It remains the case that positive radicalization in North Macedonia – and BiH as well – has blazed a path forward and shown the greatest promise for progress seen in their independent histories. Yet the radicalization seen thus far has not to date developed articulated *alternatives* to common popular grievances, even when they have made resonant calls for dignity and justice. This is where the path remains to be pushed forward into the wild.

---

[520] Nemtsova, Anna. "Meet Moscow's Man in Macedonia, One of Putin's Many Pals in Disrupting Europe," *Daily Beast*, November 6, 2018. Available at: https://www.thedailybeast.com/meet-moscows-man-in-macedonia-one-of-putins-many-pals-disrupting-europe

[521] See Kurt Bassuener, "It's Time the US Grabbed the Reins in Macedonia," *Balkan Insight*, July 15, 2015. Available at:
http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/Balkan%20Insight_It%27s%20Time%20the%20US%20Grabbed%20the%20Reins%20in%20Macedonia.pdf

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This research effort managed to set out to do what it intended to do – with the added unexpected challenge of a global pandemic. This initiative:

- Distilled the ideas presented by Chayes into an actionable research framework
- Created a comprehensive set of media/news/social media items that informs this study and could be used in future analysis
- Spoke to more than 200 people in nearly 20 places in two countries to collect current and granular data on the state of life and their communities in 2020
- Used an online survey to capture a snapshot of public opinion in two countries during a global health crisis
- Developed conceptual models that describe the political economies of these two case countries, and the resultant social impact
- Contributed to theory building by proposing models of contemporary liberal populism, and suggesting the return of political violence theory to studies of terrorism and extremism.

It therefore provides wide scope for future research of related topics, including the following:

- Additional field-level data from places like Višegrad, Pale, Široki Brijeg, Stolac, Travnik/Novi Travnik, Banja Luka, Mostar, and Sarajevo (BiH), and Kriva Palanka, Bitola, Ohrid, Kochani, Kichevo, or Prilep (North Macedonia) to build in additional data and see if the model stands. A dedicated, bilingual Macedonian/Albanian language team in North Macedonia would help to fill in the Albanian language data gaps.
- Expansion of the model to look at other regional cases, such as Serbia, Montenegro, or Bulgaria. Further afield, Lebanon, Malta, and Cyprus would be fascinating.
- Distillation of this model into a popularly accessible format that can be used as the basis for community-level discussions on how to move beyond these dynamics, and envision a better system (when public health conditions allow). This could be done with general constituencies, or targeted groups (i.e., youth, women, business owners, etc.).
- Organization of an action-research working group on political violence in the Western Balkans.
- Further analysis on the global interconnections among extremist groups, in particular on the growing linkages among the far-right in "consolidated" democracies.

It is interesting that at precisely the moment that innovative and out of the box thinking is needed, formal political structures are grasping at familiar yet failed historical narratives, and are afraid to take risks that might help countries to thrive in a time of change. Roger Hallam, in his short handbook aimed at supporting (positive) radical environmental activism to address the accelerating challenge of climate change, wrote the following: "The problem is that, sociologically speaking, not all contexts display signs of a reformist political culture. Some have a revolutionary political culture. Such a phenomenon is evidenced by mass

disillusionment and distrust toward the political class and a high level of social repression. People conform, but don't want to."[522] Using the language developed in this study, people sell out, or tune out, or get out. As noted above, constructive and peaceful disruption is not only possible, but has a greater chance of securing lasting change. While the findings of this work are often depressing and could promote discouragement, people *do* want change, and do want to be mobilized to be a part of something bigger, and better. The challenge is to mobilize them and support them for something positive. And while it has been disillusioning for people to see the decline in values and effective, accountable governance in other countries, it is at least reassuring to know that now the effort will be one of global partnership, and a shared endeavor.

The following recommendations are made to continue this dialogue:

The following recommendations are written for both countries – and in fact, apply to others in the region. While some are easily actionable given the will, they are largely aimed at *philosophical* shifts in approaches to the promotion of accountable democracy, and the incremental (re)construction of a more stable international order based on the belief that accountable, rights-based democratic systems grounded in the rule of law provide the best basis for comprehensive, human security with dignity.

For the liberal international community:

- The basic understanding of "transition" requires new thinking and formulation to shift away from assuming that "transition" implies a more or less linear progression towards an inevitable "western" model of liberal democratic governance. Instead, long-lasting "transition" phases in these two case study countries (and elsewhere) suggest a new and distinct governance model that neither meets nor even aspires to accepted models of democratic good practice. The increasing use of political economy analysis models by analysts and democratization agencies offer a platform to recalibrate understanding of these dynamics, and findings that arise from such analysis should feed into new post-transition modelling that can better inform both policy and programming decisions.
- Further research on the impact of electoral models on the quality of accountable democracies is needed, grounded in case studies from the past 30 years and aimed at citizens who need their faith in democratic systems to be rekindled.
- P/CVE projects have already begun to shift towards long-running challenges such as youth engagement and reconciliation. These efforts should shift to challenge participants to envision the systems they would like to see, and build their capacity to press such ideas forward.
- P/CVE youth projects should have longer timeframes (5-10 years) to allow for strategic engagement on bridge-building cultural tourism opportunities, regional environmental protection efforts, and economic rejuvenation schemes. However, there should be integrated and regular staff turnover to seed experience more broadly, nurture new talent, and avoid sclerosis. Positive political alternatives developing out of these efforts should be encouraged.

---

[522] Hallam, Roger. *Common Sense for the 21st Century*. 2019, p. 21. available at www.rogerhallam.com

- This report should be used to prompt discussions in policy and academic circles, to contribute to the growing literature on extremism and its drivers.
- The international community, primarily the EU and the US, must carefully decide who they proclaim and engage as *values-based allies*. This refers to political parties, NGOs, media, and other actors. The "declarative democrats," i.e., the mainstream political parties in both countries, which have contributed to the deterioration of society, need to be seen as the reason money and attention invested in these (and other) countries have failed to lead to visible positive change. They may require engagement, but do not necessarily deserve the moral endorsement or legitimation they aim to secure to help to secure their hold on the various levers of influence. Not every relationship is one between allies.
- Public appearances and statements confer approval on the individuals involved. Less time and validation should be given to those representing the anti-democratic inner core, and more to the outer ring of citizens and the embattled individuals within the institutional ring struggling to ensure independent action. The word "partner" should be reserved for the outer ring.
- Anti-corruption efforts should continue and be redoubled, with a focus on the top. In both countries the Priebe reports should be a daily reference and foundation for further high-profile efforts – a launchpad for mobilization by civic actors. Whistleblowers need protection. Local prosecution should be supported. Support to investigative journalism should be massively increased. Global Magnitsky sanctions should become a standard instrument.
- Election fairness and probity must be strengthened through independent observation (domestic and ODIHR-centered) and meaningful sanctions for malfeasance.
- There is transformative potential in improving education, health care, and the environment. Programmatic activities should be aimed in this direction, with supportive policies from liberal external actors from the top-down.
- Physical presence by international organizations (EU), development bodies (USAID, SIDA, etc.), foundations (Heinrich Boell, etc.), and NGOs is needed in smaller cities and towns. As COVID-19 is hampering the "normal" functioning of large capital-based offices, the time is right to reconfigure, hiring diverse staff throughout a country who are more plugged in to local needs, dynamics, and opportunities, collaborating via Zoom, etc. These people will be better placed to identify a new generation of forward-looking partners and ideas.

For CSOs

- CSOs in large cities continue to ignore actions and activists in smaller places. More efforts are needed to connect and reinforce both layers.
- CSOs are viewed with suspicion by many who are not involved and do not know anyone. A significant priority should be placed on making these places open and welcoming, and not another closed circle.
- Seek to change the way donors think about programming. Make a realistic assessment of what is impeding success. Don't be afraid to suggest ideas that may seem positively "radical."
- CSOs should make the case to donors that a period of cathartic, group-therapy-style conversations is essential before effective citizen actions can really produce change.

For local governments (in partnership with local citizens)

- Begin a series of future visioning activities with young people, business leaders, activists. Aim to ensure that more local funds can be invested in local priorities, without higher-level political distortion or transaction costs. Set up local constituency service centers – not political party offices – that citizens can use to bring ideas and complaints to elected officials.
- Organize public discussion fora that will be ready to prevent and react to polarizing or violent incidents involving people of different ethnic or religious background. Integrate locally-respected religious and civic leaders. Support coordinated learning with other similar peaceful movements emerging against the far-right worldwide.

For citizens

- In 2020, it is clear that no external saviors will single-handedly fix the problems of a generation. Citizens' shared aspirations for justice and dignity are powerful and universal. Local level environmental protection victories are important; the dots can be connected to higher level structural impediments that constrain further local development. Citizens need to understand that they will be supported in this.
- While international actors alone will not solve any community's problems, they can be used to create pressure. Just as elected officials and party leaders seek to ensure their voices are heard by the international community, so should citizens be ensured a regular forum. Regularly and explicitly engaging with international actors to create top-down pressure in support of their bottom-up action will not only increase the likelihood of success, but serve as a barometer of the health of power alliances that need to be tackled.

Annex 1 – Online Poll

The emergence of the coronavirus has caused profound changes in the world. The virus is spreading at a rapid rate and its full scope is still unknown to us. In that sense, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is no exception. Authorities in BiH are taking various measures to slow and stop the spread of the disease. We will know to what extent they were successful after the crisis is over. In this research, we ask the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina how they evaluate the readiness of the state to face the challenges posed by COVID-19. The survey takes 5 - 7 minutes.

Note: The Democratization Policy Council (DPC) is an initiative that promotes responsible democratic policy in the world. This questionnaire is part of a survey conducted by DPC and Eurothink in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Macedonia on citizens' attitudes on current social, political and economic issues.

All answers are anonymous.

<u>Respondent Demographics</u>

1. Choose	o Latin o Cyrillic
2. Gender	Male/Female
3. Age	o 18-25 o 26-45 o 46-64 o 65+
4. Education	o Completed elementary school o Completed secondary school o Completed vocational training o Completed university
5. Employment status (present state)	o Employed full-time o Employed part-time o Unemployed o Freelancer o Pensioner o Student

6. Employment status (before COVID-19 crisis)	o Employed full-time o Employed part-time o Unemployed o Freelancer o Pensioner o Student
7. Residence	List of BiH municipalities

Question	Offered answers
8. Please, consider the response of these institutions to the COVID-19 crisis. Please select the 3 that you think have been the most effective.	o Municipality o Community health center/Institute for public health o Cantonal government o Entity government o State government o Police o Army o Civil protection units o MZ (Local self-government) o Volunteer initiatives o Don't know
9. Evaluate the readiness of BiH health care system to the demands of the COVID-19 crisis?	5- Very prepared 4 - Prepared 3 - Neutral 2 - Not prepared 1 - Very unprepared 0 - Don't know
10. Have you had to use health services since the beginning of the crisis?	o Yes o No o No, although I had to.

	Please explain:_____
11. Think about your community (village/town/neighborhood) during this crisis. Please select up to 3 responses that you think most accurately reflect the situation on in your place of residence.	o Greater togetherness is felt, people act responsibly respecting the ordered measures o Authorities act responsibly; citizens have confidence in institutions that successfully coordinate crisis management activities o Volunteers and CSO's are well organized o New examples of corruption and criminal behavior by the authorities in times of crisis are being revealed o Citizens feel that in this crisis they can only rely on close people o Divisions in society are growing, citizens have less trust in each other o Poor coordination of institutions, lack of expertise and responsibilities can be seen o Fear of the future, anger and dissatisfaction are growing
12. In which level of government do you have the greatest confidence in the current crisis?	o Local o Cantonal o Entity o State o Neither
13. In which level of government do you have the least confidence in the current crisis?	o Local o Cantonal o Entity o State o Neither
14. The following countries have announced donations to BiH. Please select the 3 that have contributed the most to BiH to	o European union (including Switzerland and Norway) o SAD

fight COVID-19?	o UN o China o Russia o Serbia o Croatia o Turkey o Other (specify): _____
15. How confident are you that domestic funds and donated aid are being rationally allocated during this crisis?	0 - Don't know/no answer 1 - Very not confident 2 - Not confident 3 - Neutral 4 - Confident 5 - Very confident
16. Are you aware of, or involved in, any volunteer organizations in your community to address the crisis?	o There are volunteer organizations in my community o There are volunteer organizations in my community and I am personally involved o There are no volunteer organizations in my community o I don't know
17. Choose the media through which you are informed about the COVID-19 crisis. Choose as many options as you want.	o TV o Radio o Internet portals o Newspapers o Social media o Friend/family o Other (please note): _____

18. What explanation of the origin of the COVID-19 virus do you find convincing?	o The virus appeared in China after it crossed from an animal species and mutated infecting humans (official explanation of the World Health Organization) o China deliberately created and spread the virus o The virus is related to the introduction of the 5G network o SAD deliberately created and spread the virus o The virus was created and spread by an influential person for the promotion of its interests o The virus originated naturally but is no more dangerous than the common flu o Other (please note):_____
19. Do you think COVID-19 crisis will impact emigration from BiH?	o Yes, more people will want to leave o No, while people will want to leave it will be more difficult to do so o No, people feel more secure in their home country and will be less inclined to leave. o It won't have an impact / It will be the same o Don't know/Don't want to answer
20. Which of the following statements describe the possible outcome of the COVID-19 crisis's impact on BiH politics? You can select more than one answer.	o Politicians / political parties will demonstrate an awareness of unity and co-operate in combating the consequences of the crisis o The crisis will not change politicians / political parties and they will continue to focus on their interests o Politicians / political parties will additionally accuse each other and continue to quarrel o It will become clear to the citizens that the

	authorities are unprofessional, irresponsible and expensive. o Citizens will achieve a higher degree of union and mutual trust, and they will seek new political options that will suit their beliefs. o There will be social unrest o Neither o I don't know/I don't want to answer
21. If you are willing to answer additional questions, please leave your email address for contact.	
22. If you would like to receive a summary of this research, please leave your email address.	

* Note: Under GDPR provisions, all the data that you leave will be treated with the utmost care and full protection of privacy, and used exclusively for research carried out by Eurothink from Skopje and Democratization Policy Council in Berlin.

[Note: next two pages intentionally blank.]

Annex 2: BiH Respondent Profile

Bihać	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist	Ordinary citizen
Round 1	1	2	1		1			3	
Round 2		1	1		1		1	1	
Round 3			1			1	1	9 (8 in youth FG)	2

B. Petrovac	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/ NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1								5	1
Round 2								1	
Round 3		2			2		1	1	

Brčko	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1		2 (1 Maoča)				1		3	
Round 2						1		2	
Round 3		3			1		1	12 (7 in youth FG)	

Glamoč	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1		2						1	
Round 2		1						1	
Round 3		2		1				1	7

Maglaj	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1	1	1 (head of Isl. Com.)				1			2 (Bočinja)
Round 2	1					1	1		1 (Bočinja)
Round 3	1	1					1	1	10 (FG Bočinja)

Mrkonjić Grad	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1		1						1	
Round 2								1	
Round 3		1						2	6

Petrovo	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1				1					
Round 2				1					
Round 3		2 (1 M, head of Ozren monastery							

Srebrenik	Mayor	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1		2						1	
Round 2									
Round 3		3							

| Žepče | Mayor | Public | Pol. party | Teacher | Business | Journalist | Int'l com. | Activist/NGO | Ordinary |

		official	rep.				official		citizen
Round 1		2		1					
Round 2		1		1					
Round 3		2							

Respondents – Gender Breakdown

Note: some respondents may have participated in multiple rounds

	Round 1		Round 2 (Remote)		Round 3		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Bihać	1	7	3	2	9	5	13	14
Bosanski Petrovac	3	3		1	2	4	5	8
Brčko		6		3	9	8	9	17
Glamoč	1	2	1	1	6	5	8	8
Maglaj		5		4	11	3	11	12
Mrkonjić Grad		2		1	4	5	4	8
Petrovo		1		1	1	1	1	3
Srebrenik		3				3		
Žepče		3		2	1	1	1	6
Total							52	82

BiH Interviews

Note: some respondents participated in multiple rounds

	Round 1	Round 2 (Remote)	Round 3	Totals
Bihać	8	5	6	19
Bosanski Petrovac	6	1	1	8
Brčko	6	3	10	19
Glamoč	3	2	1	6
Maglaj	5	4	4	13
Mrkonjić Grad	2	1	2	5
Petrovo	1	1	2	4
Srebrenik	3		3	6
Žepče	3	2	2	7

Focus Groups - Round 3

	Female	Male	Total
Bihać	6	2	8
Bosanski Petrovac	2	3	5
Brčko	5	2	7
Glamoč	6	4	10
Mrkonjić Grad	4	3	7
Maglaj	10	0	10
Total	33	14	47

C1	Bihać
C1	Bosanski Petrovac
District	Brčko
C10	Glamoč
C4	Maglaj
RS	Mrkonjić Grad
RS	Petrovo
C3	Srebrenik
C4	Žepče

<u>Officials Interviewed:</u>

- Bihać Mayor
- Maglaj Mayor
- Srebrenik municipality representatives
- Petrovo municipality representatives
- Mrkonjić Grad municipality representatives
- Glamoč municipality representatives
- Bosanski Petrovac municipality representatives
- Žepče municipality representatives
- Brčko District representatives

Out of the total number of 134 responses either through interviews or focus groups, we spoke to 112 individuals once and with 22 individuals more than once.

Annex 3: North Macedonia Respondent Profile

Note: some respondents may have acted in multiple capacities, and have been interviewed for multiple municipalities.

Shtip	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist	Ordinary citizen	Police
Round 1	1	2			2	1		2	3	2
Round 2										
Round 3										

Veles	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen	Police
Round 1	1	2	1	1		2		3	2	1
Round 2										
Round 3										

Tetovo	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen	Police
Round 1	1	1		1	1		1	2	3	1
Round 2										
Round 3										

Chair	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen	Police

			rep.						
Round 1									
Round 2	1	1	1		1			4	1
Round 3									

Gazi Baba	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1									
Round 2	1	1	1		1			4	1
Round 3									

Struga	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1									
Round 2	1	3 (1 M, local Orthodox priest)		1		1		1	1
Round 3									

Kumanovo	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen	Police
Round 1										
Round 2										
Round 3	1	1	1			1				1

Strumica	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen	Police

Round 1									
Round 2									
Round 3	1	1			1			2	1

Gostivar	Researcher	Public official	Pol. party rep.	Teacher	Business	Journalist	Int'l com. official	Activist/NGO	Ordinary citizen
Round 1									
Round 2									
Round 3	1	1	1		1	1		1	

Respondents – Gender Breakdown

Municipality	Round	Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Chair	2	2	7	9
Gazi Baba	2	2	7	9
Kumanovo	3	0	5	5
Shtip	1	3	10	13
Veles	1	5	8	13
Strumica	3	1	5	6
Tetovo	1	2	9	11
Gostivar	3	2	4	6
Struga	2	1	7	8
Total		18	62	80

Interviewees – Gender Breakdown

Note: some respondents may have participated in multiple municipalities

Municipality	Round	Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Chair	2	2	7	9
Gazi Baba	2	2	7	9
Kumanovo	3	0	5	5
Shtip	1	0	6	6
Veles	1	1	5	6
Strumica	3	1	5	6
Tetovo	1	0	6	6
Gostivar	3	2	4	6
Struga	2	1	7	8
Total		9	52	61

Focus Groups Participants – Gender Breakdown Round 1

Municipality	Female	Male
Shtip	3	4
Veles	4	3
Tetovo	2	3
Total	9	10

Officials Interviewed:

- 1 Member of Parliament, about all municipalities
- Shtip – Member of municipal council
- Struga – 1 Orthodox priest, 1 municipality representative
- Veles – 1 Representative of the municipal social services

[This page intentionally left blank.]