

# ***Institutions and Others: Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Voting in Bosnia-Herzegovina***

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Why do voters support parties that define themselves in ethnic terms? This paper argues that ethnic voting should be understood as a choice to prioritize coethnics at the expense of ethnic others. Such a strategy is attractive only when two conditions are met: a.) ethnicity meaningfully differentiates in-group members from outsiders, and b.) voters can be assured that their ethnic group is capable of winning elections. Exploiting the unique institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, this paper shows that voters' willingness to support ethnic parties is dependent even on extremely short-term variation on these dimensions. Through an analysis of split-ticket voting, I demonstrate that Bosnian voters support ethnic parties in offices where both conditions are met, but explicitly non-ethnic parties where they are not. The results suggest that even in a country where ethnicity is extremely salient to political life, voters' support for ethnic parties is highly contingent on institutional context.

*Keywords:* electoral systems; ethnic voting; identities; split-ticket voting; decentralization; Eastern Europe

In much of the world, candidates for political office campaign on proposals to represent the interests of a specific ethnic community, and voters show a strong preference for electing coethnics to office. Individual-level explanations for this pattern focus on voter attitudes and desires, examining how voters feel about themselves and others and how those attitudes influence vote choice. Institutional explanations, on the other hand, stress the role of electoral institutions that determine which groups can win and which will lose. The former school of thought focuses on what voters want; the latter emphasizes what they can have. The link between these two approaches is human agency. Institutions could very well facilitate an ethnic groups' entry to office through democratic elections, but voters may have little reason to desire explicitly ethnic representation. Likewise, it is equally possible that the groups which desire ethnic representation have no capacity to obtain it. Building on both of these literatures, this paper disaggregates the ability of a group to win elections and the group's incentives to do so—a separation of “motive” and “means” for ethnic voting.

I argue that institutional context is highly influential in determining voters' desire to elect ethnic group representatives because it determines the fundamental power relationship between ethnic groups. Electoral rules determine how many votes a party must get to win and from which population those votes must come. In doing so, those same rules establish inter-group dynamics before the election even happens. Such electoral rules determine the communities that can be represented in the political decision-making process, and set the incentives for groups to support candidates and parties that will represent group interest. If members of an ethnic group have strong reasons to believe that ethnic outsiders will be politically powerful, and that their group

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can also elect coethnic representatives through group mobilization, they have strong reasons to politicize their own ethnic identity and support parties that campaign on the basis of ethnicity. If, however, there are few issues created by the presence of ethnic outsiders, or the group is unlikely to win on the basis of ethnic mobilization, then those group members have strong incentives to politicize cleavages, identities, and issues non-ethnic in nature.

I demonstrate the importance of both conditions through an empirical analysis of split-ticket voting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Leveraging a unique institutional context which requires voters concurrently to elect representatives to bodies where these two dimensions vary independent of each other, I show that Bosnian voters are remarkably sensitive to institutional context when deciding to support parties which actively politicize ethnicity or those that campaign on non-ethnic issues. Bosnia is a case where there are strong prior expectations for ethnic voting: ethnic identities are highly salient to everyday life, reinforced politically by constitutional protections for ethnic communities, and socially by a recent history of extreme ethnic violence. Yet even in this context, a large number of voters make sophisticated voting calculations based on what ethnic representation is likely to get them, and how likely such candidates are to win.

This paper makes two contributions to the study of ethnic politics. Theoretically, it argues that ethnic voting can only be understood in the context of the relationship between ethnic groups. While the decision to support an ethnic party is made by individual voters, the incentives for voters to do so is a product of the group-level dynamics that cannot be understood with reference to the position the group finds itself in relationship to other groups. Empirically, it employs a research design which directly observes a single group of voters simultaneously given the opportunity to vote under two separate contexts. Exploiting the idiosyncratic institutional environment of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the design allows for the observation of what is most often an unobserved counterfactual. The study uses variation in local level demographic status and a unique system of highly decentralized federalism with overlapping authority to observe how a single group of voters would vote varying their ethnic group status while holding constant other political factors.

## INSTITUTIONS AND ETHNIC VOTING

Existing explanations of ethnic voting rely on three main mechanisms. The first is that ethnic voting happens because voters see it as a way to obtain things they want from the state. Political leaders must make decisions about where to devote finite resources, and electing representatives from one's own ethnic community may be a way to divert those resources to one's own benefit.<sup>1</sup> The second form of explanation is primarily institutional, arguing that ethnic voting happens because institutions reward ethnic elites by mobilizing a coethnic constituency. In this approach, ethnic divisions are social cleavages that parties and politicians will naturally mobilize to differentiate themselves from competitors and build political constituencies, provided the institutions make it possible to win elections by doing so. The most important explanatory variable in this literature is the electoral system, with proportional representation facilitating the entry of smaller groups into office and rewarding candidates for cultivating ethnic bases of support, while majoritarian systems punish smaller groups who fail to gain a plurality of votes.<sup>2</sup> In diverse societies, institutions also interact with demographics, as the population of an ethnic group ultimately determines the maximum number of votes that elites can win by mobilizing an ethnic constituency.<sup>3</sup> The final

<sup>1</sup>Bates (1983).

<sup>2</sup>Cox (1997); Rae (1967).

<sup>3</sup>Chandra (2004); Posner (2005).

form of explanation rests on the heuristic capacity of ethnic markers to inform voters. In the absence of more credible information on the priorities and competence of parties and candidates, voters rely on ethnic cues in their leaders as a proxy for commonality of interest. Ethnic voting patterns therefore could be driven by individual-level tendencies to trust coethnics over ethnic outsiders, and assume commonality of interest in the absence of other information.<sup>4</sup>

These explanations, though, rarely address the possibility of a voter offered the choice between candidates promising to represent a constituency defined by ethnicity or by some other broader social cleavage. As a result, it is hard to understand how voters might evaluate the decision between supporting an ethnic party and a party which defines itself on non-ethnic positions. To understand the decision facing a voter in this context, it is important to appreciate how the promise to represent a specific ethnic group differs from other types of electoral campaigning. Parties that campaign on ideology, for example, promise a coherent and logically consistent package of policies. Classical liberal parties often promise to reduce the size of the state and allow for greater market-based decision making, while social democratic parties offer increased state capacity to redistribute resources. Ethnic parties, on the other hand, promise little in the way of policy consistency, but instead offer to prioritize the interests of a predetermined segment of society. Ethnic parties propose to administer the state not in a certain way, but rather to the benefit of a fixed group of citizens. As such, the appeal of an ethnic party is fundamentally based on an us-versus-them distinction. It is the promise to prioritize the interest of one set of people, even to the detriment of others. In voting for a party that claims to represent the interests of a specific group, voters are not sanctioning any specific policy, but rather the prioritization of in-group members over out-group members.

This us-versus-them division is appealing only to voters who meet two conditions. First, they must believe that there is something to gain from the redistribution of resources and the granting of special privileges to their group at the expense of another. This inherently requires the presence of an adequately threatening group of outsiders. If there is no viable group of others to speak of, a policy granting one's own group unique advantages is pointless and unnecessary. Second, they must have the reasonable expectation that their ethnic group can win the election. No rational voter would actively support an us-versus-them appeal if they were certain that they would end up on the losing side of that contest.

In this sense, there are two separate dimensions which may vary independently of each other: the policy benefits associated with ethnic representation, and the ease of electoral victory for the group. Both these dimensions are closely linked to institutional context. The voluminous literature on electoral institutions and party systems has clearly identified the crucial importance of electoral district magnitude in lessening the strategic concerns and facilitating the entry of smaller groups into government.<sup>5</sup> More proportional systems with high district magnitude lower the hurdles faced by ethnic minorities and smaller ethnic groups as fewer votes are required in order to gain entry into office, while majoritarian systems disproportionately reward larger groups with larger seat shares. This is an important—but not the only—determinant of an ethnic group's ability to win elections by mobilizing their constituencies. Since electoral districts are drawn around geographic areas, the effects of district magnitude on a group's electoral viability can vary across electoral districts even within the same country.<sup>6</sup> As such, the viability of explicitly ethnic parties depends on the distribution of the population within electoral district

<sup>4</sup>Birnir (2006); Carlson (2015); Conroy-Krutz (2013); Ferree (2006); Kuklinski and Hurley (1994); Mozaffar et al. (2003).

<sup>5</sup>Clark and Golder (2006); Duverger (1954); Kedar et al. (2016); Ordeshook and Shvetsova (1994); Stoll (2013).

<sup>6</sup>Chhibber and Kollman (1998).

boundaries.<sup>7</sup> A group which makes up a very small percentage of the population of a country as a whole but is nevertheless concentrated within electoral districts may actually be more easily able to win elections through ethnic mobilization than a larger group that is dispersed throughout several electoral districts. Some institutions explicitly acknowledge that democracy's inherent tendency to reward large groups will permanently disadvantage minorities, and establish ethnic quotas guaranteeing representation to otherwise marginalized communities.<sup>8</sup> Seats in parliament reserved for ethnic minorities, for example, guarantee representation for ethnic groups independent of the disadvantages they may face as a result of electoral rules or geographic dispersion.

What an ethnic group stands to gain by electing explicit ethnic representatives, though, is a matter separate from how easy it is to do so. Voters may benefit from electing leaders who they feel will provide them with policies producing club goods for their ethnic community, such as legal protection for the group's language, religion, or cultural practices.<sup>9</sup> Ethnic leadership may also serve as a way to facilitate patronage, and the redistribution from one group to another.<sup>10</sup> If state-controlled resources are scarce, electing leaders from one's own group who promise benefits to coethnics may be a worthwhile political strategy. All of these explanatory mechanisms have one thing in common: they require the presence of outside groups. Redistributing resources to one's coethnics is only possible if there is a viable target of appropriation: resources must first be extracted from one group to be redistributed to another. If there is no group of ethnic outsiders, then class, ideology, region, or any other social cleavage is likely to be a much more reasonable basis of voting. Likewise, legal protection for languages or religions are less important if the language or religion in question is dominant among the population. Using the power of the state to protect a group from persecution, domination, or assimilation is only a compelling issue if outside groups are strong enough to pose a threat. Voters only have incentives to demand consideration for their ethnic group when ethnic outsiders are demographically and politically strong.

Institutional and demographic considerations strongly impact voters' calculations. The more ethnic outsiders there are, the greater the incentives to elect representatives from one's own group. At the same time, if there are many voters from ethnic outsider groups, it is more difficult to win elections by mobilizing one's own group. Electoral institutions manage this demographic trade-off. The rules which determine how many votes are necessary to win office and where those votes must come from directly alter a group's ability to win office by mobilizing ethnic supporters. But this does not necessarily impact the reasons a group may have for wanting ethnic representation. In other words, motive and means are separate things: groups may have strong reasons to desire ethnic representation but difficulty achieving it, just as groups may have an easy time electing ethnic representatives, but little reason to do so.

In more general terms, this relational theory of ethnic voting proposes that a group member's likelihood to support an ethnic party is dependent on two separate factors: their group's status at the level of electoral constituency (where leaders are elected), and their group's status at the level of the polity (where political decisions are made). The more ethnic outsiders there are within a constituency, the greater the obstacles to electing ethnic representatives to power. However, the more ethnic outsiders there are within the polity, the greater the desire the group will have for electing ethnic representatives to power.

<sup>7</sup>Bochsler (2011); Lublin (2014).

<sup>8</sup>Bird (2014); Kymlicka (1995); Norris et al. (2004).

<sup>9</sup>Csergő (2007); Liu (2015); Stepan (2015).

<sup>10</sup>Chandra (2004); Fearon (1999).

	<b>Cantonal Assemblies</b>	<b>House of Representatives</b>
	1	3
Constituent People	(Either Bosniaks or Croats)	(Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs)
Territory Governed	1 of 10 ethnically homogeneous Cantons	The entire multiethnic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Polity Population	<500,000	4 Million
District Magnitude	High (21-35)	Low (3-6)
Value of Ethnic Representation	Low for Cantonal Majorities; High for Cantonal Minorities	High for Cantonal Majorities; High for Cantonal Minorities
Ease of Access for Ethnic Parties	High for Cantonal Majorities; High for Cantonal Minorities	High for Cantonal Majorities; Low for Cantonal Minorities

TABLE 1: Institutional and Demographic Differences between Cantonal Assemblies and House of Representatives

**ETHNIC VOTING IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

An ideal demonstration of the relationship between motive and means would take a single set of voters, present them with a choice between avowedly ethnic and non-ethnic parties, and randomly vary those two dimensions of interest independent of each other. While doing so in a perfectly controlled laboratory setting is not feasible, Bosnia-Herzegovina’s unique constitutional arrangement presents a valuable opportunity to measure ethnic voting under a variety of institutional settings. Under Bosnia’s complicated system of ethno-federalism, voters are asked to elect leaders to multiple governing bodies simultaneously under varying institutional contexts.

Bosnia’s post-war democracy has been called “the world’s most complicated system of government.”<sup>11</sup> Its institutional complexity is the result of the peace talks to end the Bosnian civil war in the 1990’s, when international mediators were more concerned with putting an immediate stop to ethnic violence than establishing durable state institutions. Driven by diplomatic concessions and wartime expediency, Bosnia’s current constitution has two fundamental principles: a high degree of autonomy for ethnically homogeneous units at the local level, and political power-sharing between the three dominant ethnic groups at the state level.<sup>12</sup>

Territorial autonomy is established by a system of asymmetric federalism, dividing the state in to two units referred to as “entities”: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina,<sup>13</sup> populated

<sup>11</sup>Nardelli et al. (2014).

<sup>12</sup>Some Bosnian institutions have mandatory ethnic quotas, such as the presidency, a three-person body with one president from each ethnic group elected from ethnically segregated ballots; and the upper house of parliament, composed of five members of each of the three ethnic groups appointed by sub-national entities. Each president and each ethnic caucus in the upper house can veto any legislation deemed harmful to the vital interests of their ethnic community, in theory to protect all ethnic groups against expropriation from the others. While the ethnic quota system and institutions governed by mutual veto are more commonly discussed as the most relevant institutional innovation in Bosnia, this paper will focus on the territorial division of the country into homogenous units. For a fuller explanation of the historical origins of this constitutional arrangement, see Burg and Shoup (1999) and Chandler (2000). For an overview of the workings of Bosnian consociational democracy, see Belloni (2007), Bieber (2006), and Sahadzic (2009).

<sup>13</sup>Note that “the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina” is one of two regional sub-units within the larger state of “Bosnia-Herzegovina.” “The Federation” in this paper refers to this unit, while “Bosnia” or “Bosnia-Herzegovina” refers to the state as a whole.

mostly with Croats and Bosniaks, and the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska. The Federation is itself federal, composed of ten cantons. Cantons are much more ethnically homogeneous than the country as a whole. Partially as the result of wartime migration and ethnic cleansing, ethnic communities are geographically concentrated within cantonal boundaries. This geographic concentration is further reinforced by official legal recognition linking the cantons to specific ethnic communities, formally granting special protected status to specific languages (either Bosnian or Croatian) and the use of nationalist symbols in cantonal documents and buildings.<sup>14</sup> Territorial ethnic homogeneity is far from perfect, though, as it is essentially impossible to draw a territorial boundary that perfectly includes a single ethnic group while excluding all others. Moreover, while the boundaries between cantons and entities have not changed since the end of the war, internal migration and refugee returns have served to increase the ethnic diversity of cities and towns. As a result, while cantons can be said to be much more ethnically homogeneous than the country as a whole, a significant number of people find themselves on the “wrong” side of a cantonal border, living in cantons that are legally defined as belonging to another ethnic group.

In addition, cantons are both politically autonomous, and the territorial bases of the districts which elect the lower house of the parliament governing the country as a whole. In a single election, Bosnians living in the Federation will cast votes both for a local Cantonal Assembly, and the country-wide House of Representatives. Bosnia’s system of cantonal federalism creates a high degree of overlapping authority between the central and local governments. Both levels are empowered to set policies regarding taxation, social services, education, and public works. While the high degree of autonomy for the cantons means largely similar competencies for both levels of government,<sup>15</sup> voting for the two levels of government takes place under very different institutional rules and demographic environments. When casting a vote for the Cantonal Assembly, a voter is part of a much smaller, much more ethnically homogeneous polity than that which is governed by the country-wide House of Representatives. Since Cantonal Assemblies are fairly large, and use the canton as a whole as a single electoral district, the district magnitude is extremely high, ranging between twenty-one and thirty-five. In the House of Representatives, district magnitude is much lower, ranging from three to six.

The crucial differences between Cantonal Assemblies and the House of Representatives are shown in Table 1. As cantons are relatively homogeneous, the position of cantonal ethnic majority groups is relatively secure. For these voters, there are relatively few ethnic outsiders within cantonal borders, and thus little threat of oppression or expropriation. At the same time, the high district magnitude of the Cantonal Assembly allows even very small groups to win seats in the Cantonal Assembly. The House of Representatives controls a much more diverse territory, where all groups must govern in the presence of two other groups. At the same time, a much more restrictive district magnitude creates much higher obstacles for smaller groups to enter government.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Which ethnic group a canton “belongs” to is often made abundantly clear through the use of ethnic symbols and terminology. Bosniak cantons refer to themselves as “*kantoni*,” a word which entered the Bosnian and Serbian languages by way of the various languages of Switzerland. Croat cantons refer to themselves as “*županije*,” the same administrative term used to denote the sub-national counties in Croatia.

<sup>15</sup>The main difference in authority between the state level and the canton level is foreign policy and defense. However, even in this area Cantonal Assemblies are more powerful than subnational governments in many countries. Cantons are even free to conduct their own international trade negotiations with other countries, an institutional quirk negotiated mainly to allow Croat cantons to arrange for special trade deals with Croatia.

<sup>16</sup>The Bosnian constitution also contains compensatory mandates, which are intended to offset the purely territorial allocation of seats in the state parliament. These seats bring the incentives of small groups and large groups closer together,

In this context, only two types of voters meet both conditions which I have argued produce the strongest incentives for ethnic voting: cantonal-level majorities voting at the state level, and cantonal-level minorities voting in the cantonal level. This divergence produces four testable hypotheses about the ways in which ethnic voting will systematically vary between elections for Cantonal Assemblies and the election for the House of Representatives. The first is that vote share for ethnically identified and non-ethnically identified parties will vary between cantonal and state-level elections. As the institutional context creates very different relationships between ethnic groups at the different levels of government, the rate of ethnic voting should not remain consistent between the two levels. The second is that ethnic voting in elections for the House of Representatives will decline in proportion to those votes going to ethnic minority parties for the Cantonal Assembly. While ethnic voting in the Cantonal Assembly election is likely for those who find themselves as minorities within their canton, those same voters have strategic incentives to support non-ethnic parties in the House of Representatives, and this change in ethnic party support should be observable in voting patterns.

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Vote share for ethnically identified and non-ethnically identified parties will vary between cantonal and state-level elections.

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** Ethnic voting (defined as voting for a party explicitly representing a specific ethnic group) in elections for the House of Representatives will decline in proportion to those votes going to ethnic minority parties for the Cantonal Assembly.

However, since cantonal-level majority groups have an incentive to support ethnic parties in the House of Representatives, we should also see that a certain portion of voters supporting non-ethnic parties in the Cantonal Assemblies should switch their vote to support ethnic parties in the House of Representatives. This increase in ethnic voting in the House of Representatives should be seen only in increased support for parties representing cantonal majorities, as cantonal minority group members have greater reason to suspect they may not clear the hurdles to winning elections due to their smaller population.

**HYPOTHESIS 3a:** Ethnic voting in elections for the House of Representatives will increase in proportion to those votes going to non-ethnically identified parties for the Cantonal Assembly.

**HYPOTHESIS 3b:** Increases in ethnic voting in the House of Representatives Elections will be driven by increased support for parties representing local ethnic majorities.

## DATA COLLECTION

To measure ethnic voting in Bosnia, I rely on a novel data set codings all political parties contesting election in the Federation for statewide and cantonal elections from 2006-2014. I first obtained a list of all political parties directly from the Bosnian Central Election Commission. I then coded all political parties as either ethnic parties representing Bosniaks, ethnic parties representing Croats, ethnic parties representing Serbs, or non-ethnic parties. This was done based on party

offsetting the disadvantage that local-level minority groups would face. However, the bulk of seats in parliament are nevertheless assigned through territorial voting, as three times as many seats are elected from the territorial constituencies.

platforms, party information, candidate declarations, and mission statements downloaded from publicly available political party websites and social media. In coding parties, I follow Chandra's (2004) standards of ascription, exclusion, and centrality. First, ethnic parties clearly identify their organization with a specific descent-based social group. Second, they exclude other ethnic groups from their party, making it obvious who the "outsiders" are who will not benefit from the policies enacted by the party once in power. Finally, they make their ethnic identity central to their party identity, and make defending the ethnic group and its interests the central mission of the party's political agenda.<sup>17</sup>

The standard employed is whether or not a reasonably intelligent voter would be able to clearly and quickly identify which ethnic group a party claimed to support using information made available by the party itself. While such qualitative coding requires a certain degree of subjectivity, in the Bosnian context it is usually abundantly clear which group the party represents. Many parties view the ethnic cue as so important to their brand that the name of the party includes the name of the ethnic group, such as in the case of the Croatian Democratic Union, or The Bosniak National Party. Many others employ nationalist symbols in their logo and campaign materials, such as the Bosniak fleur-de-lys,<sup>18</sup> or the Croat red-and-white checkerboard.<sup>19</sup> Given the prominent role that ethnic cleavages play in daily life, Bosnian political discourse does not shy away from explicit declarations of ethnocentrism. The Croatian Republican Party (HRS), for instance, says in its program declaration<sup>20</sup> that its guiding principle is to guarantee "the equality of the Croat people with all others." This message is typical of the way in which ethnic political parties communicate with their voters, turning all political issues into aspects of a larger, inter-ethnic struggle. Non-ethnic parties, on the other hand, consistently make explicit denunciations of ethno-nationalist rivals in their campaign materials. By way of example, the Social Democratic Party, the successor to the Bosnian communist party and historically the most electorally successful non-ethnic party in Bosnia, explicitly asks voters to support "a new vision... against the increasing ethno-nationalist tendencies which threaten to dissolve Bosnia-Herzegovina."<sup>21</sup>

The criteria result in some potentially controversial coding decisions, mainly because it defines parties as ethnic or non-ethnic based on their own declarations, rather than the ethnicity of their candidates or supporters. The definition breaks with other prominent studies,<sup>22</sup> and may raise some concerns in the Bosnian context as many parties which claim to be non-ethnic are supported almost exclusively by a single ethnic group. Many Bosnia specialists maintain that these parties are simply ethnic parties in disguise, hiding ethnic exclusionary agendas behind multiethnic rhetoric and parading token ethnic outsiders on candidate lists to gain a semblance of inclusionary legitimacy. Šedo (2010), for instance, classifies the Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (SzBiH) as a Bosniak nationalist party, whereas I classify it as a non-ethnic party. There are

<sup>17</sup>For a comparison of this conceptualization of ethnic parties with other understandings and definitions used in the literature on ethnic voting, see Chandra (2011).

<sup>18</sup>The fleur-de-lys is a medieval symbol, dating to the 14th century pre-Ottoman rulers of the Kingdom of Bosnia. During the Bosnian War, Bosniak military forces resurrected the medieval herald as combat insignia, as it had been the most recent symbol of an independent and sovereign Bosnia. The fleur-de-lys became synonymous with ethnic Bosniak interests, and today is seen as an ethnically polarizing symbol. It is so contentious that keeping the fleur-de-lys off the official flag of the newly formed country became an important point of contention during the Dayton peace discussions for the Croat and Serb delegations. See Pauker (2012).

<sup>19</sup>The *šahovnica*, or "chessboard" is also a medieval symbol, representing Croatia for hundreds of years. It was also used in military insignia during the Bosnian War, and is still used today in the flag of the Republic of Croatia.

<sup>20</sup>Hrvatska Republikanska Stranka (2014).

<sup>21</sup>Socijaldemokratska Partija BiH (2014).

<sup>22</sup>Horowitz (1985).

admittedly convincing reasons to label the SzBiH as an ethnic party: its political support comes mostly from Bosniak areas, and it was originally formed as a result of an internal rift within the front-running Bosniak ethnic party. Its founder, Haris Silajdžić, has been elected to the Bosniak seat of the state presidency, and is a vocal advocate of a constitutional amendment to abolish the ethnic entity system entirely in favor of a single, unitary Bosnian state. Many see such a policy as a threat to the Croat and Serb communities, who would likely be electorally overwhelmed in such a state by the larger Bosniak population, making such a proposal a thinly-veiled ethnic appeal.

Yet even if the party's appeal is limited to Bosniak voters, those appeals are made in non-ethnic terms. The party presents itself as the champion of specific policies, not a specific identity group. By classifying this party as non-ethnic, the coding scheme more accurately reflects the decisions and the positions taken by the party leadership in soliciting voter support. Moreover, since the empirical strategy of this paper examines voter support for ethnic and non-ethnic parties, classifying parties as ethnic or non-ethnic based on their voter support is tautological and inappropriate. A strategy based on party signaling not only avoids this methodological problem, but creates a coding standard more closely corresponding to the information provided to voters when making their voting decisions, and thus more useful in explaining how voters make the decision to support an ethnic party.

Due to extremely permissive party registration laws, the Bosnian political landscape is extremely fragmented. The voting results data contained 149 different political parties, pre-electoral coalitions, and individual candidates who registered to contest elections in Bosnia over the period under study. Many of these registered parties were duplicates or alternate abbreviations of parties and candidates listed elsewhere. After consolidating the list of parties registered with the Bosnian Election Commission to eliminate these discrepancies, I was left with 91 unique parties, coalitions, and individual candidates. Of the 91 registered electoral choices, 20 of them were independent candidates or parties so small that they had no trace in the public record that I could find. I therefore drop these votes from the data set, treating them as if the people who had voted for these candidates had simply abstained. Since these parties are extremely small and had very low levels of support, it is not expected that they should systematically bias the analysis in any direction. In total, the coding scheme covers 98.48 per cent of all votes cast in all elections under study.

## ANALYSIS OF ETHNIC AND NON-ETHNIC VOTING

Conventional wisdom holds that most voting is ethnic voting in Bosnia. While this is indeed the case, the degree to which this is true may have been overstated. Pooling cantonal and state-level elections over the three electoral cycles surveyed, only 51.75 per cent of the vote went to parties explicitly identifying as ethnic. Figure 1 shows a scatterplot of ethnic voting. Each dot represents a precinct, with the  $x$ -axis indicating vote share in that precinct that went to ethnic parties at the cantonal level, and the  $y$ -axis indicating ethnic vote share in the House of Representatives. Those dots on the 45° line represent precincts where voters supported ethnic and non-ethnic parties in equal proportions in elections for Cantonal Assemblies and the House of Representatives. Points above the line are those precincts which supported ethnic parties at a higher level in the House of Representatives than they did in the Cantonal Assemblies, and those below the line represent lower levels of ethnic party support in the House of Representatives than in the Cantonal Assemblies. While a large number of precincts are concentrated on the 45° line, a significant number of precincts deviate substantially, suggesting a high degree of split-ticket voting between

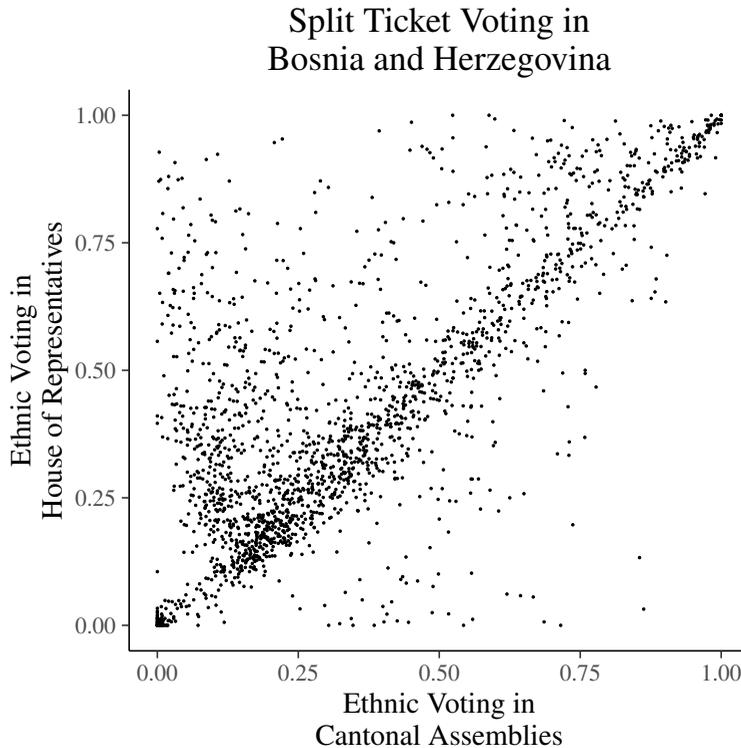


Figure 1: Ethnic Voting Scatterplot

ethnic and non-ethnic parties. Moreover, points are scattered both above and below the 45° line, suggesting that some voters have switched their votes in favor of ethnic parties at the state level, while others have moved away from ethnic parties. At the extremes, in the upper-left corner and the lower-right corner, are those precincts which saw almost total shifts between ethnic and non-ethnic parties, with virtually every single voter switching their vote from ethnic to non-ethnic (or vice-versa) in a single election.

Figure 1 shows that even in a country like Bosnia, where ethnicity is extremely relevant to many aspects of social and political life, identity alone is not sufficient to predict voting behavior. Substantial numbers of voters are voting splitting their tickets between ethnic and non-ethnic parties even in the context of the same election. Of the 8,311 precincts covered in the study, 1,272 saw a change in ethnic voting (in either direction) of more than twenty-five per cent.

#### *Local majority/minority status as independent variable*

I use ecological regression analysis in order to identify patterns in split-ticket voting to test Hypotheses 2, 3a, and 3b. In the absence of individual-level data, ecological regression represents the best possible way to generate estimates of individual-level ticket splitting. Ecological regression of this form has been used in other studies of voting behavior, where voter characteristics are theoretically relevant but empirically difficult to measure at the individual level. It has been commonly used to study voting differences based on gender or race in heterogeneous electoral

districts. However, this approach differs from techniques of ecological inference.<sup>23</sup> While ecological inference has been used to measure the voting behavior of ethnic groups, it requires an assumption that all members of an identified group follow the same distribution of voting behaviors. The hypotheses in this paper reject that assumption. I argue that members of the same group will likely follow very different patterns of voting depending on local context. In order to avoid the ecological fallacy, I instead rely on the assumption that anyone who votes for an ethnic party at either cantonal or state levels is a member of that group. I assume that no one would support an ethnic party of one group at one level, but the party of another group at another.<sup>24</sup>

In my regression analysis, I use a mixed effects model, where the dependent variable is the difference in ethnic voting in a given precinct between the cantonal legislative election and the state legislative election. A value greater than zero in the dependent variable indicates that ethnic parties did better at the state level than they did at the cantonal level, whereas a negative value in the dependent variable indicates that non-ethnic parties did better at the state level than the cantonal level. When the dependent variable is zero, support for ethnic parties and non-ethnic parties did not change between cantonal and state-level elections. Three separate regressions are run with the independent variable indicating the share of the vote going to ethnic parties representing the cantonal-level majority group, the cantonal-level minority group, or non-ethnic parties.<sup>25</sup> The models must be run separately: since nearly all votes are coded as belonging to one of the three categories, vote shares of all three measures sum to one in almost all precincts, and including all three measures in a single model specification introduces near-perfect collinearity. The mixed effects model specification includes fixed and random effects for cantons nested within years. This allows for intercepts to vary by canton, and controls for some important theoretical concerns and other possible explanations of split-ticket voting. Burden and Kimball (2009) argue that split-ticket voting is a result of contest-specific factors, especially candidate quality. They note that in the context of the United States, elections allow voters to vote for individuals rather than parties, and an especially popular or competent candidate may be able to overcome partisan attachment in a specific race. While somewhat lessened in the Bosnian context, this concern is not completely irrelevant. Bosnian political parties have very strong brands, and are generally controlled by recognizable party leaders. The highly fragmented party system and relative ease of starting a new political party is such that strong individual candidates typically form their own parties if they develop a large enough following on their own. Nevertheless, an open-list system does give Bosnian voters the chance to cross party lines at different levels of government, which they may very well do if a specific candidate on a party list is highly appealing. If, for example, an especially popular non-ethnic candidate was campaigning at the state level, those who voted for ethnic parties at the state level but switched to vote for that particular candidate would drive increases in ethnic voting at the state level correlated with non-ethnic voting at the cantonal level, introducing omitted variable bias. Including fixed effects in the model controls for this effect as candidate quality would be constant at the cantonal level. The random effects component

<sup>23</sup>King (1997).

<sup>24</sup>See Cho (1998), Freedman et al. (1991), Gosnell (1957), Grofman and Davidson (1992), King (1997), and Loewen and Grofman (1989).

<sup>25</sup>Bosniaks are classified as the majority group in Una-Sana, Tuzla, Zenica-Doboj, and Sarajevo. Croats are classified as the majority group in Posavina, Bosnian Podrinje, West Herzegovina, and Livno. Two Cantons, Central Bosnia and Herzegovina-Neretva, are “mixed”, which entails no legal designation of a dominant ethnic group and requires special protection for both Croats and Bosniaks. In the statistical analysis that follows, I exclude these two cantons, as majority/minority distinctions are not readily apparent. For a study which compares mixed cantons to those with a clear majority group, see Hulsey (2010).

Mixed Effects Analysis			
Dependent Variable is Change in Ethnic			
Voting Between House of Representatives			
and Cantonal Assembly Elections			
Majority	-.126***		
Parties	(.012)		
Minority		-.331***	
Parties		(.014)	
Non-ethnic			.262***
Parties			(.009)
Conditional			
$R^2$	.550	.624	.661
$N$	6428	6428	6428

Standard Errors in Parentheses.

\*: $p < .05$ ; \*\*: $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*: $p < .001$

TABLE 2: Regression Results

also allows for correlation in the errors within cantons, and nationwide within specific electoral contests.

The estimated coefficients therefore reflect the share of the voters who voted for either ethnic majority parties, ethnic minority parties, or non-ethnic parties at the cantonal level but switched their vote at the state level. The sign on the coefficient also indicates the “direction”—in this case, whether in favor of ethnic parties (a positive estimate) or in favor of non-ethnic parties (a negative estimate). Because the dependent variable is vote share, a one-unit change in the dependent variable would indicate a change from none of the votes to all of the votes in a precinct going to the indicated type of party. In other words, the estimates can be understood as indicating the probability that a single voter will change their vote between cantonal levels and state levels.<sup>26</sup>

Table 2 shows the results of these regressions. The models show that a voter who supports a cantonal-level ethnic majority group party has a roughly thirteen per cent chance—or roughly one in eight—of changing their vote to support a non-ethnic party at the state level. However, the estimate on cantonal-level ethnic minority parties is substantially higher. Nearly one in three voters who are minorities at the cantonal level changed their vote to support a non-ethnic party at the national level, supporting Hypothesis 2. As local-level minorities, the ethnic division is most salient to these voters at both cantonal and national levels. But since they are most likely to win office only at the cantonal level, they are better served by casting their votes for non-ethnic parties at the state level.

Likewise, the positive coefficient on the non-ethnic parties suggests that a voter who supports a non-ethnic party for a cantonal-level election has a roughly one in four chance of switching her vote to support an ethnic party at the state level, which supports Hypothesis 3. As the state is much more ethnically diverse than the canton, ethnic distinctions are more meaningful there, and

<sup>26</sup>The two least populous cantons, Livno and Posavina, are Croat cantons which are combined with Bosniak cantons in state-level electoral districts. This means that a Croat in these two Cantons is a local-level majority group member, but still a minority within their electoral district. In the regression analysis that follows, I separate these precincts as a unique subset of the data.

Analysis of Increases in Ethnic Voting		
	Change in Majority Ethnic Party Vote Share	Change in Minority Ethnic Party Vote Share
Multiethnic Party Share	.206*** (.008)	.053*** (.006)
Conditional $R^2$	.676	.400
$N$	6428	6428

Standard Errors in Parentheses.

\*: $p < .05$ ; \*\*: $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*: $p < .001$

TABLE 3: Disaggregated Dependent Variable

thus these groups stand to gain more through ethnic representation at the state level than they do at the canton, and thus have stronger incentives to support ethnic parties there.

Increases in ethnic voting at the state level should be driven by votes going to parties that represent cantonal majority groups. Since those groups have a much greater likelihood of actually winning office, ethnic majority group members are more likely to support ethnic parties than ethnic minority group members. The dependent variable specified in the three models above is the difference in ethnic voting, and cannot differentiate between ethnic voting increases in majority or minority groups. I therefore run two more regressions, this time using difference in canton-level majority and minority ethnic party support as the dependent variable, and the non-ethnic party share at the cantonal level as the independent variable. Table 3 shows these results, and confirms the predictions of Hypothesis 3*b*. Roughly one in five voters who support non-ethnic parties at the cantonal level switch their vote to support parties of the local level majority group, whereas only one in twenty voters who supported non-ethnic parties switched to support canton-level minority parties.

I have argued that local level demographic circumstances are strong predictors of ethnic voting behavior, and that majority or minority status should affect all voters regardless of which specific group they belong to. In other words, it is less important whether a voter is a Croat or a Bosniak than whether they are a member of a cantonal minority or majority group. If we could hold the voter's ethnic identity constant, but vary whether that identity group is a majority or minority group within their district, we should observe variation in voting behavior. While it is not possible to randomize group status, it is possible to compare group behavior across regions, exploiting the fact that in the Bosnian context the same groups can be majorities or minorities depending on which canton they find themselves in. I do this in Figure 2.

These plots show the differences in the coefficients discussed in Table 2 disaggregated by ethnic group. These wider confidence intervals around Croat cantons are a result of different sample sizes. Since Croats are approximately fifteen per cent of the population of the country, whereas Bosniaks are roughly fifty per cent of the country, there are more Bosniak-majority precincts in the dataset than there are Croat-majority precincts. Disaggregating by specific ethnic group thus results in more precise estimates for Bosniaks than it does for Croats. Nevertheless, the majority/minority distinction seems to matter more than specific ethnic identification. The coefficients for majority share in Bosniak cantons and majority share in Croat cantons overlap (i.e., a Croat living in a Croat canton who voted for a Croat party at the cantonal level has roughly the same chance of changing her vote to a non-ethnic party as a Bosniak living in a Bosniak

## Change in Ethnic Voting Between Cantonal and State Parliaments

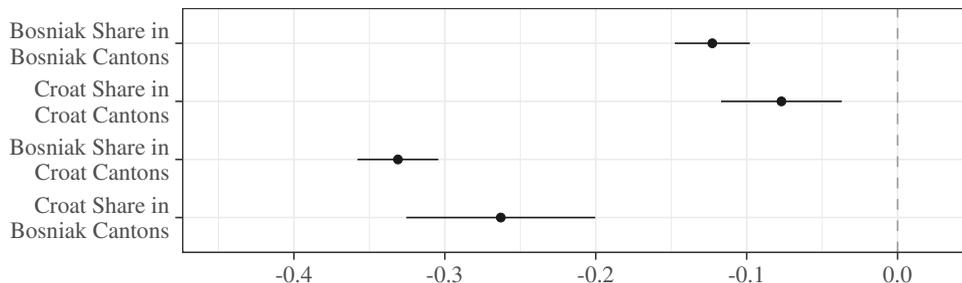


Figure 2: Comparison by Group: 2006-2014

canton who voted for a Bosniak party). Likewise, the coefficients for minority share in Bosniak cantons and minority share in Croat cantons overlap (i.e., a Croat living in a Bosniak canton who voted for a Croat party at the cantonal level has roughly the same chance of changing her vote to a non-ethnic party as a Bosniak living in a Croat canton who voted for a Bosniak party). The differences between groups given majority or minority status are not statistically significant. However, the differences between majority and minority do not overlap, as the differences between them are statistically significant. All this suggests that a local level minority group member is more likely to behave the same way as local-level minority group member of the other ethnicity than she is as coethnics living in areas where they are the majority. When it comes to ticket-splitting, local demographic and institutional context matter more than a specific group attachment.

### INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS

Ethnicity is an individual-level characteristic, but an election is a group activity. While individuals may incorporate their own identities into their voting calculations, social and political context matters. Even in Bosnia, a country with visible scars of ethnic violence and institutions designed to encourage ethnic representation, voters do not blindly support politicians who promise to deliver benefits to coethnics. Instead, many voters rationally assess what they are likely to gain from ethnic representation in light of the potential actions and capabilities of ethnic outsiders, and how feasible it is to elect those representatives to positions of power.

In many ways, Bosnia is a hard case for any theory predicting flexibility in ethnic voting. The country has a recent history of extreme ethnic conflict,<sup>27</sup> and its institutions are designed to encourage the representation of ethnic groups. Ethnic divisions are reinforced by the social and economic life of the country, and ethnicity is highly salient to everyday lived experience. Yet even in this environment, the analysis presented here shows that voters do not default to ethnic identities when voting, but rather incorporate their ethnic identities into complex calculations about what they have to gain by electing coethnics to positions of power.

<sup>27</sup>Hadzic et al. (2020).

This paper agrees with recent work suggesting that ethnic voting is ultimately about the provision of policy goods, and that both institutional and demographic context are important to understanding why voters support ethnic parties.<sup>28</sup> It also joins recent work suggesting that the relevance of identity for national politics may be dependent on variables operating at local and sub-national levels.<sup>29</sup> Integrating these findings, this paper also emphasizes the need to develop research designs which avoid establishing a false dichotomy when trying to explain the relationship between institutions and ethnic representation. Whether or not institutions encourage ethnic voting is an important question with a long history in political science.<sup>30</sup> This study shows that Bosnian institutions have both encouraged and discouraged ethnic voting among voters, even those belonging to the same ethnic group living in the same country. The decision to support an ethnic party is ultimately a strategic calculation based not only on a voter's identity, but also their group's relationship to other groups, and the institutional context in which those groups find themselves. An understanding of the political and demographic relationship between ethnic groups and the way electoral institutions change what each group can reasonably expect to obtain by electing ethnic representatives is therefore crucial to understanding ethnic voting.

More broadly, the findings suggest that ethnic voting must be understood with reference to the relationships between groups. Voters may indeed have strong personal attachments to their own ethnic identity. Yet voters have other identities beyond ethnicity, and may have other political goals and priorities beyond ethnic representation. Ethnicity is influential on voting behavior, but not deterministic. Voters ultimately have agency and the capacity to make decisions, and are likely to consider whether voting for an ethnic party is truly the best option available to them given the context in which they find themselves. This appreciation of voter agency helps to unpack the mechanisms by which institutions impact ethnic voting.

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<sup>28</sup>Huber (2017).

<sup>29</sup>Dancygier (2017); Ichino and Nathan (2013); Kasara (2013); Robinson (2020).

<sup>30</sup>See, e.g., Brancati (2006), Dunning and Nilekani (2013) and Mitchell et al. (2009).

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