

The Separation Equation

Individual Preferences Toward Territorial Politics in the Modern State

by

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Submitted to
The Doctoral School of Political Science,
Public Policy, and International Relations
Central European University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

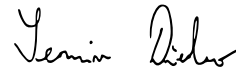
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Vienna, Austria
2025

Declaration

I, the undersigned Semir Dzebo, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Central European University Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations, declare herewith that the present thesis, apart from Chapter 2 which is co-authored with Erin K. Jenne and Levente Littvay, is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of work of others, and no part the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree. This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the underlying motivational structures shaping territorial preferences across distinct sociopolitical and territorial configurations. Through three independent empirical investigations, the analysis explores the psychological foundations of boundary reconfiguration politics, making significant contributions to understanding secessionist and irredentist phenomena beyond conventional ethno-nationalist paradigms and well-studied Western cases. Despite contextual differences across cases, the research finds that territorial preferences are predominantly shaped by two interconnected factors: a foundational identity dimension enabling populations to perceive themselves as distinct from outgroups, thereby generating desires for self-governance, and economic grievances, manifesting as immediate consequences of perceived alien governance.

Building upon these insights, the second study explores the relationship between populism and secessionism in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where leader Milorad Dodik employs populist-secessionist rhetoric. Contrary to theoretical expectations, individuals with stronger populist attitudes—particularly anti-elitism—demonstrate lower support for both secession and Dodik’s party. This counterintuitive finding likely reflects Dodik’s long-standing position of power, where his administration is regarded as the established elite despite its anti-elite rhetoric. Traditional factors, including ethnic identification, ingroup bias, and economic grievances, prove substantially stronger predictors of secessionist attitudes than populist sentiments, revealing that populist-secessionist discourse functions primarily as an elite-level strategy without the corresponding public resonance.

The third study ventures beyond secession to examine irredentism, analyzing preference formation from the perspective of citizens in a potential irredentist state rather than a separatist region. Through a survey experiment with 1,050 Serbian adults, the research examines how domestic budgetary costs and nationalist primes affect support across multiple kin-state policy domains. While cost priming significantly reduces support for economic and cultural assistance programs, it shows minimal impact on attitudes toward territorial revision. Similarly, nationalist appeals boost support for general assistance but can even backfire for border changes, possibly reflecting historical learning from past territorial conflicts. Importantly, the findings demonstrate that citizens respond differently to information environments when evaluating general assistance policies versus territorial revision, challenging frameworks that conceptualize kin-state preferences as unified constructs.

Collectively, these investigations advance scholarship by connecting macro-level theories with micro-foundational evidence, illuminating the psychological mechanisms underlying territorial preferences. These findings acquire heightened salience amid contemporary territorial reconfigurations worldwide. By revealing the psychological underpinnings of separatist impulses, this research enables the identification of latent separatism before its manifestation as conflict, thereby facilitating preemptive interventions addressing fundamental grievances before their escalation into destructive mobilization.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Erin K. Jenne and supervisory panel member, Levente (Levi) Littvay. Without their expertise and guidance, this dissertation would have never seen the light of day.

I have admired Erin's teaching and writing since taking her course *Nationalism, Populism, and Ethnic Conflict Management in Eastern Europe* during my MA studies at Central European University (CEU). It was this class that sparked my interest in the topics that I would eventually research and cover in this dissertation—which is why I was thrilled when she agreed to be my PhD supervisor. When I was struggling to refine my research question(s) and find direction for this project, she was always available for a meeting at *Kávétársaság* that would invariably give me inspiration and clarity about my direction. Her patience and unwavering support proved essential during periods when progress seemed elusive. She was always a tireless advocate on my behalf. Even while on leave living in Maputo, she provided opportunities for me by hiring me to do populism speech coding, which eventually turned into one of my major research interests. This work led me to meet numerous scholars in the field and recently culminated in several co-authored pieces. Through her genuine enthusiasm for my research and her gift for asking precisely the right questions, she guided me toward the most productive paths of inquiry, helping shape both this work and my development as a scholar.

I am equally indebted to Levi, whose path somehow never crossed mine until Erin introduced me to him to be a TA for their *American Politics and Foreign Policy* course. Since this was during the height of the pandemic, we collaborated remotely on this and several other projects for nearly two years before we finally met in person—a moment that felt like our hundredth encounter rather than our first. Levi truly went above and beyond in helping me not only complete this dissertation but also become a better scholar. Knowing I could count on his feedback to turn my scattered drafts into coherent manuscripts is what kept me writing even when I questioned whether my efforts would yield meaningful results. He taught me the research skills I had hoped to acquire when beginning my PhD, spending hours troubleshooting code with me over Zoom, and clarifying concepts I struggled to grasp. His contagious can-do attitude made me believe that no obstacle is insurmountable. Beyond his academic mentorship, his generosity manifested in numerous ways: opening his home to me when visiting for conferences or workshops, serving world-class coffee, and showing me parts of Budapest I had not seen before.

Erin and Levi were instrumental not only in the development of this dissertation but in shaping my entire doctoral journey. I am incredibly fortunate and deeply grateful to call them both friends and mentors. Their influence extends far beyond these pages, and I aspire to one day provide the same guidance, patience, and encouragement to my own students that they so generously gave me. The academic and personal standards they exemplify will continue to motivate me throughout my career.

I am also deeply grateful to other faculty who contributed significantly to this work and my

academic growth. Christopher LaRoche’s detailed and insightful commentary on the supervisory panel was instrumental in helping me understand the broader implications of my research. I am particularly thankful to Kirk Hawkins, not only for our collaborative research but especially for his kindness and perceptive comments on portions of this dissertation. My sincere appreciation also extends to Gabriel Cepaluni and Michael T. Dorsch for the co-authored research we conducted and for convincing me to invest time in learning L^AT_EX.

I would like to express my overall gratitude to CEU for the generous financial assistance provided throughout my postgraduate studies. I would not be who I am without CEU. I am deeply thankful to everyone in the Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy, and International Relations for creating an intellectually stimulating and supportive environment. Special appreciation goes to the DSPS coordinators Monica Lafaire, Ingy Kassem, and Eszter Fugedi, whose responsiveness and assistance whenever I had administrative questions made navigating bureaucracy smoother.

I would like to thank everyone in my DSPS PhD cohort who made my time in Budapest (and Vienna) enjoyable: Ameni, Elisabeta, Erlin, Eszter, Freya, James, Kirill, Krisztina, Krystof, Ricardo, Taraf, and Viktoriia. Their camaraderie and intellectual exchanges made the challenges of doctoral studies more bearable and even enjoyable. I would also like to thank my friends in Bosnia: Haris, Rešo, and Taib for their lifelong friendship. Our cherished moments together provided the necessary respite from academic demands.

Beyond academia, my foundation lies in my family, to whom I dedicate this dissertation. As the first person in my family to attend university, I am eternally grateful for the hard work and sacrifice that made this achievement possible. To my grandparents, for instilling in me the value of an education, even though they did not have the opportunity to pursue one themselves. To my parents, Hasiba and Fuad—*mama i baba, hvala vam za sve što ste uradili za mene. Ništa od ovoga ne bi bilo moguće bez vas.* To my sister Samra, whose exceptional sense of humor brightens my days. To my in-laws and everyone else in my family who has been a part of this process. Most profoundly, I thank my wife Claire whom I met on my first day at CEU and who has been with me every step of the way during my PhD journey. She was always there to listen to my ideas, provide detailed feedback, proofread countless drafts, and most importantly, lift me up when I truly needed it. I am beyond fortunate to have her in my life, and words cannot fully express the depth of my gratitude for her love and constant belief in me.

Table of Contents

1	Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Literature review	2
1.3	Methodology	6
1.4	Theoretical and Methodological Contribution	10
2	Chapter 2: “My Own Private Idaho”: A Survey of Separatist Attitudes in the Pacific Northwest	13
2.1	Introduction	13
2.2	Why Separate?	17
2.2.1	Identity Theories	18
2.2.2	Fears Theories	18
2.2.3	Economic Theories	19
2.3	Data and Methods	19
2.4	Discussion of Results	23
2.5	Conclusion	26
3	Chapter 3: Unpacking Populist Secessionism: Elite Discourse and Mass Attitudes in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina	28
3.1	Introduction	28
3.2	Populist Secessionism: Theory and Evidence	32
3.2.1	Strategic Logic and Elite-Level Dynamics	32
3.2.2	Mass Attitudes and Competing Explanations	34
3.3	A Recent History of Secessionism in Republika Srpska	35
3.4	Dodik’s Populist Rhetoric: Fueling Secessionism in Republika Srpska	38
3.4.1	People-Centrism: Invoking Popular Sovereignty for Secession	38
3.4.2	Anti-Elitism: A Three-Front War Against the People’s Enemies	40
3.4.3	Manichaeon Politics: Moral Absolutism in the Struggle for Secession	41
3.5	Data and Methods	42
3.6	Results	43

3.7	Discussion	49
3.8	Conclusion	51
4	Chapter 4: Information and Identity: How Information Environments Shape Support for Kin-State Policies in Serbia	55
4.1	Introduction	55
4.2	Case Selection: Serbia as a Kin-State in Post-Yugoslav Space	57
4.3	Literature Review	61
4.3.1	Kin State Politics: From Irredentism to Virtual Nationalism	61
4.3.2	Information Environments and Public Opinion Formation in International Politics	63
4.4	Hypotheses	65
4.5	Data and Methods	67
4.6	Results	70
4.6.1	Domain-Specific Effects of Information Environments on Kin-State Policy Preferences	70
4.6.2	Empirical Validation of Policy Dimension Distinctiveness through Factor Analysis	73
4.6.3	Treatment Effects Across Specific Forms of Assistance and Border Revision Justifications	76
4.6.4	Demographic and Geographic Determinants of Policy Preferences	78
4.7	Discussion	80
4.8	Conclusion	83
5	Chapter 5: Conclusion: Beyond Borders, Within Minds	85
A	Appendix to Chapter 2	91
A.1	Survey Procedures	91
A.2	Descriptive Statistics	92
A.3	Multiple Comparison-Adjusted Regression Results	93
A.4	Sensitivity Analysis of Model Specifications	94
A.5	Questionnaire	96
B	Appendix to Chapter 3	103
B.1	Robustness Checks	103
B.2	Exploratory Analyses of Educational and Mediating Effects	107
B.2.1	Educational Effects	107
B.2.2	Mediating Mechanisms	108
B.3	Questionnaire	110

C	Appendix to Chapter 4	121
C.1	Data Validation and Representativeness	121
C.2	Experimental Design and Treatment Effects	122
C.3	Primary Model Specification	123
C.4	Probability Distribution of Treatment Effects in the Primary Model	124
C.5	Robustness Analyses and Alternative Model Specifications	124
C.5.1	Weighted Analysis and Composite Indices	124
C.5.2	Heterogeneous Treatment Effects Across Latent Classes	126
C.5.3	Demographic and Geographic Controls	129
C.6	Treatment Effect Heterogeneity	129
C.7	Questionnaire	130

List of Tables

2.1	Survey Items for Each Concept	21
2.2	Descriptive Statistics of Regression Variables	23
3.1	Descriptive Statistics of Regression Variables	44
3.2	Predictors of Secessionism in RS, OLS Regression Results	48
4.1	Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model Fit Comparison	74
4.2	Standardized Factor Loadings from Two-Factor CFA Model	75
A.1	Comparison of U.S. Census Data (July 1, 2022 estimates) and Sample Data in the “Greater Idaho” Counties	92
A.2	Multiple Comparison Adjusted Estimates of Separatist Attitudes	93
A.3	Predictors of Separatism in Eastern Oregon, OLS Regression Results	95
B.1	Predictors of Secessionism in RS with Square Root Transformed Populism Measure, OLS Regression Results	106
C.1	Sample Characteristics Compared to Population Parameters	121
C.2	Sample Characteristics by Treatment Condition and Balance Tests	122
C.3	Ordered Logistic Regression Results Comparing Border Changes and General Assistance	123
C.4	Changes in Predicted Probabilities by Treatment Condition and Response Category .	124
C.5	Treatment Effects of Nationalist Prime Across Latent Classes	127
C.6	Demographic Characteristics of Class 1 versus Other Classes	127
C.7	Ordered Logistic Regression Results with Demographic and Geographic Controls . .	129
C.8	Demographic Interaction Effects in Treatment Response	130

List of Figures

2.1	The Greater Idaho Movement Maps	15
2.2	Predictors of Separatism in Eastern Oregon	24
3.1	Map of Political Divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina	37
3.2	Predicted Probabilities of SNSD Support by Populist Attitudes and Secessionist Preferences	46
3.3	Predictors of Secession in Republika Srpska	47
4.1	Transborder Distribution of Serb Minority Populations in the Western Balkans	58
4.2	Comparison of Treatment Effects on General Assistance and Border Changes	71
4.3	Treatment Effects on Response Probabilities for General Assistance and Border Changes	73
4.4	Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Kin-State Policy Support Dimensions	76
4.5	Treatment Effects Across Policy Domains	77
4.6	Predictors of Support for General Assistance and Border Changes	79
A.1	Distribution of the Dependent Variable	92
B.1	Distribution of Populist Attitudes	103
B.2	Predicted Probabilities of SNSD Support by Transformed Populist Attitudes and Secessionist Preferences	104
B.3	Interaction Effect of Anti-Elitism and Education on Secessionist Attitudes	108
B.4	Mediation Analysis of the Relationship Between Anti-Elitism and Secessionist Attitudes	109
C.1	Treatment Effects on Response Probabilities	125
C.2	Comparison of Treatment Effects on Composite Policy Indices	126
C.3	National Prime Treatment Effects on Support for Border Changes Across Latent Classes	128

1 Border Changes from Below: An Introduction

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

United States Declaration of Independence, 1776

1.1 Introduction

“Bosnia and Herzegovina is not my home state ... I do not feel happy to be in BiH, even though I am a member of its Presidency.” With these words in 2020, Milorad Dodik, at the time one of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s three presidents,¹ captured a profound puzzle in modern politics: Why do citizens consistently support and elect leaders who openly reject the very legitimacy of the state they govern? In Bosnia’s Republika Srpska entity, where Dodik has maintained power for almost two decades, a significant portion of citizens continually backs political forces that question or openly oppose the existence of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian state.

At first glance, the Bosnian case might appear to offer straightforward explanations: the country emerged from a brutal ethnic conflict in the 1990s ([Burg and Shoup 1999](#); [Kalyvas and Sambanis 2005](#)), its institutions were designed through international mediation rather than organic political processes ([Belloni 2007](#); [Chandler 2013](#)), and its complex power-sharing arrangements often produce governmental dysfunction ([Bieber 2010](#)). Citizens’ support for separatist leaders could be understood as a natural extension of wartime grievances, or as a rational response to institutional inefficiencies

¹Bosnia and Herzegovina’s presidency consists of three members, representing the country’s constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

inherent in Bosnia’s consociational system (Merdzanovic 2015).

Yet, Bosnia and Herzegovina and places that suffered similarly devastating conflicts are not the only ones with a prevalence of support for secessionist movements. In the heart of the European Union, Belgium witnessed an extraordinary political moment: a leader whose party’s foundational mission is the dissolution of Belgium became the country’s prime minister (Cokelaere and Ewing 2025). The Belgian case proves particularly instructive because it defies conventional theoretical explanations for separatist sentiment. Unlike cases driven by ethnic persecution or economic exploitation, Flanders represents one of Europe’s wealthiest regions. Still, Bart De Wever, who in the past referred to Belgium as “the sick man of Europe” who “has no future” and whose New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) party bylaws explicitly call for “an independent republic of Flanders,” now holds the highest office of the very state he seeks to divide (Haeck 2024; Schlamp and Schult 2010).² He achieved this position not through revolution or crisis, but through democratic elections and coalition-building in one of Europe’s most stable electoral democracies. This seeming paradox—of citizens democratically supporting leaders who wish to dissolve the state they live in—captures a fundamental puzzle in territorial politics: What drives ordinary people, whether in post-conflict states like Bosnia or stable, prosperous democracies like Belgium, to support movements that challenge existing political boundaries, even when independence might bring significant economic and political risks? It is this question of why people choose to unmake their own states and redraw existing borders that guides this dissertation’s inquiry.

1.2 Literature review

The study of secession and irredentism has generated extensive literature across multiple disciplines.³ Siroky’s (2011, 48) observation that “the most natural level on which to begin thinking theoretically about secession is the group level” aptly captures the dominant analytical approach that has characterized research on separatist movements. Scholarly efforts concentrated predominantly on macro-level dynamics, manifested through several distinct research streams.

Legal-normative approaches investigate the conditions under which secession might be justified

²It is important to mention that N-VA has moderated its stance in recent years, favoring a confederal model rather than immediate independence, positioning itself as a more moderate alternative to the far-right separatist party *Vlaams Belang*.

³For an exhaustive review of this literature see (Siroky and Abbasov 2021).

(Beran 1984; Birch 1984; Buchanan 1991, 1997, 2021; Buchheit 1978; Miller 1995; Wellman 2005). Political-economic perspectives analyze distinct regional economic patterns (Gourevitch 1979; Hale 2008; Hechter 1975; Horowitz 1985; Treisman 1997) or natural resource endowments (Billon and Waizenegger 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hunziker and Cederman 2017; Sorens 2011). Institutional analyses examine how federal structures and their potential collapse influence separatist movements (Bunce 1999; Giuliano 2011; Grigoryan 2012; Posen 1993). These analyses also investigate how power-sharing arrangements that increase regional autonomy shape the dynamics of separatism (Bakke 2015; Brancati 2010; Roeder 2007; Roeder and Rothchild 2005). International relations approaches investigate the role of systemic factors (Fazal and Griffiths 2014; Griffiths 2016), external actors (Coggins 2014; Siroky et al. 2021) and ethnic kin in other states (Cederman et al. 2009, 2013; Heraclides 1990; Jenne 2007; Jenne et al. 2007).

Despite the theoretical and empirical richness of this literature, none of the above addresses why *ordinary* people become secessionists and irredentists. Siroky explains that this is because the above research presumes the unit of analysis (in this case the ethno-national group) to be relatively unitary and calls for increased attention to the micro-level (2011, 54, 69), something other scholars have advocated as well (Sarigil and Karakoc 2016). Jenne (2017, 52) argues that “too much of the work to date has been based on statistical data aggregated at the group or state level” and urges for increased attention to lower units of analyses. Similarly, Sambanis and Siroky (2023, 154) also note that most studies on motivations focus on the country-level, region-level, or group-level, and other scholars concur (Sarigil and Karakoc 2016).

While not traditionally at the forefront of secessionist studies, individual-level research on secession has evolved into a substantial and methodologically sophisticated research program, with its empirical foundations primarily established through intensive study of two cases: Quebec and Catalonia. The research trajectory began with systematic investigations of the differential patterns of support for secession in Quebec in the 1970s (Cuneo and Curtis 1974; LeDuc 1977), developing into two distinct theoretical approaches—the socio-psychological (Pinard and Hamilton 1986) and the rational choice schools (Nadeau et al. 1999)—that shaped subsequent scholarship (Mendelsohn 2003). The empirical focus later shifted to Spain, particularly Catalonia, with scholars building upon and refining earlier theoretical frameworks while introducing new methodological approaches (Balcells and Kuo 2023; Boylan 2015; Costa-Font and Tremosa-Balcells 2008; Guinjoan and Rodon 2016a; Muñoz

and Tormos 2015; Rodon and Guinjoan 2018; Serrano 2013). Across both contexts, the evidence consistently identifies national identity as the predominant predictor of secessionist preferences (Blais and Nadeau 1992; Burg 2015; Costa-Font and Tremosa-Balcells 2008; Hierro and Queralt 2021; Howe 1998; Muñoz and Tormos 2015; Muro and Vlaskamp 2016). Other significant factors emerge with varying degrees of influence. Partisanship functions both as a predictor (Muñoz and Tormos 2015; Torcal and Mota 2014) and potential causal mechanism (Serrano 2013), while economic considerations demonstrate contextual relevance, particularly among individuals with moderate identity positions (Blais and Nadeau 1992) or specific positions in the international economy (Hierro and Queralt 2021). The research also reveals several more nuanced determinants. Risk tolerance stands out as significant, manifesting notably in gender-based differences in secessionist support (Verge et al. 2015). Social network effects also play a role, proving particularly salient for individuals with dual identities (Rodon and Guinjoan 2018). Additionally, the influence of supranational factors, such as prospects of EU membership, appears to be marginal and primarily affects those with dual identities (Muro and Vlaskamp 2016).

Although the foundational research originated from Quebec and Catalonia, recent scholarship has started expanding its geographic focus. Scotland has developed as another significant case study, with research revealing how electoral shocks and critical political events reshape independence preferences (Daoust and Gareau-Paquette 2024a; Liñeira 2021), and documenting notable gender gaps in secessionist support (Johns et al. 2012). Particularly illuminating for the Scottish case are findings on how prospects of international recognition influence independence preferences differently across nationalist and economic-minded supporters (Muro et al. 2020). However, there is a scarcity of insights beyond Western democracies, with only isolated studies examining secessionist preferences in contexts like Russia's ethnic republics (Hagendoorn et al. 2008) and Turkey's Kurdish population (Sarigil and Karakoc 2016), underscoring the need for broader geographical and contextual coverage.

Taking a step back to systematically evaluate the literature reveals several limitations that have constrained scholarly understanding of separatist phenomena on the individual level. Most fundamentally, the field exhibits a persistent bias toward group-level analysis, with information on public preferences more often coming from polling organizations in the form of assessing the proportions of hypothetical yes/no vote for secession rather than theoretically-grounded research. Even when scholarship manages to overcome this group-level myopia, it encounters another significant

constraint—a geographic bias toward developed democracies, particularly Quebec and Catalonia. Furthermore, the body of individual-level research in this domain suffers from limited generalizability, partly because studies are clustered in one type of setting and partly because they tend to prioritize case-specific explanatory frameworks over the development of broader theoretical insights about separatist preference formation. Addressing these limitations requires a reorientation of how we study separatist phenomena, one that bridges theoretical frameworks across different levels of analysis. As [Siroky \(2011, 69\)](#) outlines in his agenda for future research:

Progress on this front [explaining secession] should be both theoretical—linking actions and incentives at different levels through causal mechanisms—and methodological, combining sub-national, spatio-temporal, and relational data, connecting micro-level data to macro-level events, matching measurement to theory, in order to explain secession’s emergence, endurance and escalation.

This dissertation is precisely motivated by this—connecting the macro and micro levels. It, particularly in [Chapters 2 and 3](#), relies on the rich macro level literature from a variety of disciplines—political science, international law, political philosophy, and social psychology—to generate hypotheses, constructs, and ultimately survey items that ascertain how well these classical theories of secession resonate with individuals who provide public backing for secessionist movements. It posits that there is a general underlying motivational structure that is common to separatist movements, regardless of the context, and that secessionist drivers should not be viewed in isolation since attitudes toward political boundaries emerge through dynamic interactions between material conditions, collective identities, and institutional frameworks.

Each empirical investigation in the dissertation illuminates distinct facets of this preference formation process. The study of the Greater Idaho movement in [Chapter 2](#) examines how economic discontent interacts with regional identity even in the absence of ethno-national character to fuel support for intra-state border changes. The analysis of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina in [Chapter 3](#) inspects how classical motivations for secession interact and compete with a defining “thin-ideology” of our time—populism—within the context of the “populist zeitgeist” ([Mudde 2004](#)). [Chapter 4](#) shifts the focus from secession to another form of border changes—irredentism—and investigates how information environments interact with individual preferences on different types of

kin-state policies in an era when traditional irredentism and border changes are taboo but nonetheless, as the Russian’s invasion of Ukraine shows, very much a political reality in certain parts of the world.

This research deliberately ventures into theoretical blind spots—regions and movements that conventional frameworks struggle to capture or have overlooked entirely. The post-Yugoslav space serves as an especially rich laboratory for investigation, offering a natural experiment in boundary politics playing out across multiple variations, yet all within a shared historical canvas (Brubaker 1996). Though scholars have extensively examined group dynamics in the region (Gagnon 1994; Petersen 2002; Posen 1993), individual-level analysis remains neglected. The American Northwest serves as a compelling counterpoint, revealing how similar boundary-making processes can unfold even in stable democracies that lack traditional ethnic cleavages. This strategic contrast between cases—from fractured post-communist states to stable Western democracies—demonstrates how boundary-(re)making processes cut across seemingly unbridgeable political and social divides. The conscious juxtaposition of cases that vary along critical theoretical dimensions—ethnic versus non-ethnic cleavages, stable versus post-conflict settings, secessionist versus irredentist dynamics—serves a larger theoretical purpose: to interrogate whether there exists a coherent underlying logic of separatist sentiment that transcends particular contextual manifestations.

1.3 Methodology

The investigation of micro-foundational political dispositions regarding secessionist politics warrants thoughtful consideration of several methodological paths. Ethnographic fieldwork excels at uncovering rich narratives of local political dynamics (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2018), yet would not adequately capture the breadth and systematic nature of mass attitudes that this project sought to understand. Focus groups offer the potential for early theory development but raise methodological concerns—particularly social desirability effects and group dynamics that risked contaminating the measurement of individual preferences (Acocella 2012; Bergen and Labonté 2020; Fisher 1993). Administrative data analysis provides ecological validity but would fail to access the thought processes underlying territorial preference formation. In light of these methodological tradeoffs, survey research emerges as the most fitting investigative approach.

This dissertation utilizes psychometric and attitudinal survey research as the core methodological

approaches for examining the psychological and social dimensions underlying territorial political preferences. These complementary measurement approaches originated from distinct scholarly lineages in the mid-20th century—psychometrics through early attitude scaling work in psychology (Likert 1932; Thurstone 1928) and political attitude measurement through innovations at Columbia and Michigan (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). These traditions were widely employed and have evolved substantially through advances in scale construction, latent variable modeling, and construct validation techniques (Bollen 1989; Cronbach and Meehl 1955; Jöreskog 1973), while survey administration has been transformed by telephone-based sampling (Groves and Kahn 1979) and later internet-based methodologies (Chang and Krosnick 2009). Critics raise methodological concerns regarding construct validity and social desirability bias, particularly in studying politically sensitive topics like separatism (Krumpal 2013; Phillips and Clancy 1972; Tourangeau and Yan 2007). Contemporary survey design addresses these limitations through sophisticated measurement protocols incorporating multi-item psychological batteries, established attitudinal scales, and rigorous validation techniques (Davidov et al. 2014; Krosnick and Presser 2010). The integration of psychometric and attitudinal measurement proves particularly suited to examining territorial politics, where separatist preferences stem from interactions between psychological identification processes, explicit rational action, and structural constraints (Siroky et al. 2017).

The empirical investigations in Chapter 2 and 3 implement multi-item attitudinal batteries, a methodological approach commonly used in modern political behavior research. By combining multiple survey items targeting different facets of the same underlying construct, this method strengthens measurement reliability and validity compared to single-item measures. As DeVellis (2016, 31) argues, multi-item scales are particularly crucial for measuring phenomena that “require a respondent to reconstruct, interpret, judge, compare, or evaluate less accessible information,” where “multiple items may capture the essence of such a variable with a degree of precision that a single item could not attain.” Multi-item batteries have proven particularly valuable for studying complex psychological constructs like collective identity (Ashmore et al. 2004; Greene 2004) and intergroup affect (Iyengar et al. 2012), where no single question can adequately capture the full theoretical dimension.

This approach excels at capturing latent constructs that manifest through multiple observable indicators, crucial for understanding how different psychological mechanisms combine to shape

territorial preferences. While acknowledging critiques of latent variable approaches from scholars like Skinner (1976), Bollen (2002, 606) emphasizes their widespread empirical utility, noting that “psychology and the social sciences are no exceptions.” Sophisticated item writing techniques help overcome social desirability concerns by approaching sensitive topics indirectly (Nederhof 1985). Multi-dimensional measurement enables the examination of how different attitudinal components interact—for instance, how emotional responses might moderate the relationship between group cues and political preferences (Brader et al. 2008). Recent applications demonstrate these benefits across diverse domains, from measuring political trust (Marien and Hooghe 2011) to analyzing partisan identity (Huddy et al. 2015). The framework proves especially valuable for studying emergent political movements where multiple causal pathways potentially shape public attitudes (van Stekelenburg 2013). Independent empirical validations confirm the superior predictive power of multi-item scales compared to single indicators when measuring complex political orientations (Ansolabehere et al. 2008).

The empirical investigations in Chapters 2 and 3 utilize parallel methodological frameworks to operationalize classical theories of separatist motivations through carefully constructed multi-item attitudinal batteries. Each theoretical construct was measured through six survey items, incorporating both positive and reverse-coded formulations that function as cognitive “speed bumps,” or methodological devices that disrupt automatic response patterns and promote more deliberative cognitive processing, thereby reducing response-pattern and acquiescence biases (Paulhus 1991; Podsakoff et al. 2003, 884). Following Baumgartner and Steenkamp’s (2001, 144) methodological guidelines, the instruments employed balanced scales with equal numbers of positively and negatively keyed items, thus providing an inherent control mechanism against response styles since extreme scores cannot be achieved through simple yea-saying or nay-saying tendencies. Though the practice of reverse-worded items has been criticized for reducing questionnaire validity, introducing systematic error, and creating artifactual response factors (Harvey et al. 1985; Hinkin 1995; Schriesheim and Hill 1981), a meta-analysis by Weijters and Baumgartner (2012) still recommends their continued use. While eliminating these items may improve certain psychometric properties, they argue that such elimination would mask mechanical response patterns and introduce undetectable methodological biases through the confounding of method and content variance. I followed their suggestion applying recommended best practices, including instituting reverse-worded items at the beginning of the ques-

tionnaire, constructing balanced scales, dispersing them throughout the questionnaire, maintaining sparing use of negation, and implementing fully labeled five-point scales with clear midpoints.

The questionnaires drew extensively from classic theories of secession, translating macro-level theoretical propositions about group dynamics into individual-level psychological measures. The Republika Srpska study required careful linguistic and contextual adaptation to accommodate Bosnia and Herzegovina's complex and unorthodox institutional structure, though deviations from the base questionnaire were intentionally minimized to preserve theoretical consistency and acontextual measurement validity—something scholars have deemed “extremely useful for advancing theory testing” (Davidov et al. 2014, 56). The surveys deliberately randomized item presentation within theoretical blocks to reduce order effects (Jeong et al. 2023; Schuman et al. 1981; Strack 1992) while maintaining thematic coherence. This methodological approach is particularly suited for examining how abstract theoretical concepts like “identity subversion” (Sani 2005) or “entitativity” (Campbell et al. 1960) manifest in respondents' lived experience of territorial politics. The flexibility of this measurement framework for investigating diverse manifestations of separatist sentiment is demonstrated in two ways. First, the Oregon study successfully applied these measures to a context lacking clear ethnic distinctions. Second, the Republika Srpska study combined traditional separatist drivers with populist attitudes measures (Castanho Silva et al. 2018), offering a more classic case of secessionism. Together, these applications show how the framework can adapt to different contextual needs. Both studies implemented comprehensive data quality protocols, including attention checks in the form of instructed response items (Meade and Craig 2012) and screening for non-differentiated response patterns (Kim et al. 2019), while maintaining respondent confidentiality through anonymous data collection.

Chapter 4 adopts an experimental survey research design, marking a methodological shift from the attitudinal surveys employed in previous sections. This methodological shift aligns with the chapter's distinct theoretical orientation, which transitions from analyzing the determinants of secessionist and irredentist preferences to examining their susceptibility to modification through varied information environments. Experimental manipulation enables direct examination of causal mechanisms through which individual preference for kin-state policy could be influenced to provide (or dissuade) support for different forms of cross-border engagement, from cultural assistance to territorial revision. The research design draws on established methodological frameworks for studying

priming effects in political communication (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001), adapting these approaches to investigate previously unexplored dynamics of kin-state preference formation.

Survey experiments confront methodological challenges regarding external validity (Barabas and Jerit 2010) and experimenter demand effects (Orne 1962; Iyengar et al. 2012, 77). However, contemporary methodological research provides robust evidence for their analytical utility. Mullinix et al. (2015, 110) establish population-based survey experiments as the “‘gold standard’ for generalizable causal inferences,” demonstrating their external validity even with online convenience samples. Mummolo and Peterson (2019) further validate the method through systematic evidence that experimenter demand effects do not significantly bias treatment effects in online survey experiments, even under conditions of explicit researcher expectation disclosure.

This methodological choice reflects broader trends in political behavior research (Mutz 2011; Sniderman 2018), where experimental approaches have proven particularly valuable for isolating specific cognitive mechanisms that shape complex political attitudes (Demasi et al. 2024; Gadarian and Albertson 2014; Malhotra and Kuo 2008; Simonovits et al. 2022). The analytical strategy emphasizes comparative assessment of treatment effects across policy domains, enabling systematic evaluation of how different types of information resonate across varying forms of kin-state engagement. It provides analytical leverage for examining theoretical propositions about the conditional nature of public responsiveness to elite messaging on territorial politics that would be difficult to assess through observational data alone.

1.4 Theoretical and Methodological Contribution

This dissertation advances the study of territorial politics in three distinct ways. First, it puts public support, the backbone of any separatist movement, in research focus. While existing scholarship has extensively researched numerous aspects of macro-level dynamics,⁴ few studies examine how different theories of secession explain mass attitudes toward boundary reconfiguration. The psychometric investigation of these theories remains limited and fragmented. Since separatism is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has existed since the first political communities were created (Coggins 2011), my goal in this dissertation was to move closer to a way of studying it uniformly by identifying the

⁴For detailed reviews of this literature, see (Muro 2023; Sambanis and Siroky 2023; Siroky 2011)

underlying motivations common to those who support these movements regardless of their situational idiosyncrasies. Following recent insights on how secessionist movements combine normative and grievance-based arguments when making their cases for self-determination (Griffiths and Muro 2021), this research combines both normative and explanatory strands of scholarship (Muro 2023). In doing so, it demonstrates how normative theories of secession, despite their limited explanatory power at the group level (Requejo and Sanjaume-Calvet 2021), provide valuable analytical frameworks for understanding individual-level support of territorial reconfiguration when their morality-based justifications for secession are reconceptualized as measurable psychological dispositions. Although these theories' focus on legitimacy criteria rather than causal mechanisms restricts their explanatory value at the macro level, the same normative principles can be operationalized as attitudinal constructs that predict individual support for separatist movements. This approach not only enhances theoretical understanding of boundary politics but also demonstrates the utility of survey methods for bridging normative and explanatory approaches in territorial politics.

Second, this dissertation advances individual-level analysis of secessionist preferences beyond its current geographic and conceptual constraints. Recent scholarship demonstrates growing interest in mass attitudes toward secession (Requejo and Sanjaume-Calvet 2021), yet empirical work remains notably concentrated in Western European contexts.⁵ The continued concentration of research on Western European cases (and Quebec) leaves gaps in our understanding of how territorial preferences form in other contexts. Moreover, existing scholarship has exclusively focused on secessionist movements rooted in 19th century European conceptions of ethnic nationalism, limiting our understanding of other forms of territorial mobilization. This analytical blind spot is problematic given that the American Civil War—perhaps the most consequential secessionist crisis in modern history—arose from primarily non-ethnic divisions. This dissertation addresses these gaps through two novel empirical investigations: Chapter 2 tests theories of secession in the context of Eastern Oregon's non-ethnic Greater Idaho movement, while Chapter 3 presents an empirical test of populism and competing secessionist theories to explain individual motivations for separation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶ To the best of my knowledge, both investigations represent the first systematic

⁵In the 2021 thematic issue “What do We Know About Secession?” in *Politics and Governance*, four out of five papers examining individual-level dynamics focused exclusively on the Catalan case (Argelaguet 2021; Balcells and Kuo 2021; Muñoz 2021; Rodríguez-Teruel and Barrio 2021), with the remaining paper analyzing Scotland (Liñeira 2021).

⁶Despite populist discourse increasingly being combined with secessionism at the elite level (Albertazzi et al. 2018;

attempts to empirically test the applicability of secessionist theories in these respective contexts.⁷

The third contribution is in extending the granular micro-level attention typically reserved for secessionist phenomena to examine preference formation in a different configuration of territorial conflict—irredentism (Siroky and Hale 2017). Survey experiments have recently been utilized in research on secessionist attitudes (Balcells and Kuo 2021; Hierro and Queralt 2021; Muro and Vlaskamp 2016) and irredentist military interventions (Stoycheff and Nisbet 2017), but inquiries into how citizens evaluate different categories of kin-state are lacking. Chapter 4 applies a survey experiment to mass attitudes within Brubaker’s (1996) “triadic nexus” of nationalizing states, national minorities, and external national homelands. Given that most kin-state relationships with their ethnic kin in neighboring states exist outside the realm of violent conflict with the host state, this chapter demonstrates the malleability (or rigidity) of irredentist aims and non-military forms of engagement, reflecting how these relationships typically function today (Csergo and Goldgeier 2001).

Barrio et al. 2018; de Vos 2005; Massetti 2018), the relationship between populist attitudes and secession remains notably scarce (Blanchet and Medeiros 2019).

⁷Berg (2012, 2013) examines the relationship between state political legitimacy and secessionist dynamics in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2 “My Own Private Idaho”: A Survey of Separatist Attitudes in the Pacific Northwest

“We don’t think of ourselves as a secessionist movement. We see ourselves as a self-determination movement ... The political tension does not come because Portland’s doing something. The political tension comes when Portland does something and says we have to do the same thing. It doesn’t work for us.”

Matt McCaw, Greater Idaho movement activist

“We are very different people ... The rules and regulations that they’re making, that makes sense in the city, don’t make sense out here. The people here haven’t changed. Portland’s changed. Salem’s changed. Eugene has changed.”

Sandie Gilson, Greater Idaho movement board member

2.1 Introduction

Scholars have long examined secessionist and irredentist movements in Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and South Asia, but rarely in the United States.¹ Nonetheless, the U.S. has a storied history of separatism, beginning with the secession of eleven states leading to the American Civil War as well as more contemporary cases of independence movements in Alaska, California, and Texas. There have also been smaller movements such as the libertarian Free State Project in New Hampshire and the rural Pacific State of Jefferson.

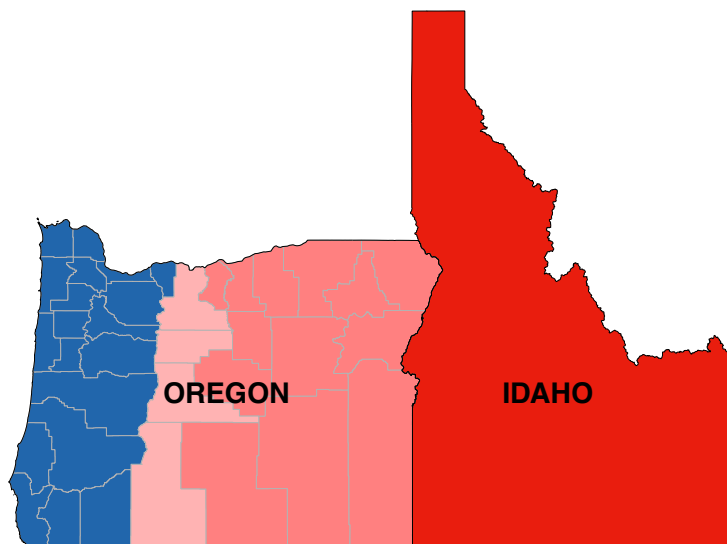
As of July 2024, 13 Oregon counties have passed advisory ballot measures to break off from the liberal state of Oregon to join the conservative state of Idaho. This so-called Greater Idaho

¹This chapter is co-authored with Erin K. Jenne and Levente Littvay, and has been accepted for publication in *PS: Political Science & Politics*.

movement is animated by the fact that Republicans have become a permanent political minority east of the Cascade mountains. Shut out of state politics, Oregon's Republican Party has increasingly affiliated with right-wing militia groups such as the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters, and the Sovereign Citizens Movement. In 2020, a group calling itself "Move Oregon's Border for a Greater Idaho" began to lobby on several fronts to leave Oregon and join Idaho, where the Republican Party has long dominated state politics. If they achieve their goal, more than a dozen counties in Eastern and Southern Oregon would be annexed by Idaho. These events have attracted relatively little attention in the national press due to their low probability of success; inter-state border adjustments require the assent of affected state assemblies as well as the U.S. Congress (this is regulated by the so-called Admissions clause of the United States Constitution found in Article 4, Section 3, Clause 1). Historically, however, separatist movements have rarely been deterred by the infeasibility or illegality of their aims, which means that we ignore them at our peril.

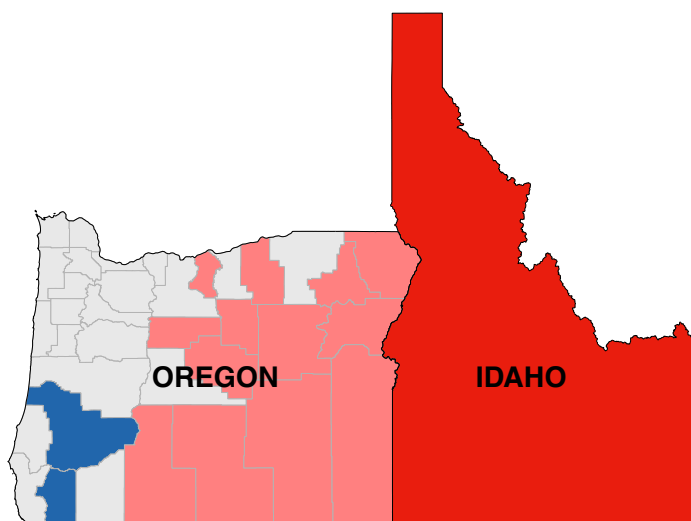
The Greater Idaho movement may be understood as a separatist movement. Separatism, as defined by Donald Horowitz (1981, 168), is any collective movement that seeks to achieve greater territorial independence from the state center. This broad definition serves as an umbrella concept encompassing more moderate autonomy movements as well as more extreme forms such as secessionism and irredentism. Secessionism is a subset of separatism that involves breaking territory off from an existing state to form a new independent state. Irredentism, meanwhile, refers to a movement by one state to separate and reclaim territory from another state, usually on ethnic grounds (Siroky and Hale 2017, 117; Kornprobst 2008, 9). The Greater Idaho movement represents a case of intra-state separatism rather than a full secessionist or a traditional irredentist movement. Unlike secessionist movements in Scotland, Quebec, or Catalonia that aim to create independent sovereign states, or the irredentist campaigns to separate Crimea from Ukraine and attach it to Russia or separate Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom and join it to the Republic of Ireland, the Greater Idaho movement seeks to change an internal federal border within the United States. If successful, the counties involved would exit Oregon and join Idaho while remaining part of the sovereign United States. Hence, the Greater Idaho movement bears greater similarity to cases of separatist border changes, such as the formation of West Virginia during the Civil War, the Jura question in Switzerland (Siroky et al. 2017), and the campaign to separate the Nagorno-Karabakh region from the Azerbaijan Republic and join the Armenian Republic in the late 1980s USSR.

A



Proposed County Status ■ Full Annexation ■ Partial Annexation ■ Remaining Oregon Counties

B



Advisory Ballot Measure Result ■ No Vote Yet ■ Voted to Join Idaho ■ Voted to Stay in Oregon

Figure 2.1: The Greater Idaho Movement Maps. Panel A shows counties proposed by the movement for border adjustment between Oregon and Idaho. Panel B shows results of non-binding county referenda on the proposal as of July 2024.

Visualized as a Venn diagram, secessionism, irredentism, and internal border changes, such as the Greater Idaho movement, are all subsets of separatism. While these terms are contested and defined differently by various scholars ([Pavković 2015](#)), we find this conceptualization most accurately matches the features of this case.

Although the Greater Idaho movement differs from secessionist or irredentist campaigns to alter international borders, we argue that theories developed to explain such movements offer valuable insights into the motivations behind *all* forms of territorial separation. Our study therefore applies theories from the broader literature on separatism to the case of Greater Idaho. These theories are relevant to the Greater Idaho movement because they all seek to explain the impulse for territorial separation, which are features of secessionist, irredentist and internal border change movements alike. We hope to illuminate the underlying motivations propelling Eastern Oregonians towards separation from Western Oregon, despite the fact that the ultimate goal is merely an inter-state border adjustment rather than sovereign independence.

It is practically a truism that separatist movements are driven by ethnic differences — be they religious, cultural, racial, or linguistic. In these movements, ethnic minorities mobilize to separate from the majority-controlled political institutions. Since the United States was founded on a civic rather than ethnic identity, the U.S. has long been presumed to be inoculated against such movements. The only serious case of separatism in U.S. history was sectoral — pitting the southern Confederate States of America against the Union states in the nineteenth century American Civil War. However, this presumption may be oversimplified. While we classify the Greater Idaho movement as primarily political rather than ethnic separatism, we acknowledge that the distinction between these categories is not always clear-cut, as political movements over territorial control may develop ethnic dimensions over time.

In recent years, the United States has witnessed evolving dynamics of political division and regionalism. There has been increasing talk of civil war due to ideological polarization ([Walter 2023](#)). However, relatively little attention has been paid to the threat of territorial separatism, although some have warned of this possibility ([Anderson 2004](#); [Buckley 2020](#)). Americans have, in practice, been separating with their feet. Over the past two decades, we see evidence of increasing territorial segregation in the United States — with Republicans moving to red states, while Democrats have moved to blue states ([Brown and Enos 2021](#)). These partisan migrants claim that they are moving

to join their co-partisans in states where “their” party dominates local politics. This dynamic has been creating permanent political majorities at the state level, with significant political knock-on effects. Predominantly Democratic states have enacted laws legalizing marijuana, protecting gay and transgender rights, and creating robust environmental and labor protections. Meanwhile, Republican states have passed highly restrictive abortion laws, tough-on-crime laws, and highly permissive gun legislation. The result is a growing political divide between “red” and “blue” states, further incentivizing people to migrate to politically-friendly states in a feedback loop.

To conduct our investigation, we administered a survey to residents of the separatist counties in Eastern Oregon. The survey questions were based on traditional theories of secessionism and irredentism. We administered our survey in September 2023 to people in the 17 Eastern Oregon counties that could feasibly separate from Oregon to join Idaho.

2.2 Why Separate?

We draw on classical theories of separatism to test for the drivers of support for the Greater Idaho movement in Eastern Oregon. Several scholars have made valuable contributions to the literature on separatism, examining various aspects such as structural conditions (Sorens 2005), violence and conflict dynamics (Cunningham 2013; Cunningham and Sawyer 2017; Griffiths 2016; Griffiths and Wasser 2019), international factors (Fazal and Griffiths 2014), and ethnic polarization (Balcels and Kuo 2023). While these studies provide important insights into the macro-level dynamics of separatist movements, our focus aligns more closely with works examining individual-level motivations for supporting separatism, such as Blais and Nadeau (1992), Hierro and Queralt (2021), and Muro and Vlaskamp (2016). However, these individual-level studies have predominantly focused on regions with distinctive ethnic or linguistic identities. In contrast, studies focusing specifically on individual-level separatist attitudes in regions that lack such distinctive identities, as in the case of Eastern Oregon, are less common. Hence, our study constitutes a plausibility probe into whether these classical theories of separatism help to illuminate the drivers of popular support for the Greater Idaho movement. To develop our survey questions, we distilled each theory into its psychological components. We then adapted these theories to the specifics of this case. The psychological drivers underlying these theories may be divided into identity, fears, and economic variants.

2.2.1 Identity Theories

Identity theories hold that significant ethnic differences between the majority and minority motivate support for political independence. To apply this logic to the Greater Idaho movement, we operationalize regional identification as the conscious belief among residents of Eastern Oregon that they possess a distinct culture that sets them apart from the rest of Oregon. Second, we measure “entitativity,” which is the degree to which respondents perceive the state as a unified whole ([Campbell 1958](#)). To test for this, we ask the survey respondents whether Oregon has a cohesive identity or not. Third, a sense of ingroup bias may be associated with political separatism. [Macauley \(2019\)](#) finds that ingroup linguistic favoritism in Quebec correlates positively with support for secession. To capture positive exceptionalism in our survey, we ask respondents if they view their region as superior to other parts of Oregon. Fourth, studies have shown that people wish to separate from the majority when they believe it is subverting their identity ([Sani and Reicher 1999](#); [Sani and Todman 2002](#)). Separatism may also be correlated with the belief that the state’s dominant norms and practices are antithetical to those of the minority. To test for this, we ask respondents whether the values and shared norms of the state of Oregon no longer correspond to their identity, specifically because Oregon’s current identity deviates from its original identity. Finally, separatism may be driven by the belief that members of a minority cannot properly voice disagreements, grievances, or divergent opinions within the political system. [Sani \(2005\)](#) finds that those who believe they can voice dissent are less inclined to seek exit. Conversely, those who perceive that they are denied a voice are more likely to desire political independence. This aligns with the Remedial Right Only justification for secession ([Buchanan 1997](#)). To test for this in Eastern Oregon, we ask respondents whether their voices are marginalized in Oregon state politics.

2.2.2 Fears Theories

The second set of separatist theories relates to group insecurity, specifically fears of domination, persecution, or assimilation by the ethnic majority. Fears-based theories of secession hold that individuals support political exit if they perceive significant threats to the group’s autonomy, identity, physical safety, or way of life. They may also favor separation if they believe they cannot properly protect the region from internal or external dangers ([Birch 1984](#)). Sudden changes or long-term

shifts in political dynamics within a state can cause particular groups and regions to re-evaluate whether they can continue to thrive in the existing state framework (Levy 1997; Posen 1993; Weingast 1998). To test whether threat perceptions motivate support for the Greater Idaho movement, we ask residents whether they fear Oregon state authorities—specifically whether they believe that the state poses dangers to their cultural and physical well-being. A second fears-based driver for separatism is the perception of oppression, inequality, discrimination, disrespect, and prejudice. In Quebec, a sense of unequal treatment and disrespect by Anglophones against Francophones played a role in galvanizing support for Francophone separatism (Mendelsohn 2003; Pinard and Hamilton 1986; Yale and Durand 2011). To capture these sentiments in the Eastern Oregon survey, we ask respondents to evaluate the quality of intergroup relations between them and Western Oregonians.

2.2.3 Economic Theories

The third set of theories relates to economic motives for separatism. Economic motivations are typically categorized as either rich region (“greed”) or poor region (“need”) separatism (Horowitz 1985; Howe 1998). The “need” logic pertains more to economically disadvantaged groups that view themselves as victims of discriminatory policies. This means that separatism is driven by perceived economic neglect or exploitation by the state. By contrast, the “greed” logic pertains more to economically successful groups whose members believe they are having to subsidize poorer parts of the state, representing a drain on regional resources. Either way, economic grievances are rooted in the belief that the group’s economic interests are better served outside the existing state framework. We test for both economic motives by asking Eastern Oregon respondents about their perceived economic exploitation by the rest of the state and whether they believe the state government protects their economic interests.

2.3 Data and Methods

The Greater Idaho movement aims to detach 13 Eastern Oregon counties fully, and another 4 partially, from Oregon and join them to Idaho by moving the Oregon-Idaho border westward. The 17 surveyed counties have a combined population of 413,223 adult residents. To ensure external validity, our survey respondents included only voting-age US citizen residents in these counties.

We contracted with Cint, which maintains a large panel of potential US survey participants, to obtain an adequate sample size for our online survey of the 17 counties. Cint adheres to rigorous industry standards for data quality control and fraud detection. Between July 27 and September 14, 2023, they recruited close to 300 respondents from the region (of which 193 were included in our analysis).² Respondents were told that the study was intended to investigate “public opinion about current issues.”

Power analysis for bivariate correlations shows that our sample size ($n = 193$) is adequate for yielding significant results for an effect size of $r = 0.2$ (4% of the variance explained), with 95% confidence in a two-tailed test, 80% of the time. Therefore, we have the traditionally used 80% power to find 95% significant result for any relationship with a reasonable effect size of $r = 0.2$.

We measured our dependent variable of support for the Greater Idaho movement using the following question: “If offered the chance, how likely are you to vote for Eastern Oregon to leave Oregon and join Idaho?” Response options were presented on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Very unlikely” to “Very likely.”

We measured the key motivations for separatism (our independent variables or predictors) using eight constructs, each assessed by six survey items. All items used a five-category agree/disagree Likert scale, with the exception of the Linz-Moreno question (ID6r). Half of the items were reverse-coded. Table 2.1 presents the full list of survey items used to measure each concept.³ We averaged the responses for each construct and rescaled them to range from 0 to 1. In our sample, 39 cases (20.2%) had one response out of the 48 motivational factor items that was coded as NA (Not Available), and one case (0.5%) had two NA responses from different factors. Notably, 30 out of these 40 cases were for the Linz-Moreno question, which asked respondents to self-identify on an Eastern Oregonian-Oregonian spectrum. For this particular question, we included an “I don’t know” option, which is typically included due to the potential complexity of regional identity.⁴ All 30 of these cases selected the “I don’t know” option rather than leaving the question unanswered. To ensure that respondents were not excluded for incidental missing data, we averaged all available responses for each construct. This means that each measure represents the mean of at least five items, even in cases with NA responses.

²See Appendix A.1 for sample deterioration details.

³See Appendix A.5 for full questionnaire.

⁴For a detailed discussion of the Linz-Moreno question, see (Guinjoan and Rodon 2016b).

Table 2.1: Survey Items for Each Concept

Concept	Survey Items
Regional identification	<p>Eastern Oregon has a unique character and culture that is distinct from the rest of the country.</p> <p>The distinct identity of the people of Eastern Oregon is adequately protected by the government of Oregon.*</p> <p>My primary loyalty is to Eastern Oregon, not to the state of Oregon.</p> <p>The people of Eastern Oregon are second-class citizens in Oregon.</p> <p>The people of Eastern Oregon are afforded the same rights as others in Oregon.*</p> <p>Do you see yourself as:*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eastern Oregonian only • More Eastern Oregonian than Oregonian • Equally Eastern Oregonian and Oregonian • More Oregonian than Eastern Oregonian • Oregonian only • I don't know
Entitativity	<p>Despite their differences, all Oregonians are on the same team.</p> <p>The people of Eastern Oregon want different things than the people from other regions of Oregon.*</p> <p>The different people of Oregon are “as one.”</p> <p>The people of Oregon are deeply divided.*</p> <p>The people of Oregon do not feel like one group to me.*</p> <p>The citizens of Oregon share the same fate.</p>
Ingroup bias	<p>No region has given more to this state than Eastern Oregon.</p> <p>The people from Eastern Oregon overrate their importance.*</p> <p>It is always better to have someone from Eastern Oregon to represent the people of Eastern Oregon, even if their politics are different than mine.</p> <p>The mayors of cities and towns in Eastern Oregon are a great example of political decision-making that others should try to emulate.</p> <p>I think the people from Eastern Oregon are the least reasonable people in Oregon.*</p> <p>I tend to trust individuals from other regions of Oregon more than people from Eastern Oregon.*</p>
Identity subversion	<p>The identity of Oregon today contradicts its historical values.</p> <p>Oregon is currently the state that I think it should be.*</p> <p>The current state of Oregon does not align with our values and traditions.</p> <p>The dominant values of Oregon today reflect my personal values.*</p> <p>The recent cultural shifts and political changes have undermined the core essence of Oregon's identity.</p> <p>The state of Oregon is heading in the right direction.*</p>

Note: * indicates reverse-coded items.

Survey Items for Each Concept (continued)

Concept	Survey Items
Right to dissent	<p>If you say that you are more loyal to Eastern Oregon, than to Oregon, people will call you a traitor.*</p> <p>Dissenting opinions are valued in our society.</p> <p>Those who disagree with majority opinions are discriminated against.*</p> <p>There is a culture of open dialogue that encourages the expression of disagreement in Oregon.</p> <p>Those who propose strengthening local institutions in Eastern Oregon are seen as destroyers of Oregon.*</p> <p>You can publicly express support for Eastern Oregon without fear of consequences.</p>
Threat perception	<p>The government of Oregon wants to populate Eastern Oregon with outsiders.</p> <p>The government of Oregon makes decisions that harm the culture of Eastern Oregon.</p> <p>The government of Oregon continuously fails to protect the physical security of people in Eastern Oregon.</p> <p>No one in Oregon is going to physically harm me simply for being a Democrat / Republican.*</p> <p>I feel safe visiting other regions of Oregon.*</p> <p>The survival of Eastern Oregonian culture in Oregon is not in doubt.*</p>
Intergroup relations	<p>People from other regions of Oregon rarely show understanding or empathy towards the people of Eastern Oregon.*</p> <p>I do not blame the people in other regions of Oregon for the problems Eastern Oregon is facing.</p> <p>The people in other regions of Oregon look down on the people of Eastern Oregon.*</p> <p>The people in other regions of Oregon care about the same issues the people of Eastern Oregon care about.</p> <p>I have been in situations where I felt humiliated by others for being from Eastern Oregon.*</p> <p>The people in other regions of Oregon have good intentions towards the people of Eastern Oregon.</p>
Perceived economic grievances	<p>Eastern Oregon subsidizes poorer regions of Oregon.</p> <p>The economic interests of Eastern Oregon are the same as those of the rest of Oregon.*</p> <p>The government of Oregon does not make policies that hurt the economic interests of the people of Eastern Oregon.*</p> <p>Other regions of Oregon are not economically benefiting at the expense of Eastern Oregon.*</p> <p>Eastern Oregon would be richer if it were not for the rest of Oregon holding it back.</p> <p>I would personally be better off if the government of Oregon was not interfering in Eastern Oregon's economy.</p>

Note: * indicates reverse-coded items.

We also controlled for age, gender, education, income, race, partisanship, and whether the respondent resides in one of the four partial secession counties. For independents and third-party supporters, follow-up questions were used to gauge partisan leanings. All predictors were rescaled from 0 to 1. We did not include controls for ethnicity or religiosity, as church attendance is relatively low throughout Oregon, and the state is very White (Newport 2015; U.S. Census Bureau 2023). Hence, there is little reason to believe that support for Greater Idaho in Eastern Oregon is motivated by either religious or racial differences between the East and the West.

Table 2.2 provides summary statistics.

Table 2.2: Descriptive Statistics of Regression Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	SE
Separatism	2.53	1.48	0.10
Regional identification	0.42	0.19	0.01
Entitativity	0.41	0.21	0.01
Ingroup bias	0.60	0.18	0.01
Identity subversion	0.55	0.23	0.02
Right to dissent	0.47	0.17	0.01
Threat perception	0.48	0.16	0.01
Intergroup relations	0.55	0.17	0.01
Perceived economic grievances	0.47	0.17	0.01
Age group	0.58	0.28	0.02
Female	0.68	0.47	0.03
Education	0.48	0.27	0.02
Income	0.33	0.31	0.02
Non-white	0.14	0.35	0.02
Partial counties	0.38	0.49	0.03
Leaning Republican	0.52	0.50	0.04
Democrat	0.30	0.46	0.03
Independent	0.25	0.43	0.03
Something Else	0.13	0.34	0.02

Note: Predictors scaled 0-1. Outcome (Separatism) coded 1-5; higher numbers indicate greater support for joining Idaho.

2.4 Discussion of Results

Our regression analysis identifies key drivers of separatist preferences in Eastern Oregon.⁵ Economic grievances emerge as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 2.11$, BH $p = 0.083$, Storey's $q = 0.025$),⁶ suggesting that perceptions of economic exploitation are critical drivers of support for the Greater Idaho movement. Identity-based factors constitute the second tier of significant predictors, with

⁵See Appendix Table A.3 for sensitivity analyses.

⁶We report multiple testing corrected significance levels calculated with Benjamini-Hochberg (BH) p-values (Benjamini and Hochberg 1995) and Storey's q-values (Storey 2002; Storey and Tibshirani 2003). These are interpreted the same way as regular p-values but corrected for false discovery rate under simultaneous testing of multiple hypotheses.

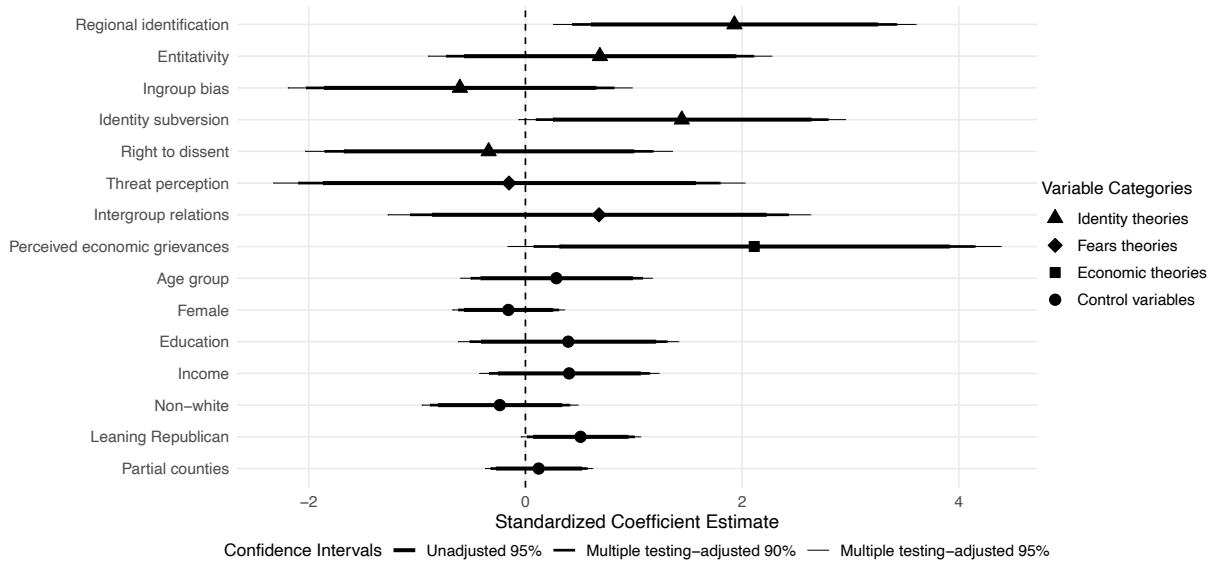


Figure 2.2: Predictors of Separatism in Eastern Oregon. All predictors standardized to range [0,1]. $n = 193$

both regional identification ($\beta = 1.93$, BH $p = 0.067$, Storey's $q = 0.020$) and perceived identity subversion ($\beta = 1.44$, BH $p = 0.083$, Storey's $q = 0.024$) showing substantial effects. The strong regional identification coefficient reflects the importance of a distinct and uniquely Eastern Oregonian identity, while the identity subversion effect indicating that supporters of the movement believe that Oregon no longer stands for what it used to stand for. Among the control variables, Republican partisan identity is a moderate predictor for redrawing state borders, even after controlling for identity, fears, and economic concerns ($\beta = 0.51$, BH $p = 0.083$, Storey's $q = 0.025$).

We visualize the results in Figure 2.2 where we present both unadjusted (95%) confidence intervals and false coverage rate (FCR) adjusted intervals (90% and 95%) following Benjamini and Yekutieli's (2005, 73) procedure. The multiple testing correction procedures did not lead to substantively different conclusions from uncorrected results though their confidence levels in some cases dropped to 90%.⁷

In sum, identity and economic theories of separatism best explain popular support for political separatism in Eastern Oregon. Economic motivations exert the biggest impact, highlighting the importance of perceptions of economic exploitation in driving support for the movement. Economic discontent may also reflect a broader urban-rural divide, as Eastern interests are believed to be

⁷See Appendix Table A.2 for complete details of the multiple comparison procedures and alternative analyses.

subverted to the interests of residents in Western urban centers. This conforms to [Horowitz's \(1981\)](#) “backward region” theory of separatism as well as the ethnographic findings of [Cramer \(2016\)](#), who studied political consciousness in rural Wisconsin towns in the early 2010s. With growing national polarization tied to place-based identities, so-called “left-behind” rural grievances may ignite similar political separatist movements elsewhere in the country.

Support for the Greater Idaho movement also appears to be rooted in regional identification. Our results show that backers of the movement view themselves as culturally distinct from Western Oregonians and that they believe state policies fail to align with their values. This misalignment appears to have produced a yearning for belonging to a state where they form the political majority and can therefore exercise control over legislative and executive institutions. This makes separatism an attractive option. Our results indicate that political renegotiation, regional recognition, and mutual respect for values are critical to effective governance of diverse populations. If Greater Idaho supporters feel that Oregon has fundamentally deviated from its original character, this could make political exit more attractive. When groups feel abandoned by the political unit, destructive bids at re-affiliation can emerge if grievances remain unreconciled. While the partisan findings of our study confirm the links between partisanship and political separatism, economic motivations appear to matter more. This calls into question reductionist narratives framing Greater Idaho exclusively through a partisan lens. Rather than “culture wars” or negative partisanship ([Abramowitz and McCoy 2019](#)), our study suggests that separatism in the Pacific Northwest may be driven more by desires to improve the region’s economic status.

The most interesting finding of our survey was the limited role of fears in support of the Greater Idaho movement. Eastern Oregon separatists are apparently not too concerned about repression or survival, nor are they motivated by hostility toward the more liberal Westerners — contrary to the partisanship hypothesis. Indeed, the insignificance of intergroup animus demonstrates that political separatism in this case is not primarily driven by hostility toward Democrats. Similarly, while supporters believe their voices lack influence, the suppression of dissent non-finding indicates that most Eastern Oregonians believe that they can openly campaign for separatism.

2.5 Conclusion

Our findings are based on a relatively small sample, although it is demographically representative.⁸ Further ethnographic research in the region should be used to validate our results and develop a more in-depth understanding of popular support for the movement.

Overall, the Greater Idaho movement seems to have more “pull” than “push” factors. Its supporters appear to believe that joining Idaho would be economically beneficial to them, while at the same time affirming their conservative identities. They are not, in other words, driven primarily by antagonism toward liberal Oregonians. Together, these results suggest that the Greater Idaho movement has mostly to do with a crisis of representation in the eastern half of the state where conservatives are in the permanent minority (Kriesi 2020). What does this mean for policy? We think it suggests that if permanent political minorities, like ethnic minorities, are offered a legislative buy-in, they may be less likely to suffer the alienating effects of their minority status. A consociational model, which ensures representation for distinct groups within a shared governance structure, could potentially address these concerns without resorting to territorial separation. While the Greater Idaho movement may not currently pose a serious threat of instability, much less collective violence, history tells us that separatist movements ought not to be ignored. Separatist impulses are often tied up with right-wing populism, which comes in the wake of demographic change and other representational crises (Brubaker 2017; Moffitt 2017). In such settings, destructive bids for separation may emerge. Responsible policymakers are needed to give voice to self-determination claims within existing institutions in order to transform zero-sum mentalities into a positive-sum proposition in the state as a whole.

Finally, the results of this study suggests that classical secessionist theories offer insights into the drivers of internal separatism. Our findings suggest that economic and identity drivers may be more important than fears and animosities in accounting for support for the Greater Idaho movement. While this is merely a preliminary study, our approach offers a valuable framework for examining the drivers of territorial separation more broadly. Our psychometric investigation of separatist impulses enables more direct testing of competing theories through systematic measurement of individual-level

⁸See Table A.1 in the Appendix for a comparison of our sample demographics with U.S. Census data for the “Greater Idaho” counties.

motivations. This includes not only cases of separatism and secession but also irredentism, both within federal systems and potentially in other contexts worldwide. Our study thus contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the varied forms of territorial separation, while also highlighting the need for further research to fully explore the distinctions between different types of separatist movements.

3 Unpacking Populist Secessionism: Elite Discourse and Mass Attitudes in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

3.1 Introduction

Populist secessionism — the strategic use of populism as a “thin ideology” to frame and pursue territorial separation — has emerged as a potent political strategy in divided societies.¹ Contemporary secessionist leaders increasingly combine populist appeals with ethno-nationalist rhetoric to advance separatist goals. In Flanders, *Vlaams Belang* has long merged populist anti-establishment messaging with calls for independence (de Vos 2005). The Catalan independence movement shifted from the traditional nationalist character toward increasingly populist framing after 2012 (Barrio et al. 2018, 2019), while the Lega in Italy originally combined populist anti-elite rhetoric with calls for northern autonomy (Albertazzi et al. 2018; Newth 2024). In the UK, the Scottish National Party and *Plaid Cymru* adopted populist discourse in their independence campaigns, framing British austerity policies as elite impositions that harmed Scottish and Welsh interests (Massetti 2018). These movements demonstrate how populism’s emphasis on “the pure people” versus “corrupt elites” can provide secessionist leaders with powerful narrative tools for delegitimizing the central state and justifying territorial separation.

Populist secessionism is particularly intriguing given the distinct operational logics of its underlying “thin” and “thick” ideologies - populism and nationalism. While populist movements thrive on

¹This chapter is currently in the revise and resubmit stage in *Nations and Nationalism*.

constant agitation, positioning themselves against established elites and relying on persistent public engagement, nationalist sentiments often permeate state structures and can lie dormant within institutional frameworks for long periods, frequently cultivated by the very elites populists oppose. Populist secessionism thus represents a strategic attempt to reframe a traditionally elite-driven project (nationalism-based secession) as an expression of popular will against elite collusion. Yet, when fueling separatist ambitions, nationalism can ignite into an intense, emotionally charged force that combines powerfully with populist appeals. This convergence spawns a hybrid form of political mobilization that scholars have termed “ethnopolitism,” highlighting how it combines popular sovereignty with national identity (Jenne 2018; Laclau 2005; Vachudova 2020).

The strategic utility of this combination stems from populism’s “thin” ideological nature (Mudde 2004) which makes it particularly useful for framing secessionist demands. Populist rhetoric provides a framework for delegitimizing constitutional constraints, international oversight, and domestic opposition by casting them all as elite impositions that subvert the people’s will. When combined with ethno-nationalism’s “thick” ideology, which provides substantive content about who constitutes “the people,” populist secessionism becomes a powerful tool for mobilizing separatist demands (Jenne 2018; Varshney 2021). This fusion allows leaders to present institutional resistance to secession not merely as political opposition, but as evidence of elite scheming and disconnection from popular sovereignty.

Understanding the relationship between populist attitudes and secessionist preferences at the mass level is crucial because it reveals whether populist secessionism represents a genuine ideological fusion that resonates with the electorate or merely an opportunistic elite strategy of reframing secessionist goals through populist rhetoric. This study addresses three critical theoretical gaps in our understanding of populist secessionism. First, how do populist attitudes and secessionist leanings influence political support in divided societies? While existing research documents the increasing adoption of populist rhetoric by secessionist movements (Heinisch et al. 2018; van Haute et al. 2018), we lack systematic evidence of whether individuals who exhibit stronger populist attitudes are more likely to support leaders who frame secession in populist terms. Second, to what extent does populist secessionism function primarily as an elite-level strategy versus reflecting and mobilizing corresponding mass attitudes? This question builds on recent theoretical work examining the relationship between populism and territorial politics (Gamper Sachse 2018) to investigate the

ideational congruence between elite discourse and mass opinion. Third, how do populist attitudes compare to traditional drivers of secessionist preferences in divided societies, such as ethnic identity, perceived grievances, and economic considerations (Siroky 2011; Sorens 2012)?

To systematically investigate these theoretical questions, this study examines Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia and Herzegovina, a case that offers unique analytical leverage for understanding populist secessionism. The RS context provides several methodological advantages. First, citizens have experienced sustained exposure to populist-secessionist messaging through Milorad Dodik's leadership, enabling examination of how such rhetoric shapes mass attitudes over time. Second, RS's substantial institutional autonomy within Bosnia and Herzegovina means that secessionist preferences reflect meaningful political possibilities rather than purely abstract attitudes. Third, the post-conflict context allows investigation of how populist appeals interact with traditional drivers of separatism, such as ethnic grievances and economic disparities.

The timing of this investigation is particularly opportune as populist secessionism in RS has escalated from rhetorical strategy to institutional confrontation. Widely described as a populist² (Brezar 2021; Djurdjevic 2017; Džananović and Karamehić 2016; Hasić 2020) and associated with populist and authoritarian leaders across Europe (Enyedi 2020; Ruge 2022), Dodik and RS offer unique insights into populist secessionism's dynamics in less consolidated democracies, distinguishing it from cases like Catalonia, Flanders, or Scotland. In 2021, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina warned that the country faced imminent danger of dissolution, characterizing Dodik's threats to withdraw from state-level institutions as "tantamount to secession without proclaiming it" (Borger 2021). The situation has continued to deteriorate, with the European Parliament urging sanctions against Dodik in 2023, and the International Crisis Group warning that Bosnia and Herzegovina is "on the verge of falling apart" (International Crisis Group 2024, 1). This raises a crucial question: How much of the appeal of secessionism in RS is owed to Dodik's "so powerful, so temptingly populist" rhetoric (Majstorović 2013, 211)?

²This is not to say that Dodik is *only* a populist. Indeed, his political discourse might be more accurately characterized as predominantly nationalist in its substantive content. Following Brubaker (2017, 2020), Jenne (2018), and Jenne et al. (2021), I conceptualize Dodik's rhetoric along a continuum where nationalist and populist elements interact dynamically rather than as mutually exclusive categories. This integrated ethnopopulist framework recognizes that political discourse can simultaneously operate on both vertical (people-elite) and horizontal (in-group/out-group) dimensions. Rather than forcing artificial categorical choices, this approach acknowledges that while nationalist content provides the substantive core of his political program, populist discursive strategies serve as essential rhetorical tools for advancing secessionist objectives. For a critical analysis of how Dodik's regime specifically employs ethnopopulism through denial and relativization of past crimes as means of preserving power, see Barton Hronešová (2022).

Drawing on an original survey that measured populist attitudes, secessionist preferences, and various traditional motivations for separatism, the analysis reveals that populist secessionism operates primarily as an elite-level strategy that lacks corresponding resonance among the public. While Dodik and other leaders strategically combine populist and secessionist appeals, citizens who embrace populist attitudes are not more likely to support secession. In fact, those who espouse anti-elitism demonstrate a significant negative association with secessionist preferences. Traditional factors, including ethnic identification, ingroup bias, and economic grievances, prove substantially stronger predictors of secessionist attitudes than populist sentiments.

These findings yield significant theoretical and practical implications. For scholars, they demonstrate how “thin” ideologies like populism can be strategically deployed by political leaders without necessarily reshaping the fundamental drivers of mass political attitudes in divided societies. For policymakers and international organizations working on conflict prevention, the results suggest that strategies focused solely on countering populist rhetoric may misdiagnose the root causes of separatist sentiment. Instead, addressing structural conditions that make populist-secessionist appeals resonant, particularly ethnic grievances and economic disparities, may prove more effective in promoting stability in divided societies.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. First, it reviews existing literature on populism and secessionism, identifying key theoretical expectations about how these phenomena might interact at both elite and mass levels. The paper then examines how Dodik employs populist rhetoric to frame and advance secessionist demands in RS, providing a detailed analysis of the empirical manifestation of populist secessionism. After describing the data collection methodology and analytical approach, the analysis presents findings on the relationship between populist attitudes, traditional drivers of separatism, and secessionist preferences in RS. The paper concludes by discussing the theoretical and policy implications of these findings for understanding and managing territorial conflicts in divided societies.

3.2 Populist Secessionism: Theory and Evidence

3.2.1 Strategic Logic and Elite-Level Dynamics

The intersection of populism and secessionism represents a theoretically rich but empirically understudied phenomenon in contemporary politics. As [van Haute et al. \(2018, 955\)](#) observe, “The literatures on populism and sub-state nationalism largely ignore each other,” despite compelling theoretical reasons to examine their relationship. This oversight has left significant gaps in our understanding of how these forces interact, particularly at the mass level, where the effectiveness of populist-secessionist appeals remains poorly understood ([Blanchet and Medeiros 2019, 817-818](#)).

The potential for meaningful integration between populist discourse and secessionist mobilization emerges from their shared emphasis on popular sovereignty and structural antagonisms. [Laclau’s \(2005\)](#) foundational conceptualization of populism as a political logic that constructs “the people” as underdogs against a power bloc offers a theoretical framework that readily extends to secessionist contexts, where regional populations are portrayed as oppressed by unresponsive central states. Even more relevant in cases of subversive politics of territorial reconfiguration, [Jenne \(2018, 546\)](#) conceptualizes “ethnopolulism” as a strategic amalgamation that “combin[es] nationalism with the revolutionary impulse of populism to amplify the effects of nationalism at the regional or even systemic level.” This synthesis operates through a sophisticated blending of perceived threats—creating narrative frameworks wherein external others purportedly collaborate with supranational entities and central state elites to undermine regional sovereignty ([Jenne 2018](#)). The resulting discursive construction positions both vertical (elite versus people) and horizontal (in-group versus out-group) antagonisms as coordinated dimensions of a singular assault on “the people,” thereby harnessing populism’s inherently flexible discursive structure ([Mudde 2004](#)) as a vehicle for advancing substantive ethnonationalist programmatic content.

Applying this logic to territorial disputes, scholars have explored how populist narratives can catalyze secessionist demands, particularly in contexts marked by intra-state tensions and power-sharing arrangements. [Maier \(1994\)](#) introduced the concept of “territorial populism” to describe the exclusionary process of reinvigorating bounded identities tied to specific localities. [Adelman \(1995\)](#), examining the Canadian context, demonstrated how both ethnonational and non-ethnic based

secessionist movements exhibit elements of territorial populism. More recently, [Heinisch et al. \(2018\)](#) have articulated how populism and ethno-territorial ideologies share a fundamental connection in their construction of homogeneous people-concepts. Their regionalist-populist framework demonstrates how regional populations can be constructed as virtuous citizenry in opposition to political elites who allegedly sacrifice regional interests for broader state objectives ([Heinisch et al. 2018](#), 928).

At its core, populist secessionism serves several strategic functions in territorial disputes. First, it helps leaders circumvent constitutional and legal constraints on territorial separation. By framing these constraints as elite impositions that subvert popular will, leaders can challenge the legitimacy of constitutional arrangements without directly confronting their legal validity ([Gamper Sachse 2018](#), 579). Second, populist rhetoric helps obscure the traditionally elite-driven nature of separatist projects. Historically, nationalist movements often emerged from and were led by regional elites seeking to protect or expand their influence ([Breuilly 1993](#)). Populist rhetoric helps contemporary leaders distance themselves from this legacy by presenting secession as a bottom-up expression of popular will against established elites. In its early phases, Scottish nationalism was tied to elites seeking greater representation within the British state, often driven by concerns about local economic control and cultural preservation. However, since the mid-20th century, Scottish secessionism has increasingly positioned itself as the defender of ordinary Scots, using economic appeals like “It’s Scotland’s Oil” to mobilize working-class support and portraying independence as a way to empower “the people of Scotland” against Westminster elites.

Empirical research on populist secessionism reveals both the potential and limitations of populist-secessionist fusion. An early analysis by [de Vos \(2005\)](#) demonstrated how Belgium’s *Vlaams Belang* combined separatist nationalism with authoritarian populism, illustrating the strategic utility of this combination. Subsequent research by [van Haute et al. \(2018\)](#) revealed how sub-state nationalist parties’ populist rhetoric varies based on their relationship to power, suggesting that populist-secessionist appeals may be more tactical than ideological. The Catalan independence movement offers particularly rich insights into these dynamics. [Barrio et al. \(2018\)](#) document how traditional regionalist parties adopted increasingly populist discourses after 2012, while [Ruiz Casado \(2020\)](#) demonstrates how this “populist drift” reflected broader changes in political opportunity structures. These findings suggest that populist framing of secessionist demands often emerges as a strategic response to political circumstances rather than reflecting deep ideological alignment. Furthermore,

[Albertazzi et al. \(2018\)](#) analysis of the Lega’s evolution from regional autonomist movement to national populist party highlights how populist and secessionist elements can become decoupled over time, challenging assumptions about their natural alignment. While these case studies illuminate how political parties combine populist and secessionist appeals at the elite level, understanding the effectiveness of such combinations requires examining their resonance with mass attitudes.

3.2.2 Mass Attitudes and Competing Explanations

Existing research on populist secessionism has relied heavily on discourse analysis and elite-level case studies, leaving mass attitudes relatively unexplored. The rare exceptions that examine individual-level attitudes have been constrained by data availability. [Blanchet and Medeiros \(2019\)](#) examine the relationship between populist attitudes and secessionist preferences in Quebec, finding a weak but significant positive relationship. Due to data constraints, their analysis relies on a single item measuring distrust in political elites (“Politicians are ready to lie to get elected”), capturing only the anti-elitism dimension of populist attitudes. While the authors acknowledge this limitation and provide theoretical justification for their measurement choice, this unidimensional approach cannot capture the full conceptual richness of populism as theorized in the literature.

Beyond these methodological challenges in measuring populist attitudes, evaluating their importance necessitates situating them within the broader theoretical landscape of secessionist motivations. Traditional explanations for secessionist sentiment offer competing frameworks for understanding separatist demands. Identity-based factors encompass multiple dimensions: the perception of belonging to a group with a distinct ethnic or national character ([Miller 1995](#)); entitativity, or the degree to which various groups in the country are perceived as representing a unified whole ([Campbell 1958](#)); ingroup bias reflecting positive ingroup exceptionalism ([Allport 1954](#); [Tajfel et al. 1971](#)); perceived subversion of core national identity ([Sani and Reicher 1999, 2000](#); [Sani and Todman 2002](#)); and preferences for devolution ([Buchanan 2021](#); [Jenne et al. 2007](#)). Fear-based explanations comprise several elements: perceived threats to group autonomy, identity, or physical safety ([Birch 1984](#); [Levy 1997](#); [Posen 1993](#)); the quality of intergroup relations between various ethno-national groups ([Mendelsohn 2003](#); [Pinard and Hamilton 1986](#); [Yale and Durand 2011](#)); and perceptions about the ability to express dissent ([Buchanan 1997](#); [Sani 2005](#)). Economic approaches distinguish between “greed” separatism in economically advantaged regions and “need” separatism in disadvantaged

areas (Horowitz 1985; Howe 1998), reflecting perceptions of economic exploitation or neglect by the central state. The relative explanatory power of these traditional frameworks versus populist attitudes remains untested, particularly in post-conflict contexts where institutional structures like power-sharing agreements and territorial autonomy may amplify certain motivations for secession while dampening others. For instance, extensive regional autonomy might simultaneously reduce security concerns while intensifying economic grievances about resource distribution with the center.

These various theoretical frameworks for understanding secessionist demand highlight critical gaps in the current understanding of populist secessionism. First, while elite-level adoption of populist-secessionist rhetoric is well-documented, its effectiveness in shaping mass attitudes remains poorly understood. Second, the explanatory power of populist attitudes and traditional drivers of secessionism has not been systematically examined. Third, existing research focuses predominantly on Western democracies, leaving populist-secessionist dynamics in post-conflict societies largely unexplored. This study addresses these gaps by examining populist and secessionist attitudes in Republika Srpska, offering three key contributions. First, it provides the first systematic analysis of how populist attitudes relate to secessionist preferences in a post-conflict context. Second, it compares the relative influence of populist attitudes versus traditional drivers of secession, offering insights into whether populist framing fundamentally reshapes secessionist motivations. Third, it extends research on populist secessionism beyond Western democratic contexts, testing whether existing theories travel to more complex political environments. Methodologically, this study advances beyond previous research by employing a comprehensive measure of populist attitudes that captures all three key dimensions: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and Manichaeism outlook. This operationalization allows for examination of how different aspects of populist attitudes relate to secessionist preferences, providing a richer understanding of populist-secessionist dynamics than previously possible with unidimensional measures.

3.3 A Recent History of Secessionism in Republika Srpska

The historical development and institutional context make Republika Srpska a uniquely suitable case for examining whether populist secessionism shapes mass attitudes toward territorial separation. Emerging from the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent Bosnian War (1992-1995), it has

maintained a degree of autonomy within Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) since its formalization under the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. However, secessionist ambitions have persisted, often intertwined with ethno-nationalist rhetoric and calls for closer ties with Serbia ([International Crisis Group 2024, 4](#)). These aspirations have intensified in recent years, particularly under the leadership of Milorad Dodik, who has served as President of RS from 2010 to 2018 and again since 2022, as well as the Bosnian Serb member of the three-person collective presidency of BiH from 2018 to 2022. Dodik's secessionist agenda began to take shape during his first term as RS President, marked by provocative actions such as his 2011 call for a referendum on rejecting BiH's state war crimes chamber and his 2016 referendum on celebrating "The Day of Republika Srpska," which defied a Constitutional Court ruling and led to U.S. sanctions against Dodik for undermining the Dayton Agreement. Scholars have noted that Dodik's rhetoric often employs populist tropes, portraying RS Serbs as a virtuous people besieged by hostile external forces, including Bosniak politicians, international organizations, and Western governments ([Beglerović 2020, 116](#)). This narrative has helped mobilize support for secessionist ideas within RS, framing independence as a means of protecting Serb identity and interests. In his speech at a ceremony for victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp in April 2023, Dodik declared that "Serbs will not survive in these areas if Republika Srpska does not become independent in the coming years" ([Haas 2023](#)).

The secessionist rhetoric and actions escalated significantly from 2021 onwards, with Bosnian Serb political parties, led by Dodik, launching a boycott of key BiH state institutions in response to a law banning genocide denial related to the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. By October 2021, Dodik had announced plans for RS to withdraw from Bosnia and Herzegovina's armed forces, judiciary, and tax system. Despite temporarily putting these plans on hold in June 2022 due to the Ukraine war, secessionist activities intensified after Dodik's return to the RS Presidency in November 2022. In June 2023, the RS National Assembly enacted legislation to nullify the authority of both the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the High Representative within RS territory. When the High Representative annulled this legislation, Dodik responded by signing it into law, creating parallel legal frameworks within RS ([Fella 2024, 5-6](#)).

The international community has responded with increasing alarm to these developments, with the USA and UK imposing sanctions on Dodik and other RS leaders, and joint statements from the USA, UK, Germany, France, and Italy condemning moves to withdraw RS from BiH institutions

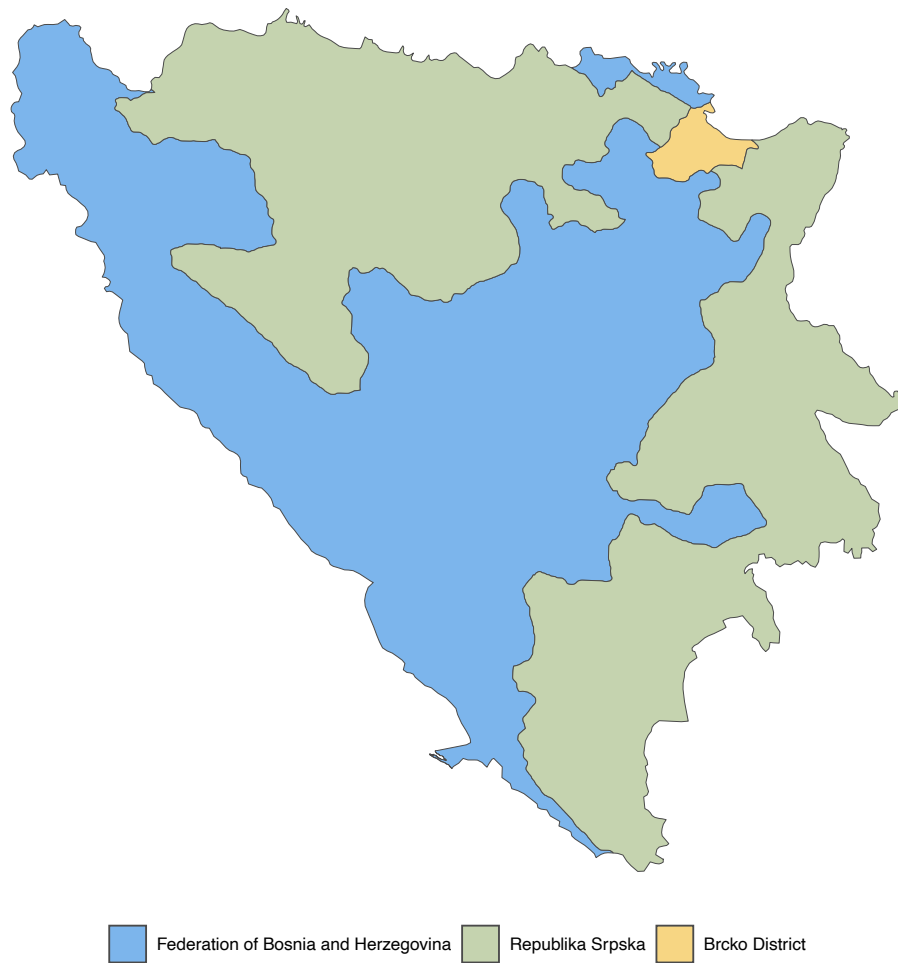


Figure 3.1: Political Divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, and Brčko District. These administrative divisions were established by the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement.

and reaffirming support for BiH's territorial integrity. The EU has expressed concern over the "secessionist and authoritarian measures" in RS, noting they are "not in line with the EU path" for BiH (Fella 2024, 30). Dodik has sought support from Russia, meeting with Vladimir Putin several times since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, blocking BiH's alignment with EU sanctions against Russia, and awarding Putin RS's highest medal of honor in January 2023. These actions have further strained relations with Western countries and raised concerns about Russian influence in the region (McBride 2023).

3.4 Dodik's Populist Rhetoric: Fueling Secessionism in Republika Srpska

The strategic deployment of populist discourse in service of secessionist goals requires systematic analysis of how political leaders articulate challenges to territorial integrity. In RS, Dodik's rhetoric represents a fusion of populist and secessionist elements that merits detailed examination through the lens of populism's core theoretical components. This analysis employs the ideational approach to populism, which identifies three essential elements: appeals to a unified popular will, anti-elitism, and a Manichaeian worldview that pits virtuous people against corrupt elites (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2018). The systematic examination of these ideational elements reveals how populist discourse operates as a strategic mechanism for reconfiguring the boundaries of legitimate political contestation, thereby constructing discursive frameworks that normalize institutional confrontation and territorial separation.

3.4.1 People-Centrism: Invoking Popular Sovereignty for Secession

A central tenet of Dodik's populist discourse is his frequent invocation of the "will of the people" as the ultimate source of political legitimacy, particularly in relation to secessionist aspirations. The very title of his fifth book, *The Will of the People*, encapsulates this approach. As described by its publisher, "Dodik and all the authorities in RS are here by the will of the people, that's why this book bears this name" (Matarugić 2021). This framing not only positions Dodik as the legitimate representative of the people but also implies that his political agenda, including secessionist ambitions, is a direct manifestation of democratic will.

His construction of “the people” predominantly aligns with an ethnopopulist conception, where the virtuous populace is primarily defined along ethnic Serb lines. However, on rare occasions, Dodik demonstrates rhetorical flexibility when politically expedient. In these contexts, he adopts a more inclusive stance, distinguishing between political elites and ordinary citizens across ethnic lines, acknowledging that “there are scoundrels among Serbs just as there are among other peoples” while describing Bosniaks as “good people” who are “somewhat unfortunate because their political elites keep them in stereotypes” (Buka 2023; TRT World 2021). This tactical inclusivity primarily serves to legitimize his attacks against political opponents who he claims betray popular will, while his concrete political actions and institutional initiatives remain oriented toward ethnically-defined secessionist goals. Such discursive flexibility exemplifies Vachudova’s (2020) distinction between ethnopopulism and traditional ethnic nationalism, wherein the former operates as both an electoral mobilization strategy and a power consolidation mechanism through its capacity to strategically redefine boundaries of inclusion when politically advantageous.

Dodik reinforces this narrative by consistently delegitimizing opposition parties and institutions that challenge his authority. He frames any opposition to his policies as opposition to the people themselves, as evidenced in his statement about one of his main rivals, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS): “Those who present themselves as the will of the people, they are the misfortune of the people. A misfortune like all other misfortunes. They have betrayed this people in recent years and decades. The SDS has become a sycophantic party, of Bosniak and Bosnian interests and foreign conquerors here and emperors” (TVK3 2024). By contrasting his party with SDS, historically the dominant Serb party in RS before his rise to power, Dodik positions himself as the sole legitimate representative of popular will.

This claim to embody popular will is particularly evident in Dodik’s insistence on organizing referendums as tools to legitimize his political actions, even when they conflict with higher authorities. Following a controversial referendum in 2016, he declared, “Three foreigners and two Bosniaks, who are on the side of political abuse of the Constitutional Court, have degraded the strength of that court by outvoting others, but RS has, with its law and the implemented referendum, clearly specified and shown what the will of this people is” (RTRS 2018). He further reinforces this with statements like “History in this area teaches us that the will of a nation cannot be broken by punishment” (Linde 2022), portraying secessionist aspirations as an immutable expression of popular will.

3.4.2 Anti-Elitism: A Three-Front War Against the People's Enemies

Dodik's anti-elitist discourse targets three allegedly colluding groups: the domestic opposition in Republika Srpska, the Bosniak elite in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the international community. His rhetoric consistently portrays these elites as working in concert to undermine RS sovereignty and subvert popular will. This conspiracy of elites is framed in existential terms: "Republika Srpska has only a choice between two things. One is to allow itself to quietly disappear and be destroyed through a deadly package made by the international community and Muslims in Sarajevo. They are implementing this in the first phase through the High Representative and his imposition of solutions, and now they are doing it through the Constitutional Court" ([Radio-televizija Vojvodine 2020](#)).

Dodik's criticism of the domestic opposition in Republika Srpska is particularly scathing, often characterizing political opponents as traitors who have abandoned the interests of the Serb people in favor of aligning with external powers. This sentiment is clearly expressed in his 2016 statement where he iterates that some Serbs in the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina have broken away from Republika Srpska: "They are committing the most shameless betrayal there and have put themselves in the function of Bakir Izetbegović. We will also have elections and I hope that the people will choose a structure that can defend the RS, because a strong RS has the right to its own life, and a weak one will be the subject of the manipulation by many" ([RTVBN 2016](#)). This rhetoric extends to his characterization of media outlets critical of his administration, whom he has accused of being "foreign paid individuals" and "traitors to their people" ([RTRS 2024](#)).

His attacks on the international community are pointed, framing foreign oversight as neo-colonial domination: "BiH is the last colony in Europe in which the people who came from abroad took the lead, who were not elected by anyone in the elections in BiH. We, domestic politicians, just go to the polls, win or lose, but those who are not from BiH, they actually play the leading role" ([Linde 2022](#)). This critique extends to specific international representatives, as evidenced by his claim that international actors actively undermine RS through financial support of opposition media: "We know that in the last 15 days, four million pounds came from Great Britain and that coordinated activities against RS and its leadership are creating an atmosphere of persecution" ([Karić Gauk 2023](#)).

The Bosniak political elite features prominently in Dodik's anti-elitist discourse, portrayed as the primary internal threat to RS autonomy. His attacks frequently target the Party of Democratic

Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije*, SDA), the historically dominant Bosniak party in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In one statement, he claims: “Because of Izetbegović and the SDA, the whole of BiH is in quicksand and no one can pull it out anymore. They have privatized every institution and now their former cadres are trying to do the same” (Milorad Dodik 2024). He frequently accuses Bosniak leaders of harboring hidden agendas: “Bosniaks have never hidden what they want and that their main goal is to take away all rights from Serbs and Croats with the support of foreigners” (Milorad Dodik 2024). This framing of Bosniak politics as inherently hostile to Serb interests presents secession as the only viable solution to protect RS from alleged Bosniak domination.

3.4.3 Manichaean Politics: Moral Absolutism in the Struggle for Secession

The Manichaean aspect of Dodik’s worldview is evident in his portrayal of Serbs as a people under constant attack from multiple fronts. In a statement preceding a meeting with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Dodik declared, “I will tell him that Serbs are attacked in all places where they live, in Montenegro, in Kosovo and Metohija, in RS, not to mention in the Federation, and that everyone wants to paint us as the disruptive factor” (Radio-televizija Vojvodine 2024). This narrative of universal victimhood reinforces the idea of a moral struggle against overwhelming odds, with hidden agendas threatening Serb interests: “It’s not accidental. I don’t believe in conspiracy theories, I believe in conspiracies. I think that many in the West are not comfortable with the strength of Serbia” (Glas Srpske 2024).

International actors are consistently portrayed as forces of evil working to undermine RS sovereignty. Dodik’s statement that “High Representatives have inflicted historical and national evil on Republika Srpska and we should insist that they leave” (N1 News 2018) exemplifies this moral framing. His attacks often become personal, as evidenced in his criticism of the U.S. Ambassador: “This speaks more about the impotence and personal aspect of this ambassador who engaged here to do evil to Republika Srpska. This proves that he is evil” (Index 2024). Such personalized attacks create a clear moral dichotomy between RS defenders and their alleged enemies.

This moral absolutism extends to domestic politics, where Dodik frames Bosniak political goals as fundamentally evil: “The SDA is an evil that has never allowed BiH to be a normal community. They have poisoned everything with their hatred against Serbs and Republika Srpska” (Milorad Dodik 2024). By elevating secession from a political program to a moral crusade, as evidenced in

declarations like “The Republic has a moral aspect that no one can destroy... Freedom for us is not a philosophy but a way of life” (N1 News 2024), Dodik frames resistance to his agenda as opposition not just to RS’s interests, but to fundamental moral values themselves.

3.5 Data and Methods

The data for this study was collected by the Bosnian and Herzegovinian subsidiary of Valicon, a survey vendor headquartered in Slovenia and focused on the region of South-East Europe. The sample ($n = 918$) was a representative sample of Republika Srpska residents based on ethnicity, age, gender, and region. The sample demographics closely match the most recent census data for Republika Srpska from 2013. In the sample, 89% of respondents identified as Serb (compared to 81.5% in the census), 65% were female (52% in census), and 23% lived in rural areas (versus 21.3% in census). The mean age was 41 years old, compared to 41.3 in the census. While the sample slightly overrepresents women and Serb respondents, these minor deviations are addressed through the inclusion of demographic controls in the analyses.

Data collection took place between February 1 and 21, 2024. The survey was administered as a computer assisted web interview and it included voting-age residents in Republika Srpska. Given the web-based methodology, it is noteworthy that household internet penetration in RS reached 84.8% in 2023, with higher access rates in urban (89.1%) than rural areas (81.9%), according to the Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics. Respondents were informed that the study aimed to investigate “public opinion about current issues.” Participants accepted the call to join after receiving an invitation emailed to all individuals in the panel who satisfied the survey pre-conditions (RS residents of voting age). Prior to starting the survey, participants provided informed consent. To ensure data quality, responses were screened for straightlining, a pattern where respondents select the same answer for all or most questions, indicating potential disengagement. Five cases exhibiting straightlining down the middle of the scale were identified and removed from the dataset, resulting in a final sample of 913 respondents.

The paper uses a scale developed by scholars from Team Populism that measures populist attitudes by separately measuring the three key components of populism: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and Manichean outlook (Castanho Silva et al. 2018). This scale is used due to its focus on all

three elements of populism, allowing granular examination of its subcomponents. To calculate the overall measure of populism, this study adopts the multiplicative unified scale approach introduced by Castanho Silva et al. (Castanho Silva et al. 2018). In this method, the scores for each dimension of populism are first normalized to fall between 0 and 1. These normalized scores are then multiplied together to produce a single populism score for each individual. This approach ensures that a person’s overall populist attitude is constrained by their lowest score in any of the three dimensions, reflecting the interconnected nature of these components in populist ideology.

Measures of populist attitudes are integrated alongside other theoretical motivations for secession. The traditional motivations for secessionism (the independent variables or predictors) were measured using six survey items, each on a five-category agree/disagree Likert scale. Half of the items were reverse-coded to ensure reliability and reduce response bias. The dependent variable, support for political separatism, was measured with the question: “If offered the chance, how likely are you to vote for Republika Srpska to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina and form an independent country?” Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Very unlikely” to “Very likely.”³ Control variables included age, gender, education, income, and urban/rural residence in the baseline model. Additional controls for ethnicity (Serb) and partisanship (affiliation with Dodik’s party, SNSD) were included to account for their potential influence on secessionist attitudes.

3.6 Results

The analysis revolves around three key questions regarding populism and secessionism in RS. First, how populist attitudes and secessionist leanings shape political support in divided societies, particularly whether these orientations influence support for parties championing territorial separation. Second, whether populist secessionism is primarily elite-driven or reflects broader public sentiments. Third, how populist and secessionist attitudes compare to traditional drivers of political behavior in divided societies.

Table 3.1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis. The outcome variable, support for secession, shows substantial variation (mean = 2.90, SD = 1.36) on its five-point scale. Of particular theoretical interest is the distribution of the populism measure (mean = 0.20, SD

³The full questionnaire is available in Appendix B.3.

= 0.14). The multiplicative populism index exhibits notable right-skewedness, with most respondents clustering toward the lower end of the scale (see Appendix B.1). This pattern reflects the conceptual foundations of populist ideology: since populist attitudes lie at the intersection of three constituent elements—people-centrism (mean = 0.74), anti-elitism (mean = 0.71), and Manichaeism (mean = 0.37)—few individuals consistently embrace all components (Wuttke et al. 2020, 365). Robustness checks using square-root transformed measures confirm the stability of all findings regarding the relationship between populist attitudes and secessionist preferences that will be presented in the rest of this section (see Appendix B.1).

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics of Regression Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	SE
Secessionism	2.90	1.36	0.04
Ethno-regional identification	0.56	0.15	0.01
Entitativity	0.46	0.14	0.00
Ingroup bias	0.57	0.16	0.01
Identity subversion	0.64	0.14	0.00
Devolution	0.51	0.13	0.00
Right to dissent	0.50	0.16	0.01
Threat perception	0.51	0.18	0.01
Intergroup Relations	0.51	0.17	0.01
Perceived economic grievances	0.47	0.16	0.01
Populism	0.20	0.14	0.00
People-centrism	0.74	0.20	0.01
Anti-elitism	0.71	0.20	0.01
Manichaeism	0.37	0.18	0.01
Age	0.41	0.21	0.01
Education	0.42	0.23	0.01
Income	0.25	0.16	0.01
Female	0.65	0.48	0.02
Rural	0.23	0.42	0.01
Serb	0.89	0.31	0.01
SNSD	0.32	0.47	0.02

Note: Predictors scaled 0-1. Outcome (secessionism) coded 1-5.

The analysis reveals contrasting relationships between populist attitudes and secessionist sentiments with regards to support for Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) in Republika Srpska. Contrary to expectations derived from the literature on populist secessionism, the findings indicate that individuals with stronger populist attitudes are less likely to support SNSD. The logistic regression model shows a significant negative relationship between standardized populist attitudes and SNSD support ($\beta = -2.774, p < 0.001$). Given that logistic regression does not assume normality of predictors, the right-skewed distribution of populist attitudes does not violate model assumptions (Peng et al. 2002). As populist attitudes increase from their minimum to maximum values, the probability of supporting SNSD decreases by approximately 41.4 percentage points. To contextualize this effect, a one standard deviation increase in populist attitudes is associated with a 5.5 percentage point decrease in the probability of supporting SNSD. In stark contrast, secessionist attitudes demonstrate a strong positive association with SNSD support. The logistic regression model reveals a significant positive relationship between standardized secessionist attitudes and SNSD support ($\beta = 2.188, p < 0.001$). Moving from the minimum to the maximum value on the secessionist attitude scale is associated with a 44.4 percentage point increase in the probability of supporting SNSD. A one standard deviation increase in secessionist attitudes corresponds to a 17.7 percentage point increase in the likelihood of SNSD support. The contrasting slopes in Figure 3.2 visually reinforce these findings, clearly illustrating the opposing directions of the relationships between populist and secessionist attitudes and SNSD support.

After examining the relationship between populist attitudes and SNSD support, the analysis now evaluates whether populist secessionism reflects broader public sentiments. Table 3.2 presents results from OLS regression analyses of secessionist preferences. Model 1 includes standard demographic controls: age, gender, education, income, and urban/rural residence.

The regression analysis reveals a negative but statistically non-significant association between populist attitudes and support for secession ($\beta = -0.371, p = 0.158$). Additional analyses using a square root transformed measure to address distributional concerns yield substantively similar results (see Appendix B.1). This relationship remains non-significant when incorporating additional control variables in sensitivity analyses (models 2 and 3): the inclusion of ethno-national identification (Serb) and partisan support for Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Both Serb ethno-national identity ($\beta = 0.448, p < 0.001$) and SNSD partisan affiliation ($\beta = 0.206, p < 0.05$)

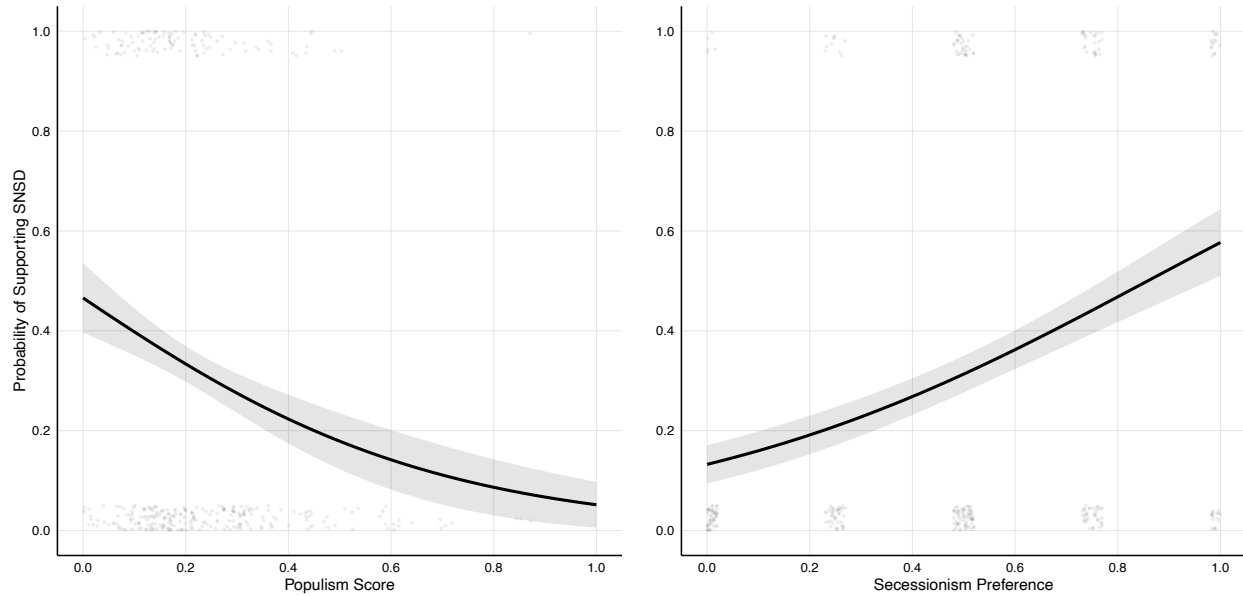


Figure 3.2: Predicted Probabilities of SNSD Support by Populist Attitudes and Secessionist Preferences. Black curves show predicted probabilities from logistic regression models, with shaded regions indicating 95% confidence intervals. Gray points represent observed data (jittered to avoid overplotting), with 1 indicating SNSD support and 0 indicating non-support. All variables standardized to 0-1 scale.

emerge as significant predictors, though at different levels of statistical significance. Disaggregating the constituent components of populist attitudes (model 4) reveals that anti-elitism demonstrates a significant negative relationship with secessionist preferences ($\beta = -0.447$, $p < 0.05$), while people-centrism ($\beta = -0.081$, $p = 0.656$) and Manichaean outlook ($\beta = -0.061$, $p = 0.764$) show no significant association. These findings suggest limited empirical support for populist attitudes as drivers of secessionist preferences in Republika Srpska.⁴

Having established both the significant negative relationship between populist attitudes and SNSD support and the more nuanced pattern regarding secessionist preferences - where only the anti-elitism component of populism shows a significant negative association while overall populist attitudes demonstrate no significant relationship - these findings provide clear evidence that populist secessionism is primarily an elite-driven phenomenon rather than reflecting broader public sentiments. This raises the third research question: how do these attitudes compare to traditional drivers of political behavior in divided societies? The regression analysis systematically tests competing

⁴Additional exploratory analyses examining potential moderating and mediating relationships are presented in Appendix B.2.

theoretical explanations for secessionist preferences, revealing the enduring explanatory power of conventional drivers. Figure 3.3 provides a visual summary of these relationships.

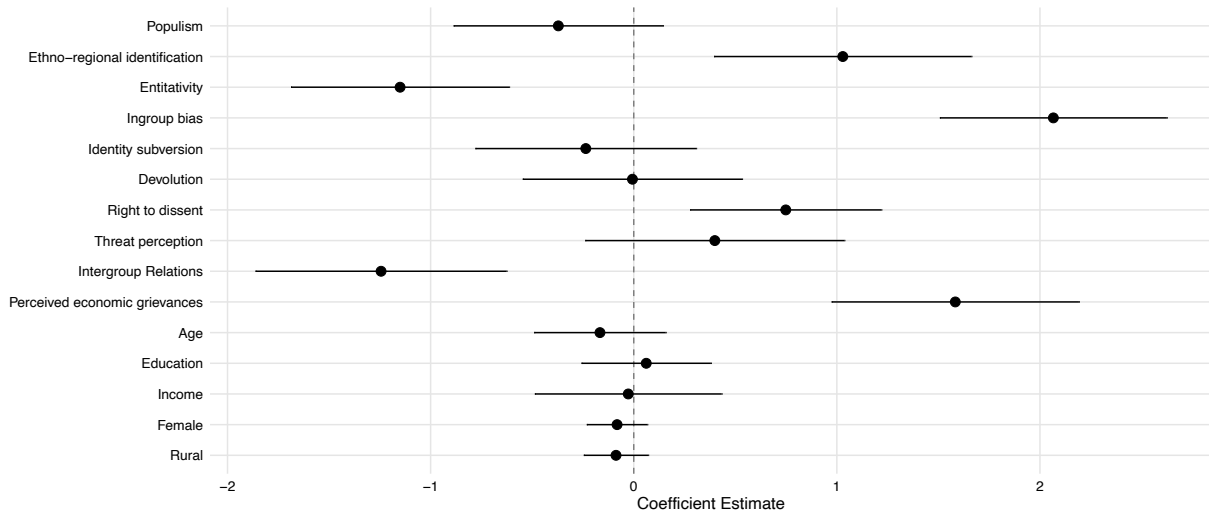


Figure 3.3: Predictors of Secession in Republika Srpska. Predictors scaled 0–1. Outcome (secessionism) coded 1–5; higher numbers indicate greater support for RS secession. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. $n = 913$.

Identity-based explanations emerge as particularly powerful. Notably, ingroup bias – perception of positive ingroup exceptionalism – emerges as the strongest predictor ($\beta \approx 2.07$, $p < 0.001$). Entitativity – the degree to which respondents perceive groups as a unified whole – has a strong negative association with secessionist attitudes ($\beta \approx -1.15$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that not perceiving Bosnia and Herzegovina as a unified entity increases support for secession. Ethno-regional identification, capturing a distinct RS identity, is also positively associated with secessionist preferences ($\beta \approx 1.03$, $p < 0.01$), aligning with ascriptive theories of secession. Perceived economic grievances also exhibit a strong positive association with secessionist support ($\beta = 1.58$, $p < 0.001$) lending credence to the “need” logic of economic theories of separatism. This suggests that perceptions of economic disadvantage or exploitation by the central authorities fuel desires for secession in RS.

When it comes to fears-based theories, intergroup relations emerge as a significant predictor, with poorer perceived relations between Serbs and other ethnic groups (Bosniaks and Croats) associated with higher support for secession ($\beta = -1.22$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with theories emphasizing the role of perceived tensions and discrimination in fueling secessionist demands. Contrary to expectations, the perception of having one’s right to dissent protected within Bosnia

Table 3.2: Predictors of Secessionism in RS, OLS Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Identity Theories</i>				
Ethno-regional identification	1.029** (0.323)	1.006** (0.321)	1.129** (0.359)	1.006** (0.323)
Entitativity	-1.150*** (0.274)	-1.385*** (0.280)	-1.137*** (0.317)	-1.145*** (0.274)
Ingroup bias	2.066*** (0.285)	1.900*** (0.287)	1.466*** (0.339)	2.054*** (0.294)
Identity subversion	-0.236 (0.277)	-0.143 (0.277)	-0.111 (0.317)	-0.087 (0.288)
Devolution	-0.006 (0.275)	-0.032 (0.274)	-0.021 (0.307)	0.047 (0.276)
Right to dissent	0.748** (0.240)	0.693** (0.239)	0.781** (0.279)	0.677** (0.243)
<i>Fears Theories</i>				
Threat perception	0.399 (0.325)	0.223 (0.327)	0.054 (0.369)	0.447 (0.326)
Intergroup relations	-1.244*** (0.315)	-1.127*** (0.315)	-1.277*** (0.357)	-1.192*** (0.316)
<i>Economic Theories</i>				
Perceived economic grievances	1.583*** (0.311)	1.607*** (0.309)	1.880*** (0.346)	1.524*** (0.315)
<i>Populism Measures</i>				
Populism	-0.371 (0.263)	-0.333 (0.262)	-0.348 (0.293)	
People-centrism				-0.081 (0.182)
Anti-elitism				-0.447* (0.198)
Manichaeism				-0.061 (0.201)
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Age	-0.166 (0.165)	-0.099 (0.165)	-0.287 (0.193)	-0.179 (0.165)
Education	0.062 (0.162)	0.001 (0.162)	-0.080 (0.188)	0.069 (0.162)
Income	-0.027 (0.235)	-0.036 (0.233)	-0.256 (0.281)	0.012 (0.235)
Female	-0.082 (0.076)	-0.082 (0.076)	-0.075 (0.087)	-0.086 (0.076)
Rural	-0.087 (0.081)	-0.084 (0.080)	-0.143 (0.093)	-0.087 (0.081)
Serb		0.448*** (0.129)	0.359* (0.153)	
SNSD			0.206* (0.096)	
Constant	1.306** (0.495)	1.112* (0.495)	1.329* (0.567)	1.538** (0.524)
Observations	913	913	670	913
R ²	0.425	0.433	0.470	0.428
Adjusted R ²	0.416	0.423	0.456	0.417
Residual SE (df)	1.043 (897)	1.036 (896)	1.035 (652)	1.042 (895)
F Statistic (df)	44.228*** (15; 897)	42.738*** (16; 896)	34.052*** (17; 652)	39.332*** (17; 895)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

and Herzegovina is positively associated with support for secession ($\beta = 0.75, p < 0.01$), while threat perception does not significantly predict secessionist preferences.

3.7 Discussion

The findings reveal a fundamental disconnect between elite-level populist-secessionist rhetoric and mass attitudes in Republika Srpska, with the negative relationship between anti-elitism and secessionist attitudes demonstrating that populist secessionism functions primarily as an elite rhetorical strategy rather than reflecting genuine public sentiment. The unique political landscape of RS offers a compelling explanation for this phenomenon. Milorad Dodik, a dominant figure for over a decade, embodies both elite status and secessionist ambitions, illustrating how nationalist mobilization often relies more on elite figures rather than purely grassroots movements (Kaufman 2001; Snyder 2000). While Dodik's rhetoric constructs a trinity of antagonistic elites (domestic opposition, Bosniak leaders, and international actors), anti-elitist sentiments among RS residents likely reflect dissatisfaction with his long-standing administration rather than with the external elites he rhetorically targets. This interpretation gains empirical support from cross-national research by Jungkunz et al. (2021), who demonstrate that standard measures of populist attitudes effectively predict support for populist parties when in opposition but fail to do so when populists hold power. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018, 1670) argue, the definition of "the people" and "the elite" is inherently context-dependent, particularly in divided societies with multiple levels of governance. In RS, where entity-level institutions exercise substantial autonomy while remaining formally subordinate to state-level and international oversight, anti-elitist attitudes likely reflect a complex evaluation of multiple power structures rather than the simpler dichotomy often presented in populist rhetoric. Consequently, secessionist appeals resonate through channels independent of populist attitudes, drawing strength from deeply rooted grievances that need not be filtered through an anti-elite worldview. This theoretical framework helps explain the apparent paradox in the findings - while populist attitudes correlate negatively with secessionist preferences at the mass level, populist framing remains primarily an elite strategy for navigating the politically charged nature of territorial separation, allowing leaders to present institutional resistance not merely as political opposition but as evidence of elite manipulation of popular sovereignty. Opposition narratives illustrate this

dynamic, with figures like Milan Miličević, president of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), condemning Dodik's "false patriotism" and portraying his independence rhetoric as "a great deception, designed to strengthen his absolute power." Miličević argued that while Dodik "manipulated with false national rhetoric, he was actually filling the pockets of the chosen elite and emptying Republika Srpska" (Raport 2024).

Moving beyond the elite-level strategic deployment of populist rhetoric, the analysis demonstrates that traditional drivers of secessionism explain mass attitudes far more effectively than populist sentiments. The dominance of traditional drivers reflects the power of institutionalized ethnicity in post-conflict societies (Bieber 2004). The process unfolds through a self-reinforcing cycle of ethnic identification, ingroup bias, and pessimism regarding the possibility of intergroup cooperation. The Dayton Agreement's consociational framework, designed to end hostilities, inadvertently solidified ethnic categories as primary political identities. This institutional entrenchment of ethnicity primes individuals to view their Serb identity as more salient than a broader Bosnian Herzegovinian civic identity. However, the findings reveal that mere ethnic identification is not the strongest predictor of secessionist attitudes. Instead, it is the ingroup bias accompanying this identification that plays a more crucial role, suggesting that the institutional structure not only preserves ethnic categories but actively fosters a sense of ingroup favoritism. This heightened bias, exacerbated by post-war demographic homogenization, erodes any sense of shared civic nationhood. Consequently, secessionists tend to view Bosnia and Herzegovina not as a cohesive state but as an artificial construct forcing distinct groups to coexist against their will. This perception of the state as a forced union, rather than a natural political community, further reinforces negative intergroup attitudes, creating a feedback loop that strengthens secessionist tendencies. This is an example of how post-conflict institutions, designed to manage conflict, can inadvertently create conditions that perpetuate divisive attitudes and separatist ambitions (Belloni 2007).

While both elite rhetoric and mass attitudes confirm the potency of "ethnic framing" (Huszka 2013, 7), the strong predictive power of economic grievances offers a crucial counterpoint to analyses that focus primarily on ethno-national identities and legacies of conflict in the Western Balkans. As the second strongest predictor of secessionist attitudes in Republika Srpska, economic factors underscore the popularity of the "prosperity frame" (Huszka 2013, 9). These findings align with Sambanis and Milanovic (2014) and Deiwiiks et al. (2012) who argue that economic inequalities

between regions can be a potent driver of secessionism. The explanatory power of economic grievances in the model suggests that secessionist attitudes in RS are not solely rooted in ethnic differences, but also in perceptions of economic disadvantage. This provides grounds for cautious optimism. If economic factors play a significant role in driving secessionist sentiments, then targeted economic development strategies and efforts to address perceived economic inequities could potentially mitigate motivation for secession among the population.

These findings have important implications for understanding similar cases where populist leaders champion secessionist causes. The RS case demonstrates the need to distinguish between elite-level populist-secessionist rhetoric and the actual drivers of mass support for secession. While populist leaders may strategically frame secessionism through an anti-elite lens to navigate institutional constraints, mass attitudes remain anchored in traditional group identifications and economic grievances that operate independently of populist worldviews. This suggests that comprehensive approaches to conflict resolution in divided societies should focus on addressing fundamental drivers of secessionist sentiment—particularly economic grievances and intergroup relations—rather than merely countering populist rhetoric. The persistence of these traditional drivers, even in the face of sustained populist-secessionist messaging from political elites, underscores their centrality to understanding and potentially mitigating separatist demands in post-conflict contexts.

3.8 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate three critical questions regarding populist secessionism: how populist attitudes and secessionist leanings shape political support in divided societies, whether populist secessionism primarily functions as an elite-level strategy or reflects corresponding mass attitudes, and how populist attitudes compare to traditional drivers of secessionist preferences. The empirical evidence from Republika Srpska reveals a fundamental disconnect between elite-level populist-secessionist rhetoric and mass attitudes, with individuals exhibiting stronger populist attitudes—particularly anti-elitism—demonstrating lower support for both secession and Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Such results cast doubt on conventional wisdom regarding populist framing's capacity to mobilize secessionist sentiment. Instead, traditional factors emerged as substantially stronger predictors of secessionist attitudes, with ingroup bias and economic

grievances demonstrating the most robust effects. The analysis reveals that ethnic identification, while significant, operates primarily through its relationship with ingroup favoritism rather than as a direct driver of secessionist preferences. Most notably, the negative relationship between anti-elitism and secessionist attitudes suggests that populist rhetoric may actually undermine rather than reinforce separatist demands at the mass level, particularly in contexts where populist leaders have held power for extended periods.

These findings advance our theoretical understanding of populist secessionism in several crucial ways. First, they demonstrate that the strategic deployment of populist rhetoric by secessionist leaders does not necessarily reshape the fundamental drivers of mass political attitudes in divided societies. This challenges prevailing assumptions about the natural fusion of populist and nationalist sentiments, suggesting instead that populist appeals may function primarily as elite-level tools for navigating institutional constraints rather than genuine ideological innovations that resonate with mass attitudes. Second, the findings contribute to broader debates about the nature of populist attitudes in post-conflict societies, suggesting that standard conceptualizations of anti-elitism may operate differently in contexts where ethnic divisions and institutional arrangements create multiple, overlapping power structures. The analysis reveals how consociational frameworks, designed to manage ethnic conflict, can inadvertently create conditions where anti-elite sentiments become decoupled from secessionist preferences, particularly when populist leaders become entrenched within regional-level institutions with a high degree of autonomy. Finally, these results extend the literature on institutionalized ethnicity by demonstrating how post-conflict institutional arrangements not only preserve ethnic categories but actively shape the relationship between identity, economic grievances, and territorial preferences, creating self-reinforcing cycles that perpetuate separatist demands independently of populist rhetoric.

The findings take on immediate urgency in light of Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 presidential election and Dodik's earlier statement that "When Donald Trump won in America, I intended to declare the independence of Republika Srpska, but then some around me got scared and I didn't do it. I have to say that I regret it today. But if Trump were to win again, I don't think I would hesitate" ([Radio Free Europe 2023](#)). Such declarations, coupled with intensifying institutional confrontation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, demand immediate policy attention. The empirical patterns revealed here suggest that international stakeholders might more productively focus on material conditions and

intercommunal relations rather than rhetorical escalation. The striking salience of economic factors indicates that targeted development initiatives, particularly those addressing perceived regional disparities, could prove more effective in stabilizing the situation than efforts aimed at countering populist political discourse. A comprehensive approach emphasizing both economic integration and institutional mechanisms for managing ethnic relations may offer the most promising path forward, particularly given the interplay between material grievances and group identities in shaping territorial preferences.

This investigation advances methodological frontiers in studying populist-secessionist dynamics while acknowledging certain constraints and directions for future research. Moving beyond the single-item measures that have been utilized in previous work in this specific domain, the research design's comprehensive measurement of populist attitudes proved particularly valuable in illuminating how distinct elements of the populist worldview relate differently to territorial preferences. In addition, RS's distinctive institutional configuration and political trajectory provided an ideal setting for examining how sustained exposure to populist-secessionist messaging shapes mass attitudes. However, the single-case design necessarily limits the generalizability of these findings. Future research should extend this analytical framework to other cases of populist secessionism, particularly examining whether the disconnect between elite rhetoric and mass attitudes persists across different institutional arrangements and historical contexts. Comparative studies could be especially valuable in determining whether the relationship between populist attitudes and secessionist preferences varies systematically between post-conflict and consolidated democratic contexts.

The empirical patterns documented in this study hold significant implications for understanding the relationship between populism and territorial politics in an era of increasing challenges to existing state structures. While populist-secessionist rhetoric has gained prominence from Flanders to Catalonia, the findings from Republika Srpska suggest that the mobilizational effectiveness of such discourse may be more limited than commonly assumed, particularly in cases when the regional elites propagating secession have been in power for a long time and operate in a system that already grants them a significant degree of autonomy. The negative relationship between anti-elitism and secessionist preferences indicates that scholars and policymakers should exercise caution in presuming natural affinities between populist and nationalist sentiments, even in cases where political entrepreneurs actively pursue their fusion. Instead, the persistence of traditional ethnic and economic drivers of

separatist attitudes suggests that territorial conflicts will be resistant to purely discursive solutions. This pattern holds particular relevance given the potential for renewed secessionist pressures in the wake of Trump's 2024 victory and growing geopolitical instability. The fundamental challenge facing divided societies lies not in countering populist rhetoric but in addressing the underlying grievances and institutional arrangements that make such appeals resonant. As polarization intensifies and established international frameworks face mounting pressures, the ability to distinguish between elite-level strategic discourse and mass-level motivations for territorial separation becomes crucial for maintaining political stability. Ultimately, the findings suggest that effective responses to secessionist challenges must move beyond the populist moment to engage with deeper questions of real or perceived economic inequality, institutional design, and intercommunal relations in divided societies.

4 Information and Identity: How Information Environments Shape Support for Kin-State Policies in Serbia

4.1 Introduction

How do information environments shape public support for kin-state engagement policies? The growing prominence of diaspora and kin-state politics in international relations has made this question particularly urgent, as kin states increasingly assert their right and responsibility to engage with co-ethnic populations beyond their borders ([Adamson 2016](#); [Gamlen et al. 2021](#); [King and Melvin 1999](#)). While extensive research examines how media frames and elite rhetoric shape public opinion during international crises ([Baum and Groeling 2010](#); [Baum and Potter 2008](#); [Berinsky and Kinder 2006](#); [Guisinger and Saunders 2017](#); [Iyengar and Simon 1993](#)), empirical work on how citizens evaluate policies pertaining to co-ethnic populations abroad remains limited. The notable exception is [Stoycheff and Nisbet's \(2017\)](#) examination of Russian public opinion during the Crimean crisis, which shows how priming economic, military, and diplomatic costs alongside hawkish nationalist rhetoric shaped support for intervention. Yet beyond this study of a specific military intervention, we know surprisingly little about how citizens in kin states evaluate the broader range of policies toward external national minorities or form long-term strategic preferences regarding engagement with co-ethnics in neighboring states. This limited comprehension of individual-level preference formation is particularly problematic as states increasingly pursue various forms of engagement with external minorities, from cultural and educational support to more aggressive policies of passportization

and territorial revision (Ganohariti 2020; Waterbury 2010). Moreover, while existing theoretical frameworks effectively map the institutional relationships between nationalizing states, national minorities, and external national homelands (Brubaker 1996), we lack systematic evidence about how citizens within kin states evaluate and respond to different policy options for engaging co-ethnic populations abroad and whether these attitudes are malleable.

This paper advances scholarship by examining how information environments shape Serbian public opinion across multiple kin-state policy domains. The experimental design manipulates two distinct informational frames: a cost prime that emphasizes how assistance to co-ethnic populations reduces domestic spending capacity by drawing from the same state budget that funds services within Serbia, and a nationalist prime that highlights shared ethnic identity while emphasizing discrimination and unequal treatment faced by co-ethnic populations in neighboring states. Using an original survey experiment with 1,050 Serbian adults, the analysis reveals that the effectiveness of both cost and nationalist appeals varies systematically with policy stakes. While priming domestic budgetary trade-offs significantly reduces support for general assistance, especially visible in decreased backing of economic and cultural assistance programs, these cost considerations have minimal impact on attitudes toward territorial revision. Conversely, priming shared identity and discrimination boosts support for general assistance but shows unexpectedly negative effects on border change attitudes. These findings suggest that opinion formation in kin-state politics reflects an interaction between information environments and the inherent stakes of different policy domains.

This research bridges several literatures in addition to offering important policy implications. Theoretically, the study extends priming theories from crisis decision-making to routine kin-state politics while identifying how policy domain characteristics condition information effects. Empirically, it provides the first experimental evidence on how citizens evaluate different tools of co-ethnics engagement, from cultural support to territorial claims. For policymakers, the results suggest that public resistance to aggressive kin-state policies may be more robust than nationalist rhetoric would suggest, while support for assistance programs shows greater sensitivity to cost considerations.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the case selection and justification of Serbia as an appropriate context for examining kin-state politics. Section 3 develops a theoretical framework synthesizing kin-state politics with public opinion formation, which illustrates how information environments shape citizen preferences across policy domains. Section 4 introduces

theoretically-derived hypotheses regarding the conditional effects of cost and nationalist primes on support for different forms of co-ethnics engagement. Section 5 details the experimental methodology, including sample characteristics, treatment design, and empirical strategy. Section 6 presents the empirical analysis of treatment effects across policy domains, examining both general assistance and territorial revision attitudes while accounting for demographic and geographic heterogeneity. Section 7 discusses the theoretical implications of the findings for understanding domain-specific preference formation in kin-state politics and concludes by identifying promising directions for future research.

4.2 Case Selection: Serbia as a Kin-State in Post-Yugoslav Space

The contemporary dynamics of Serbian kin-state politics are heavily influenced by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the subsequent state-building processes in its former republics. Therefore, Serbia's position as a kin-state reflects both historical patterns of ethnic settlement across the Western Balkans and more recent demographic movement (both voluntary and forced) resulting from the Yugoslav wars ([Sardon 2001](#)). Significant population of Serbs outside of Serbia reside in the region of Western Balkans spanning multiple neighboring states including Bosnia and Herzegovina (particularly Republika Srpska), Croatia, Montenegro, and the disputed area of Kosovo. This geographic dispersion exemplifies what scholars have identified as the fundamental tension between territorial sovereignty and ethno-national communities, creating "imperfect" nation-state borders and overlapping spheres of political influence that characterize post-imperial spaces ([Mylonas 2013](#)).

Serbia's approach to kin-state engagement has undergone a fundamental transformation since the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, evolving from a hybrid strategy of direct territorial control in Kosovo and support for separatist movements in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina toward more institutionalized mechanisms of cultural and economic support for co-ethnic populations today. This transformation reflects both changing regional dynamics and Serbia's reorientation toward European integration. The 2006 Constitution explicitly establishes Serbia's responsibility to maintain ties with co-ethnics abroad, stating that "The Republic of Serbia shall develop and promote relations of Serbs living abroad with the kin state" (Article 13). This constitutional framework was operationalized through the 2006 Declaration defining diaspora relations as the "highest state and national interest" and the subsequent 2009 Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, which established a bifurcated

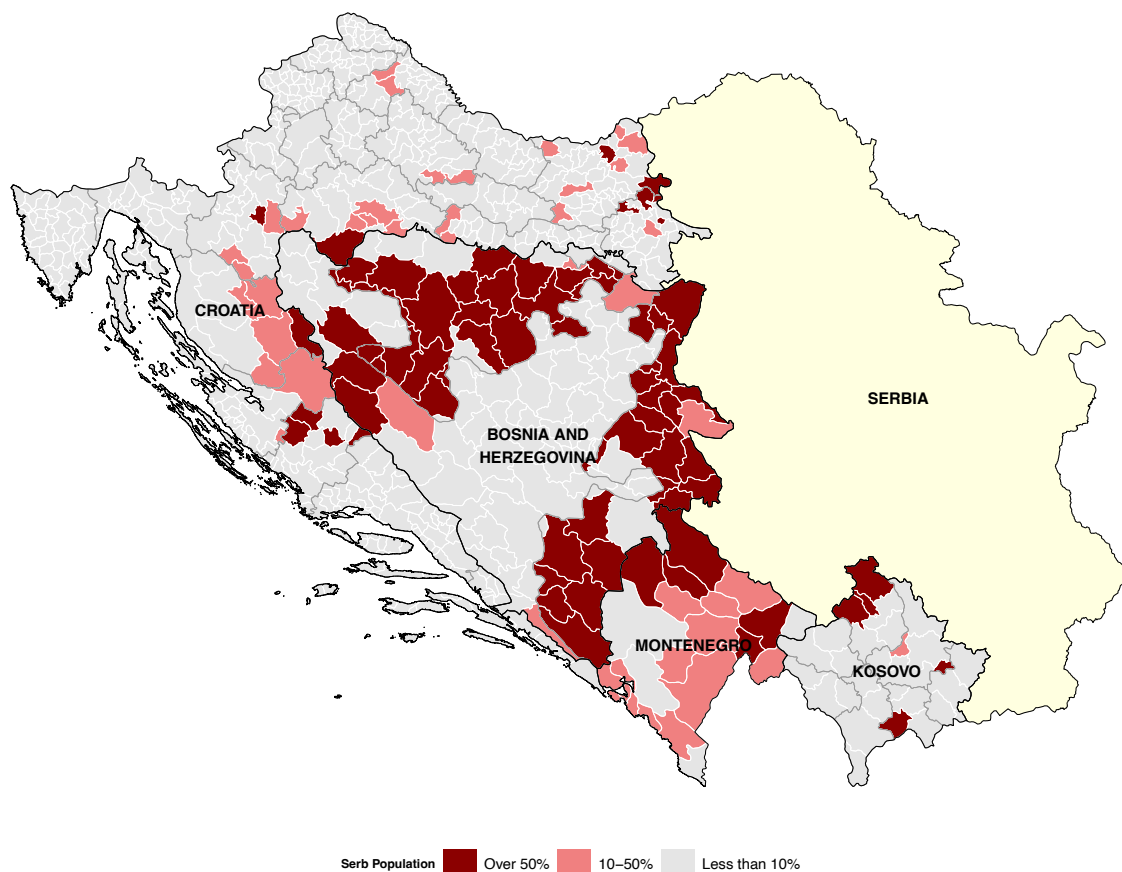


Figure 4.1: Transborder Distribution of Serb Minority Populations in the Western Balkans. This municipal-level cartographic representation depicts the geographic concentration of ethnic Serbs residing as significant transborder minorities outside of Serbia proper in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Kosovo (whose international status remains contested and which Serbia constitutionally defines as its own autonomous province). Municipalities are categorized by proportional ethnic Serb population density. Notable Kosovo municipalities with substantial Serb demographic majorities not visualized in this map include post-2008 administrative units established through decentralization processes: Parteš (99.9%), Ranilug (97.2%), Gračanica (82.2%), North Mitrovica (76.5%), and Klokot (71.2%). This is because the visualization is built upon the GADM database (version 4.1) which uses pre-2008 municipal boundaries. Data sources: 2021 Croatia Census, 2013 Bosnia and Herzegovina Census, 2023 Montenegro Census, and 2013 European Centre for Minority Issues demographic estimates for Kosovo.

institutional approach: distinguishing between the “diaspora” (Serbian citizens abroad and ethnic Serbs worldwide) and “Serbs in the region” (ethnic Serbs in neighboring states). The Administration for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, which integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014, implements this dual engagement strategy. Nevertheless, Serbia’s kin-state policies operate within complex regional and international constraints. The legacy of the 1990s has made neighboring states particularly sensitive to Serbian engagement with co-ethnic populations and its EU candidacy status introduces additional considerations regarding minority rights standards and regional cooperation. These constraints help explain the observed shift toward “softer” forms of engagement.

However, the institutionalization of kin-state policies occurs within an ambiguous discursive environment that complicates policy implementation and regional relations. While official state policy emphasizes cultural and economic engagement within existing territorial boundaries, some political elites maintain intentionally ambiguous nationalist rhetoric through concepts like *Srpski svet* (Serbian world). This discourse, notably promoted by then Internal Affairs Minister Aleksandar Vulin, exemplifies significant parallels with historical Greater Serbia aspirations and contemporary transborder nationalism epitomized by Russia’s *Russkiy mir* (Russian world) doctrine. The deliberate ambiguity of the *Srpski svet* concept serves multiple domestic political functions, particularly in appealing to nationalist constituencies while maintaining plausible deniability regarding irredentist intentions (Tuhina and Vukićević 2021). This was followed with President Vučić’s explicit disavowal of any challenge to neighboring states’ sovereignty and emphasis that *Srpski svet* is not part of Serbia’s official policy, framing regional criticism as inherently anti-Serbian (Radio Free Europe 2021). This discursive ambivalence among the elite raises important empirical questions about how Serbian citizens process and evaluate different categories of kin-state policy.

While the internal validity of the experimental findings derives from randomization and treatment design rather than case characteristics, Serbia represents what Van Evera (1997) classifies as an extreme case due to sharp within-case variance in both kin-state policy approaches and information environments. This extreme variation enhances the external validity of this investigation in two crucial dimensions. First, Serbia represents one of the few post-Cold War cases where the idea of “Greater [Insert Ethno-national Territory]” resulted in actual conflict, followed by a transformation to constitutionally mandated cultural assistance, providing a context where citizens have direct or

vicarious experience with the full spectrum of kin-state policies. Second, the contemporary policy environment features significant variation in elite discourse, from pragmatic discussions of cultural engagement that respects the sovereignty of the neighboring states to nationalist rhetoric about territorial questions, meaning that the experimental treatments reflect actual political choices rather than purely hypothetical scenarios. The information treatments thus approximate real-world frames that citizens have encountered both during the Yugoslav Wars and in current political discourse. This combination of extreme within-case variance in both policy approaches and elite messaging provides ideal conditions for examining how citizens process competing frames in an experimental setting.

Three additional characteristics further establish Serbia's methodological suitability for this investigation. First, the case holds particular theoretical significance for the field of kin-state politics, which emerged as a distinct analytical framework during the post-Cold War transformations of the 1990s. The concurrent dissolution of multinational states like Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union generated new patterns of transborder ethnic engagement that demanded novel theoretical frameworks.¹ Second, there is a documented history of the Milošević regime's systematic deployment of media to increase public backing for his policies toward co-ethnic populations during the Yugoslav Wars ([Gordy 1999](#); [Thompson 1999](#)). Contemporary analysis of Serbia's media environment reveals notable institutional continuities, as the current president Aleksandar Vučić, who served as Minister of Information during the Milošević regime, has established what scholars characterize as a more sophisticated system of media control ([Milojević and Kleut 2023](#); [Vučićević and Atlagić 2023](#)). The state's institutional capacity to influence public discourse through information environments provides empirical relevance for investigating this case. Lastly, Serbia's simultaneous position as both a kin-state pursuing external engagement and a host-state managing relationships with Hungarian and other neighboring minorities provides a distinctive empirical vantage point for understanding how citizens conceptualize different approaches to transborder ethnic politics.

¹As [Mylonas \(2025\)](#) demonstrates, scholarly engagement with kin-state politics increased markedly during this period, reflecting the need to theorize these emerging patterns of interstate ethnic relations, especially in the wake of violent conflicts.

4.3 Literature Review

4.3.1 Kin State Politics: From Irredentism to Virtual Nationalism

The study of kin-state politics emerged as a framework for understanding how states engage with co-ethnic populations beyond their borders, particularly in the wake of the Cold War's conclusion. A kin-state, as conceptualized by [Waterbury \(2020, 799\)](#), is “a state that represents the majority nation of a transborder ethnic group whose members reside in neighboring territories.” This analytical construct has proven especially pertinent for examining state behavior in post-communist Europe, where the dissolution of multinational states created numerous instances of ethnic populations residing outside their perceived national homeland. Unlike conventional foreign policy issues, kin-state politics occupies an analytically distinct space between irredentist security challenges and broader questions of diaspora engagement ([Waterbury 2020, 799](#)). This theoretical positioning reflects the intricate ways states pursue varying strategies of engagement with external co-ethnic populations - from assertive territorial claims to more subtle forms of cultural and economic support. The existing literature establishes that kin-state policies span a spectrum of transnational and extra-territorial activities, encompassing both security-oriented interventions supporting secessionist movements ([Cederman et al. 2009, 2013](#); [Heraclides 1990](#)) and softer forms of influence such as educational assistance and citizenship policies ([Csargo 2007](#); [Pogonyi 2017](#); [Waterbury 2010](#)).

The scholarship on kin-state behavior has devoted considerable attention to explaining irredentist policies - the most extreme form of engagement with external co-ethnic populations involving territorial revision, often justified through claims of protecting vulnerable co-ethnic populations ([Siroky and Hale 2017, 124](#), [Jenne 2007](#)). [Saideman and Ayres \(2008, 2\)](#) note that “most studies of irredentism tend to consider only the most aggressive efforts.” This dominant strand of literature has primarily focused on explanations as to why certain states engage in irredentism that results in violent conflict while others do not. Scholars have put forth arguments based on ethnic demography and power balance ([Davis and Moore 1997](#); [Horowitz 1985](#)), elite incentives ([Saideman and Ayres 2008](#)), intergroup competition and ethnic outbidding ([Hale and Siroky 2023](#); [Siroky and Hale 2017](#)), and system-level factors ([Mylonas 2025](#)). However, its macro-level focus has led to a neglect of individual-level preferences, mostly assuming their uniformity based on the group-level. Even when

Horowitz (1985, 284) acknowledges that heterogeneity may restrain irredentism within the putative irredentist state, he refers specifically to ethnic heterogeneity rather than variation in individual preferences. Indeed, Waterbury's (2020) comprehensive review of the kin-state politics literature points to a striking absence of research focused on citizen preferences and attitude formation. This theoretical blind spot is particularly noteworthy given the recent scholarly emphasis on the "micro-political turn" in analyzing transnational identity politics (Waterbury 2020, 805) and the fact that domestic political calculations are the main drivers of policy decisions regarding external co-ethnic populations (Saideman and Ayres 2000).

Stoycheff and Nisbet's (2017) analysis of Russian public opinion during the Crimean crisis is a crucial first step in addressing this. It provides some empirical validation for the assumption of broad public support for irredentist policies, with 90% of respondents supporting territorial revision - closely matching nationally representative polling. Though their analysis constitutes a significant first test, it examines public preferences under very specific conditions that may not generalize to other forms of kin-state politics. First, their data collection purposefully occurred during an active military intervention. The distinction between crisis and non-crisis periods is theoretically important due to the profound effect that crisis periods exert on public opinion formation and information processing. The "rally around the flag" effect, first systematically documented by Mueller (1970) and subsequently refined by Baker and Oneal (2001), captures how international crises can produce sudden surges in leader approval ratings. The 2014 Crimean crisis provides a compelling illustration of this dynamic: Putin's approval ratings increased by nearly 10 percentage points to 71.6% in less than a month following the military intervention (Arutunyan 2014). This pattern repeated following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with Putin's approval ratings rising from 69% to 83% in the weeks following the invasion (Nechepurenko 2022; Volkov and Kolesnikov 2022), despite the significantly higher international costs imposed on Russia. The absence of real-world rally around the flag effect would enable slower, more deliberate processing that allows for careful weighing of costs and benefits of kin-state policies.

Second, the exclusive focus on territorial revision overlooks how citizens might evaluate the broader spectrum of kin-state engagement policies. Irredentism itself manifests on a continuum where the majority of irredentist campaigns do not go further than the rhetorical level. In fact, instances of irredentism that escalate to violent conflict represent a mere 4% of historical cases (Hale and

Siroky 2023, 198). Armed conflict represents an increasingly rare approach, as states have generally found it to be the most costly and destabilizing form of engagement (Waterbury 2010). Instead, contemporary kin-states more commonly pursue what Csergo and Goldgeier (2001) term “virtual nationalism” - a range of non-territorial policies focused on maintaining cultural, economic, and political connections without challenging existing borders. These softer forms of engagement include educational support, cultural programming, preferential citizenship policies, and economic assistance (Csergo 2007; Dumbrava 2014). The distinction between these approaches is crucial for grasping variation in both elite policy choices and public preferences, as territorial and non-territorial policies carry significantly different costs and risks. While territorial revision threatens regional stability and often triggers international sanctions, cultural and economic engagement policies generally operate within accepted international norms of minority protection (Venice Commission 2001).

Insight into these opinion dynamics would advance models of kin-state behavior and have practical importance for policymakers seeking to anticipate public responses to different engagement strategies. This study addresses these limitations by examining how variations in information environments influence citizen support for different approaches to kin-state politics, thereby contributing to both theoretical debates about kin-state politics and practical discussions of policy design.

4.3.2 Information Environments and Public Opinion Formation in International Politics

Given the limited empirical research on public opinion regarding foreign aid (Milner and Tingley 2013, 391), and the even more pronounced paucity of systematic studies examining citizen attitudes toward kin-state assistance, we look at the role of domestic audience in more general theories of state conflict behavior. One popular explanation as to why some states engage in conflict while others do not stems from the democratic peace theory. Despite the fact that the exact logic of it has been disputed (Rosato 2003), the evidence that democracies do not tend to wage wars against one another has been undeniable (Oneal and Russett 1999; Ray 1998; Russett et al. 1995; Weart 1998). Fearon explained this democratic conflict aversion with the concept of audience cost (Fearon 1994). By modeling international crises as political “war[s] of attrition,” Fearon points out that leaders in democracies face greater domestic political penalties compared to autocracies when they make public commitments and subsequently fail to fulfill them. Smith (1998) further developed this theoretical

framework by highlighting how domestic political processes, including reelection concerns, shape leaders' ability to make credible commitments in international disputes. Subsequent experimental work provided direct evidence of audience costs, showing through survey experiments that citizens impose significant political costs on leaders who fail to follow through on public commitments (Levy et al. 2015; Tomz 2007; Trager and Vavreck 2011). These costs proved particularly pronounced among politically active citizens, suggesting a mechanism through which electoral accountability shapes foreign policy behavior (Tomz 2007). By holding leaders accountable for foreign policy failures, the public renders conflict-prone behavior a risky strategy for leaders and consequently fosters conflict aversion among democracies.

Though scholars have demonstrated that audience cost mechanisms function in authoritarian settings (Bell and Quek 2018; Li and Chen 2021; Weeks 2008), the foundational logic linking audience costs to the democratic peace theory rests upon specific institutional characteristics of democracies - particularly the presence of free and independent information environments where citizens can access knowledge about conflict costs and probability of success (Slantchev 2006). The relationship between information ecosystems and foreign policy attitudes operates through multiple pathways: opposition parties in multi-party systems increase the likelihood of "whistle-blowing" about foreign policy failures, free media institutions transmit this information to citizens, and open information environments facilitate interstate communication that reduces misperception between states (Potter and Baum 2014). Empirical evidence supports this theoretical framework, with quantitative analyses indicating that media openness is associated with decreased likelihood of interstate conflict (Choi and James 2007). These institutional features create conditions where citizens can both access accurate information about policy outcomes and exercise electoral punishment.

However, the democratic peace theory and the logic of audience cost only addresses how citizens might respond to irredentist policies that escalate to violent conflict. A more pressing theoretical question for kin-state politics concerns whether and how public receptiveness to kin-state policies can be shaped across the full spectrum of engagement, from cultural diplomacy to territorial claims. While audience cost theory suggests that democratic publics should generally impose costs on conflict-prone behavior, the distinctive nature of kin-state politics may alter these dynamics, as these policies are grounded in pre-existing ethno-cultural bonds between the kin-state and co-ethnic populations in neighboring states. These special relationships may make irredentist appeals particularly persuasive

to domestic audiences, as they can be framed within established narratives of shared identity and historical responsibility (Kemp et al. 2011; Saideman and Ayres 2000), not only to conflict but also to more routine kin-state policies (Udrea 2014). Indeed, Stoycheff and Nisbet's experimental findings during the Crimean crisis demonstrated the malleability of public attitudes through information framing - both cost-related and hawkish frames significantly influenced support for intervention. Their results suggest that elite framing can effectively activate latent ethnic solidarities, though as discussed earlier, the crisis context of their study raises important questions about whether such framing effects would persist during periods of relative stability across the broader spectrum of kin-state engagement policies (Stoycheff and Nisbet 2017).

4.4 Hypotheses

The preceding review of kin-state politics and the democratic peace theory suggests that public support for kin-state policies operates through two primary mechanisms: instrumental calculations about costs and benefits, and affective attachments rooted in national identity. The experimental design tests how these mechanisms interact by priming either economic costs or national identity considerations. Priming theory in political communication research suggests that accentuating specific considerations will influence how citizens evaluate kin-state policies (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). While citizens may hold various pre-existing attitudes about co-ethnics engagement, research reflects that recently activated constructs tend to be oversampled when individuals form political judgments (Iyengar and Simon 2000). Although the experimental manipulations examine immediate changes in construct accessibility, estimating these effects is crucial because repeated exposure to similar frames can lead to "chronic accessibility," creating lasting changes in how citizens process information about kin-state policies (Roskos-Ewoldsen 1997; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al. 2006). By experimentally manipulating the salience of different considerations, this study examines how emphasizing particular aspects of kin-state policies - their economic costs or their connection to national identity - shapes subsequent policy evaluations.

Kin-state policies often compete directly with domestic spending priorities. When citizens are reminded that resources devoted to co-ethnic populations abroad could alternatively fund domestic programs, the opportunity costs become particularly concrete. This builds on research showing that

citizens are especially sensitive to trade-offs between foreign and domestic spending (Heinrich et al. 2016).

Hypothesis 1: *Exposure to information about policy costs will reduce support for kin-state engagement policies.*

Conversely, appeals to national identity can activate powerful affective responses that may override cost considerations. Research on nationalist mobilization suggests that framing issues in terms of co-ethnic solidarity and discrimination creates strong emotional resonance (Waterbury 2010, 7, 146). When citizens are reminded of their shared identity with external populations and the challenges these populations face, considerations of group solidarity can become more prominent than economic calculations.

Hypothesis 2: *Exposure to information about national identity and discrimination will increase support for kin-state engagement policies.*

Because the spectrum of kin-state policies is wide, the analytical model anticipates variation in priming effects across policy domains, with the nature of specific kin-state policies fundamentally conditioning public responsiveness to different types of information. For lower-stakes policies like cultural or economic assistance, citizens' opinions should be more malleable since these policies carry fewer long-term consequences. In contrast, attitudes toward territorial revision involve fundamental questions of state sovereignty and potentially serious international repercussions, making them more resistant to priming effects. This logic aligns with research on attitude strength and susceptibility to framing (Chong and Druckman 2007). Strong attitudes, typically those concerning core values or high-stakes issues, tend to be more stable and resistant to contextual influences. Attitudes toward major geopolitical actions should be less responsive to short-term information effects. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: *The effect of cost and nationalist primes will be stronger for lower-stakes policies (economic and cultural assistance) than for higher-stakes policies (border changes).*

This hypothesis reflects the expectation that citizens' views on fundamental questions of territorial sovereignty are more crystallized and thus less susceptible to priming effects compared to their attitudes toward routine forms of co-ethnics support.

4.5 Data and Methods

The research design involved a survey experiment with Serbian adults from April 4-18, 2024, testing hypotheses about the conditional effects of cost and nationalist appeals on support for kin-state policies. The experiment employed a between-subjects design with three conditions: a control group and two treatment groups receiving either cost-related or nationalist identity primes (Mutz 2011, 55; Privitera 2019, 273). This design enables isolation of the causal effects of making different considerations salient while avoiding concerns about item-order effects that can arise in within-subjects designs (Schuman et al. 1981; Strack 1992).

The sample consists of 1,050 Serbian adults recruited through a non-probability online panel managed by Valicon Serbia. Data collection occurred online via Valicon’s proprietary *JaZnam* platform between April 4-18, 2024. Automated quota sampling on key demographic characteristics including age, gender, and region helped ensure representativeness. When compared against the 2022 Serbian census data, the sample achieved close correspondence with population parameters for gender distribution (female representation within 1.1 percentage points) and geographic representation for Belgrade and Central Serbia (within 0.5 percentage points), while some demographic disparities emerged in age distribution and remaining regional coverage (see Appendix Table C.1 for detailed sample characteristics). Most notably, adults aged 65 and older are underrepresented relative to population parameters, a common limitation in online survey research (Bosnjak et al. 2013; Leenheer and Scherpenzeel 2013; Zickuhr and Smith 2012). However, recent methodological research suggests that while such demographic discrepancies can affect descriptive population estimates, they rarely alter substantive theoretical relationships or model estimates in attitudinal research (Eckman 2016). This finding is particularly relevant for experimental studies like this one, where random assignment to treatment conditions helps ensure internal validity regardless of sample composition.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions with equal probability. The control group ($N = 350$) received no prime before answering questions about kin-state policy preferences. The cost treatment group ($N = 349$) read the following text emphasizing budgetary trade-offs:

“It is important to consider the economic costs of assisting Serbs in neighboring countries.

This assistance (cultural support, economic aid, and security assistance) comes from the state budget, which is paid by Serbs in Serbia. Giving financial support to Serbs abroad therefore reduces the amount of money that can go to Serbs within Serbia.”

The nationalist treatment group ($N = 351$) read a text highlighting shared identity and discrimination:

“Serbs in neighboring countries face discrimination and unequal treatment. Serbia’s commitment to protecting Serbs from discrimination follows from our shared national identity and solidarity, which transcends borders. Serbia’s assistance serves as a crucial safeguard against such discrimination, preserving the cultural and national heritage of Serbs abroad.”

All treatment texts (and the entirety of the survey) were presented in Serbian (the entire questionnaire in Serbian and English translation is available in Appendix C.7). Balance tests across observable pre-treatment covariates (gender, age, rural residence, education, and monthly personal income) verified successful randomization (see Appendix Table C.2). One-way ANOVA tests reveal no statistically significant differences across treatment conditions for any demographic characteristics (all $p > 0.05$), supporting the validity of the randomization procedure. The sample size of 350 participants per condition ($N = 1,050$) enables detection of effects as small as $f = 0.096$ (equivalent to Cohen’s $d = 0.136$) with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating sufficient power to detect even subtle treatment effects (Bloom 1995; Cohen 1988).

Immediately following the experimental manipulation (or no manipulation in the control condition), all respondents evaluated their general support for kin-state assistance by indicating their agreement with the statement: “The Serbian government should provide assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries.” The survey then proceeded to assess support for specific forms of kin-state engagement. Respondents evaluated four distinct policy domains: diplomatic assistance (“The Serbian government should provide diplomatic assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries”), economic aid (“The Serbian government should provide economic assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries”), cultural support (“The Serbian government should support cultural organizations of Serbs in neighboring countries”), and military intervention (“The Serbian government should intervene militarily to support Serbs in neighboring countries, if necessary”).

The final section of the survey focused on territorial revision policies, beginning with a general assessment of border changes (“The Serbian government might under some circumstances change the border to include Serbs in neighboring countries”). Following this general item, respondents read a brief text referencing Russia’s annexation of Crimea as a contemporary example of territorial revision, which introduced questions about specific justifications for border changes. Respondents then evaluated four distinct rationales for territorial revision: national identity (“The Serbian government should expand its borders to include territories where Serbs live in neighboring countries because they share the same national identity as Serbs in Serbia”), historical claims (“The Serbian government has the right to annex all historically Serb territory”), economic conditions (“Serbia has the right to change its borders to help Serbs in neighboring countries if they are struggling economically”), and humanitarian intervention (“Serbia has the right to change its borders when the neighboring governments are persecuting Serbs”).

The analysis employed unpooled ordered logistic regression models to examine treatment effects on general support for assistance policies and territorial changes. The base specification took the form:

$$\text{logit}[P(Y_{ki} \leq j)] = \alpha_{kj} - \beta_{k1}\text{CostPrime}_i - \beta_{k2}\text{NationalPrime}_i \quad (4.1)$$

where Y_{ki} represents the ordinal response for respondent i in policy domain k (assistance or border changes), j indexes the response categories (1-5), and α_{kj} represents the domain-specific cut-points between categories. This approach enables direct comparison of treatment effects while accounting for potential differences in threshold parameters across domains. Confidence intervals derive from the normal approximation with standard errors from the observed information matrix. Predicted probabilities supplement coefficient estimates to facilitate interpretation. Mean responses and 95% confidence intervals for each experimental condition and policy domain derive from the empirical distribution of responses. Treatment effect comparisons across domains incorporate both statistical significance of individual coefficients and their relative magnitudes, providing insight into how information environments differentially shape preferences across policy types. These complementary approaches—model-based estimates and descriptive statistics—offer multiple perspectives on treatment effect magnitude and uncertainty.

The full model specification incorporated both individual-level and geographic heterogeneity to enhance model specification and facilitate causal inference. The extended model took the form:

$$\text{logit}[P(Y_{ki} \leq j)] = \alpha_{kj} - \beta_{k1}\text{CostPrime}_i - \beta_{k2}\text{NationalPrime}_i + \gamma X_i + \delta Z_i \quad (4.2)$$

where X_i represents a vector of standardized individual-level controls (age, education, income, and gender) and Z_i captures geographic factors including border municipality status (municipalities bordering Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo) to create binary border indicators, and regional indicators. Continuous variables were standardized (age, education, and income) to facilitate coefficient interpretation and enable direct comparison of effect magnitudes across predictors. Regional fixed effects were implemented using Belgrade as the reference category.

4.6 Results

4.6.1 Domain-Specific Effects of Information Environments on Kin-State Policy Preferences

Figure 4.2 presents the main experimental results, comparing treatment effects across the two fundamental domains of kin-state policy. Panel A displays treatment effects estimated from the ordered logistic regression model (full regression results are presented in Table C.3). For general assistance policies, both informational conditions produced strong and statistically significant effects, with the cost prime reducing support ($\beta = -0.53$, $p < 0.001$) and the nationalist prime enhancing it ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$). These coefficients reveal that exposure to cost-related information decreased the odds of selecting a higher support category by approximately 41%, while nationalist primes enhanced these odds by 95%. In marked contrast, attitudes toward potential border changes exemplify markedly different patterns. The cost prime achieves significance only at 0.10 level, showing a weak negative effect ($\beta = -0.23$, $p = 0.085$), while the nationalist prime unexpectedly reduces support even at 0.05 level ($\beta = -0.35$, $p = 0.010$). These findings provide empirical confirmation for Hypotheses 1 and 2 in the context of general assistance, but present a significant qualification to Hypothesis 2 regarding nationalist appeals, which not only fail to increase support for territorial revision but actually diminish it. Further analysis reveals that this unexpected negative effect is driven by a

distinct subgroup (approximately 18% of respondents) that is predominantly male, older, and more affluent compared to the rest of the sample (see Appendix C.5.2). However, it is important to note that supplementary robustness analyses incorporating post-stratification weights and composite indices based on confirmatory factor analysis in section 4.6.2 reveal that these negative effects on border changes preferences lose statistical significance in alternative specifications (see Appendix C.5.1). Nevertheless, the pronounced difference in effect magnitudes between policy domains offers compelling support for Hypothesis 3, which posited that information effects would systematically vary according to policy stakes, with higher-stakes territorial policies exhibiting greater resistance to framing effects than lower-stakes assistance programs.

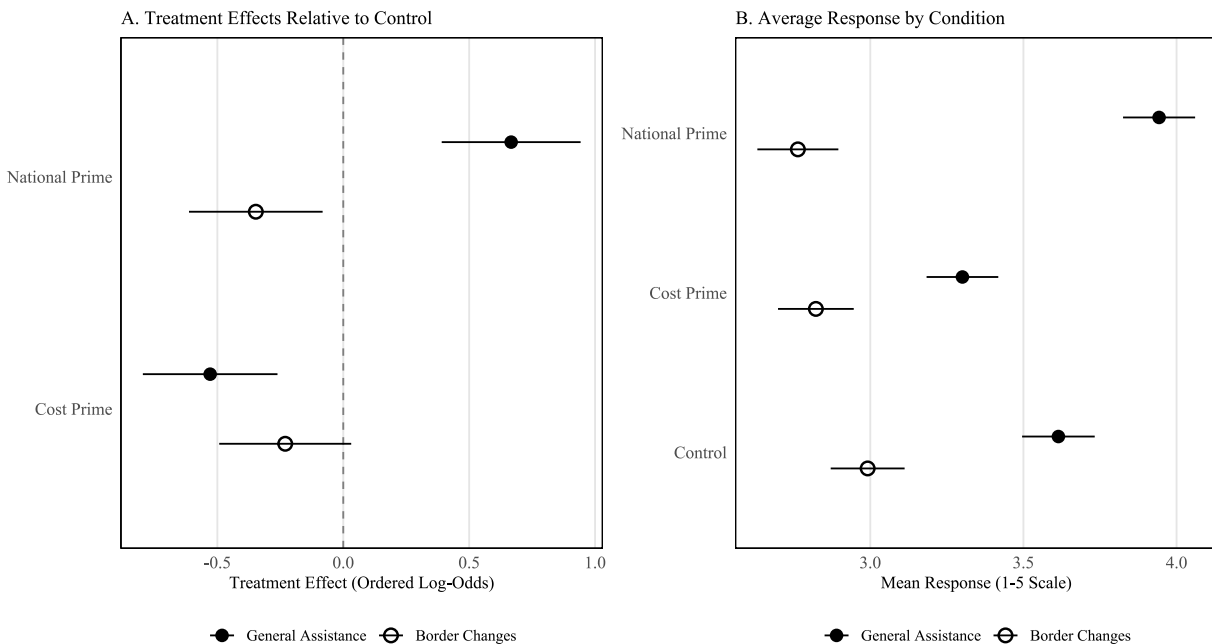


Figure 4.2: Comparison of Treatment Effects on General Assistance and Border Changes. Panel A displays treatment effects from ordered logistic regression models estimating responses to two questions: “Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should provide assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries?” and “Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government might under some circumstances change the border to include Serbs in neighboring countries?” Panel B shows raw mean responses by condition on a 5-point scale from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. $N = 1,050$.

The substantive interpretation of these differences becomes particularly evident when examining the mean responses displayed in Panel B. General assistance policies enjoy robust baseline support in the control condition ($M = 3.61$, $SE = 0.051$), with the cost prime reducing this support by 0.31

points ($M = 3.30$, $SE = 0.053$) and the nationalist prime increasing it by 0.33 points ($M = 3.94$, $SE = 0.051$). These shifts represent meaningful changes in policy preferences, particularly given that they resulted from brief informational prompts rather than sustained messaging campaigns. For border changes, the control group shows moderate baseline support ($M = 2.99$, $SE = 0.062$), with both experimental conditions producing modest negative shifts. Support levels decreased to 2.82 ($SE = 0.063$) under the cost prime condition, with the nationalist prime generating a comparable reduction to 2.76 ($SE = 0.068$). These effects represent shifts of -0.17 and -0.23 points respectively on the five-point scale.

The analysis of probability distributions reveals different mechanisms through which the two information frames reshape attitudes toward kin-state policies. The cost prime operates through a broad moderating effect, systematically redistributing responses across the entire attitudinal spectrum. This diffusion pattern suggests that cost considerations prompt individuals to recalibrate their preferences in a measured way, producing balanced shifts in the direction of reduced support. In contrast, the nationalist prime demonstrates a more concentrated mobilizing effect, primarily operating by converting neutral positions (-7.7 percentage points [95% CI: -10.7, -4.7]) into strong support (13.4 percentage points [95% CI: 7.1, 19.6]). This distinctive pattern suggests that nationalist appeals function primarily by crystallizing latent support among previously uncommitted respondents rather than through broad attitudinal shifts. For border changes, both treatments shift responses toward opposition categories, though with smaller magnitudes than observed for assistance policies, further reinforcing the domain-specific nature of information effects. Figure 4.3 provides a visual representation of these distributional patterns, with tabular data and confidence interval estimates available in Appendix C.4.

The main findings reveal noteworthy contrasts in both effect magnitude and model robustness across different domains of kin-state policy preferences. The normalized treatment effects for general assistance (12.8% of scale range) substantially exceeded those documented by Stoycheff and Nisbet (2017, 665) (2.7%) in their examination of intervention support during the Crimean crisis. However, given that Stoycheff and Nisbet measure support for an active military intervention with irredentist purpose, a comparison with the treatment effects for territorial revision is more apt. Here, the treatment effects (1.2% of scale range) exhibit comparable, though slightly smaller, effect magnitudes to their intervention study, with marginally significant impacts for cost considerations and a significant

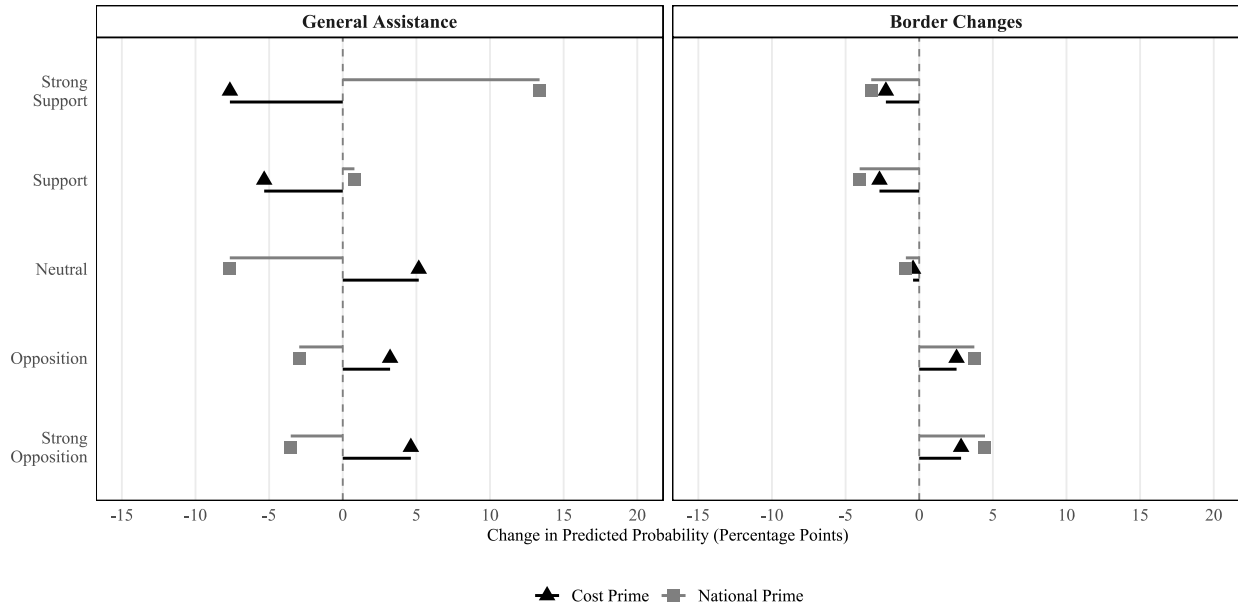


Figure 4.3: Treatment Effects on Response Probabilities for General Assistance and Border Changes. Points show changes in predicted probabilities relative to control condition. Horizontal line at zero represents no change from control.

negative effect for nationalist appeals. These contrasting patterns between assistance and border change domains in the study (12.8% vs 1.2% effect sizes) suggest substantially different preference structures across distinct aspects of kin-state politics. While public support for general assistance shows substantial malleability to both cost and identity considerations (as portrayed in the earlier analysis), attitudes toward territorial revision reveal greater resistance to standard framing effects.

4.6.2 Empirical Validation of Policy Dimension Distinctiveness through Factor Analysis

To empirically substantiate the conceptual distinction between assistance and territorial revision domains observed in the treatment effects, I conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the full set of policy items. This analytical approach provides crucial validation for the theoretical framework positing qualitatively different preference structures across kin-state policy domains. Table 4.1 presents results comparing three potential measurement models: a unidimensional model treating all policy items as manifestations of a single latent construct, a basic two-factor model separating assistance from border change items, and a refined two-factor model that recategorizes military intervention with the border changes dimension.

Table 4.1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model Fit Comparison

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
One-factor model	2866.95	35	0.957	0.945	0.278	0.188
Original two-factor model	1769.64	34	0.974	0.965	0.221	0.149
Revised two-factor model	362.86	34	0.995	0.993	0.096	0.066

Note: The one-factor model treats all items as manifestations of a single construct. The original two-factor model separates assistance items (AMM1-AMM5) from border change items (AMM6-AMM10). The revised two-factor model moves the military intervention item (AMM5) to the border changes factor. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

The analysis provides compelling empirical support for a two-factor structure, with all fit indices demonstrating substantial improvement from the one-factor to the two-factor models (chi-square difference test: $\chi^2 = 444.05$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Most importantly, model fit improves dramatically when military intervention is reconceptualized as part of the border changes dimension rather than general assistance. This refined model achieves excellent fit (CFI = 0.995, TLI = 0.993), with RMSEA (0.096) and SRMR (0.066) demonstrating acceptable fit within established parameters (Hu and Bentler 1999).² The moderate correlation between the two factors ($r = 0.45$) provides additional empirical validation that while these dimensions share variance, they nevertheless represent distinct constructs in citizens' cognitive frameworks for evaluating kin-state policies. Table 4.2 presents the standardized factor loadings from the revised model, revealing robust associations between observed items and their respective factors, further corroborating the theoretical distinction between assistance-oriented and territorial-revision domains.

Figure 4.4 visually represents this factor structure, illustrating the clear separation between general assistance and border change dimensions. Notably, the military intervention item loads strongly with the border changes dimension, suggesting that the public conceptualizes military intervention as closely aligned with territorial revision. This is not surprising considering that military interventions represent a very severe form of external engagement that almost always accompanies territorial claims.

The factor analysis confirms that citizens cognitively organize kin-state policies into two distinct

²The extremely high incremental fit indices (CFI, TLI) substantially exceed the conventional threshold of 0.95 for excellent fit. While the RMSEA (0.096) falls marginally above the most stringent criterion of ≤ 0.06 , it remains within acceptable parameters, particularly given the excellent SRMR value (0.066) that comfortably satisfies the < 0.08 threshold.

Table 4.2: Standardized Factor Loadings from Two-Factor CFA Model

Factor	Item Description	Loading	SE	95% CI
General Assistance	Economic Assistance	0.908	0.015	[0.879, 0.937]
	Diplomatic Assistance	0.778	0.018	[0.743, 0.813]
	General Support	0.760	0.018	[0.725, 0.795]
	Cultural Assistance	0.759	0.018	[0.724, 0.794]
Border Changes				
<i>Justifications</i>				
	Shared National Identity ^a	0.910	0.007	[0.896, 0.924]
	Economic Need ^a	0.920	0.007	[0.906, 0.934]
	Historical Claims ^a	0.861	0.009	[0.843, 0.879]
	Protection from Persecution ^a	0.860	0.009	[0.842, 0.878]
<i>Actions</i>				
	Support for Border Changes	0.853	0.010	[0.833, 0.873]
	Support for Military Intervention	0.803	0.012	[0.780, 0.826]

Note: Factor loadings from revised two-factor CFA model. SE = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval. ^aThe Border Changes factor encompasses both potential justificatory rationales (Economic Need, Shared National Identity, Historical Claims, Protection from Persecution) and policy preferences (Support for Border Changes, Support for Military Intervention).

clusters rather than evaluating all policies through a unified framework. The structural distinction between assistance and territorial domains helps explain why information environments operate differently across these domains, as citizens employ different evaluative criteria when considering routine assistance versus potential border changes. Furthermore, the categorization of military intervention with territorial revision rather than with other means of assistance suggests that citizens easily perceive and understand qualitative differences in the nature and implications of different policy tools, with military measures conceptually aligned with the higher-stakes domain of territorial politics and not comparable to routine diplomatic, economic, or cultural engagement.

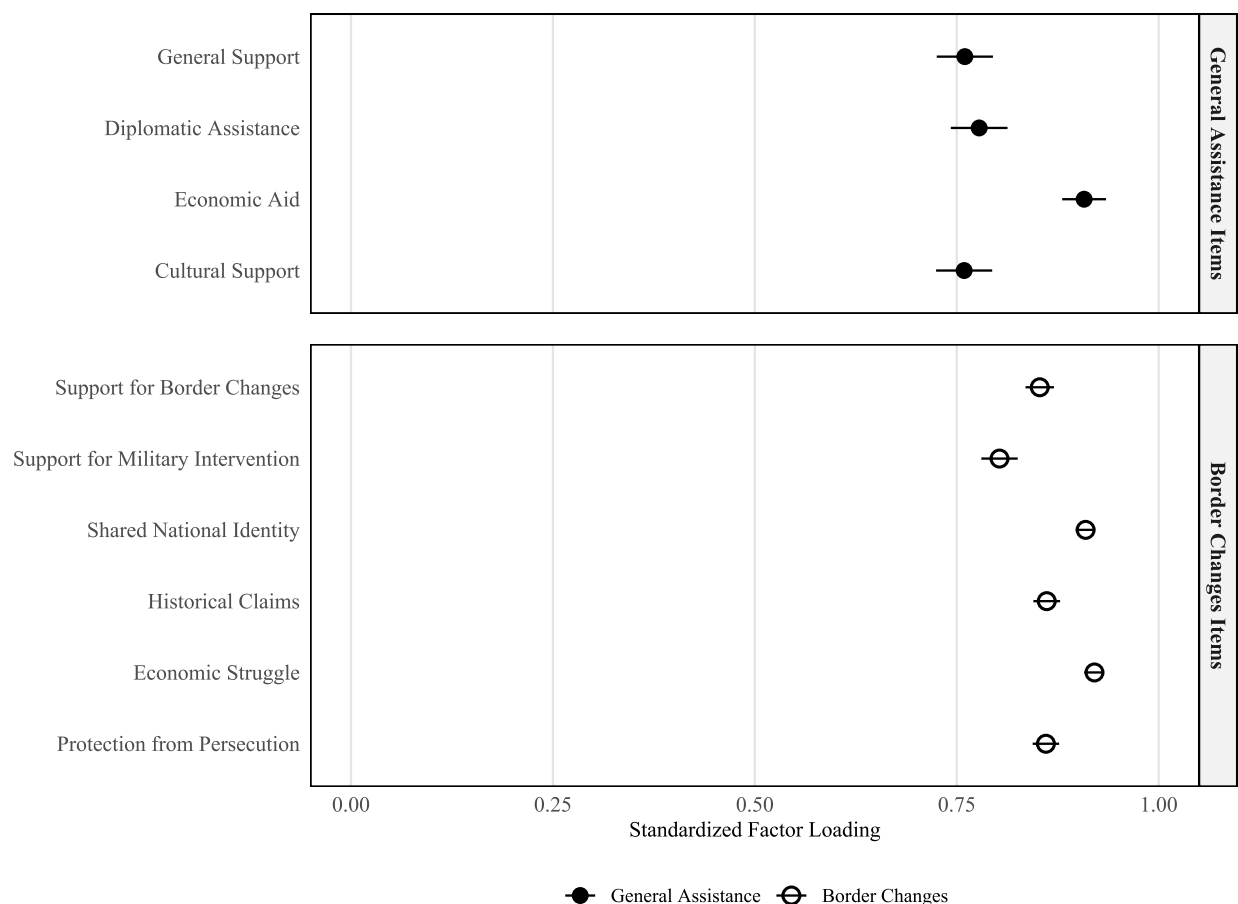


Figure 4.4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Kin-State Policy Support Dimensions. Points represent standardized factor loadings with 95% confidence intervals.

4.6.3 Treatment Effects Across Specific Forms of Assistance and Border Revision Justifications

Examining treatment effects for specific forms of assistance and justifications for irredentism further reveals systematic variation in how information environments shape public preferences for different forms of engagement (Figure 4.5). The ordered logistic regression models identify distinct patterns between the two. Among types of assistance, the cost prime exhibits consistently negative effects, with statistically significant impacts on cultural assistance ($\beta = -0.400$, $p < 0.01$) and economic aid ($\beta = -0.403$, $p < 0.01$). The nationalist prime's effects are more limited, with only diplomatic assistance showing a significant positive association ($\beta = 0.323$, $p < 0.05$).

Treatment effects manifest markedly differently for territorial policies where most estimated effects

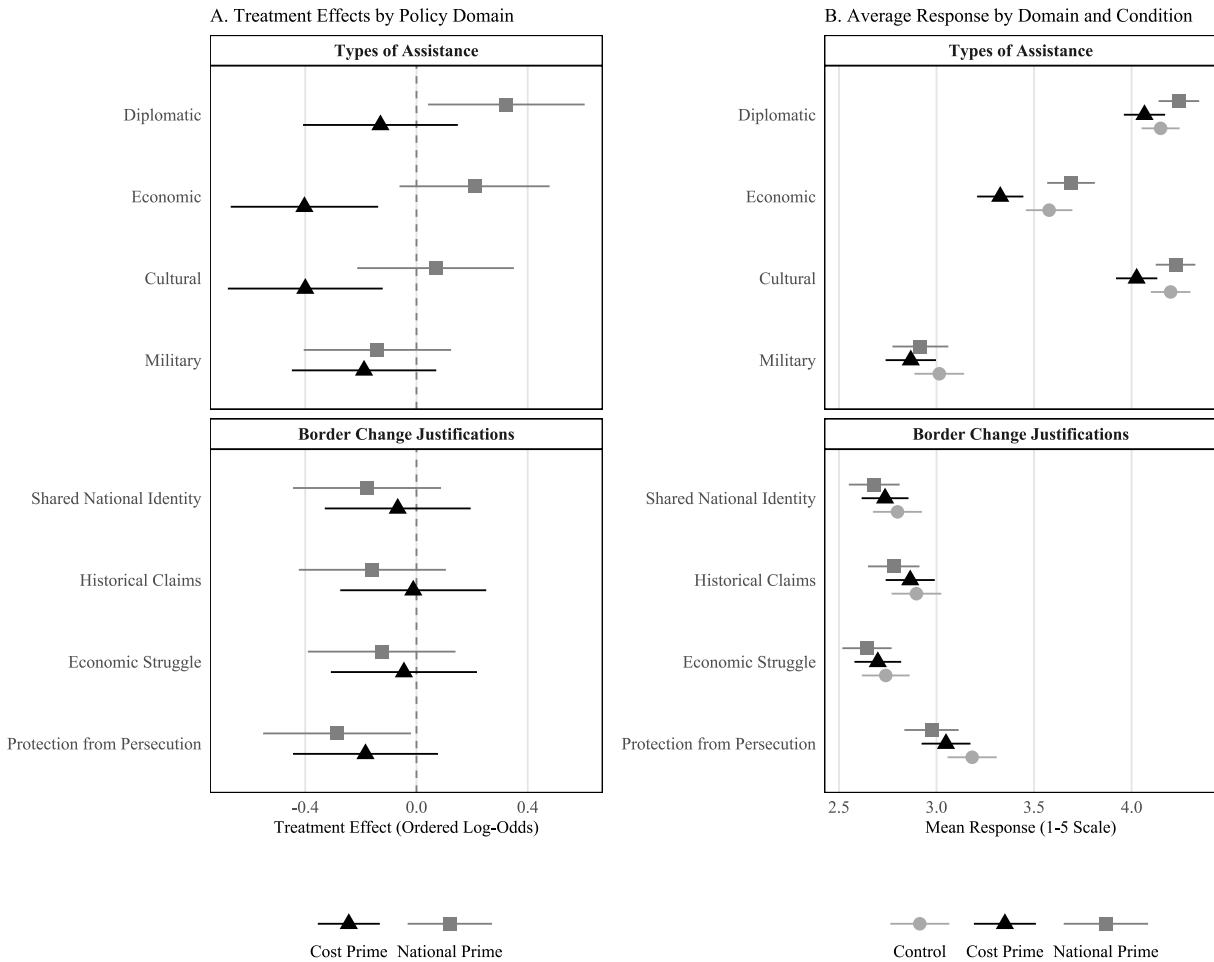


Figure 4.5: Treatment Effects Across Policy Domains. Note: Panel A displays treatment effects from ordered logistic regression models estimated separately for each domain. Panel B shows raw mean responses by condition. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. $N = 1,050$.

are statistically indistinguishable from zero at conventional significance levels. A single exception emerges in the negative association between the nationalist prime and support for humanitarian-based territorial changes ($\beta = -0.286$, $p < 0.05$). This counterintuitive finding suggests that heightening the resonance of national identity may actually diminish support for territorial revision in this case.

Raw response means illustrate the difference in baseline levels of support for these domain-specific dynamics. Support for non-military assistance policies illustrates clear hierarchical ordering, with cultural and diplomatic assistance receiving the highest baseline support ($M = 4.20$, $SE = 0.052$ and $M = 4.15$, $SE = 0.050$ respectively) while military intervention garners the lowest ($M = 3.01$, $SE = 0.065$). Justifications for territorial revisionism exhibit consistently lower baseline support,

clustering between 2.7 and 3.2 on the five-point scale. Humanitarian justifications for border changes receive the highest support among territorial policies ($M = 3.18$, $SE = 0.064$), while economic integration arguments attract the lowest ($M = 2.74$, $SE = 0.063$).

4.6.4 Demographic and Geographic Determinants of Policy Preferences

Building on the experimental findings, ordered logistic regression models that incorporate demographic and regional controls alongside treatment indicators assess how individual characteristics and geographic factors shape attitudes toward both general assistance and border change policies while validating the robustness of the treatment effects (see Figure 4.6). The treatment effects remain consistent with the earlier findings even after incorporating demographic and geographic controls. Age and gender emerge as important demographic predictors. For border change attitudes specifically, age demonstrates a substantial and highly significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.308$, $p < 0.001$). Since age is standardized, this coefficient indicates that a one standard deviation increase in age decreases the odds of supporting border changes by approximately 27% ($e^{-0.308} = 0.735$). As for gender, women exhibit consistently lower support across both policy domains. The gender effect proves particularly strong for general assistance ($\beta = -0.337$, $p < 0.01$), where being female decreases the odds of support by approximately 29% ($e^{-0.337} = 0.714$). A similar though weaker and less precisely estimated pattern appears for border changes ($\beta = -0.221$, $p < 0.10$).³

Geographic factors also reveal interesting patterns, though interpretation requires caution due to sample size limitations. The analysis identifies municipalities adjacent to three international borders—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo—though the limited sample from these frontier regions ($n = 119$) necessitates cautious interpretation of any border proximity effects. However, there is suggestive evidence of regional variation in border change attitudes, with Vojvodina residents showing significantly lower support compared to Belgrade ($\beta = -0.323$, $p < 0.10$) and West and Central Serbia residents displaying higher support ($\beta = 0.323$, $p < 0.10$), though both at 0.10 levels.

³The analysis reveals only one significant demographic interaction: a marginally significant gender-based heterogeneity in cost treatment effects for border changes. No other demographic characteristics exhibit significant interaction effects with the experimental treatments. For comprehensive analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects, see Table C.8 in the Appendix.

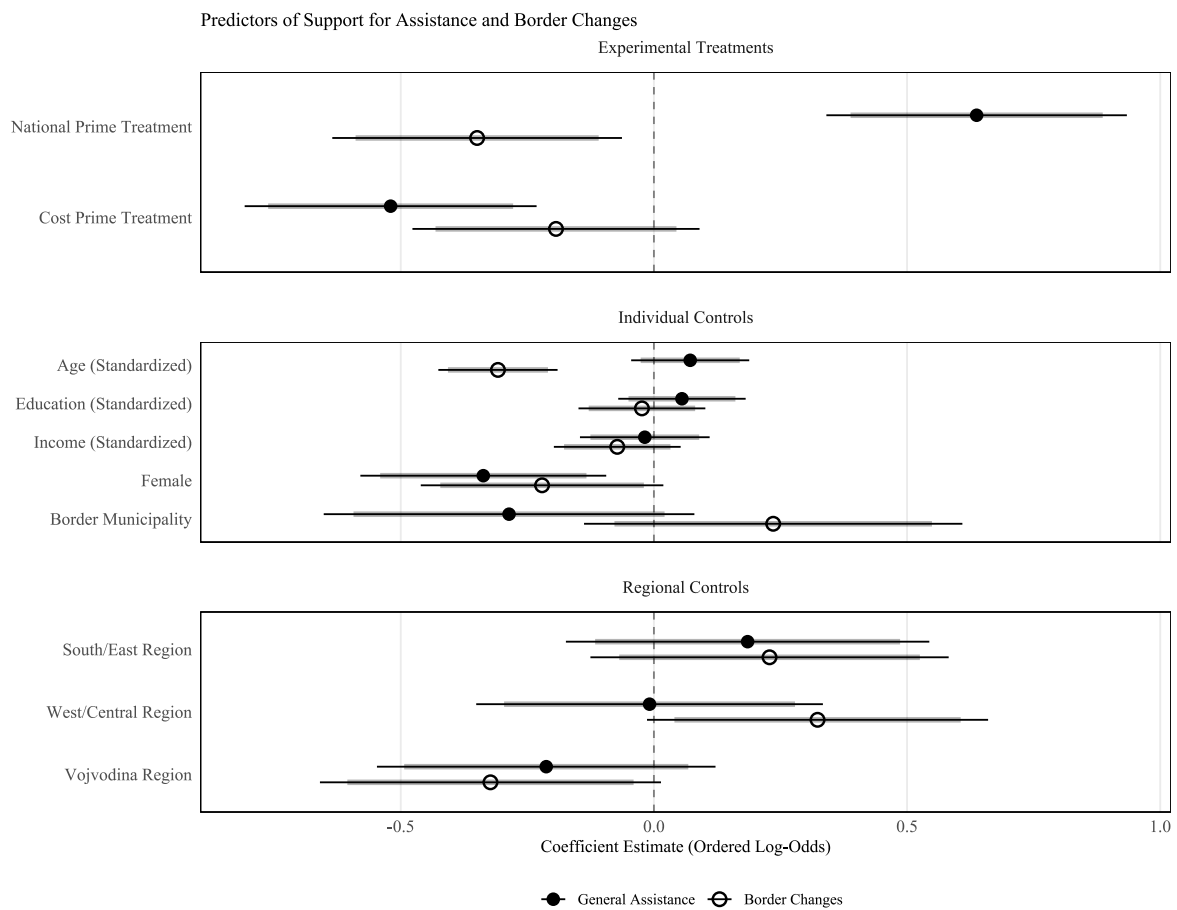


Figure 4.6: Predictors of Support for General Assistance and Border Changes. Points and thin lines show 95% confidence intervals, thick bars show 90% confidence intervals. Belgrade region serves as the reference category for regional effects.

4.7 Discussion

The experimental findings reveal distinctive patterns in how citizens evaluate different forms of kin-state policy and how these evaluations respond to information environments. The analysis demonstrates that public opinion formation in kin-state politics is more nuanced than typically theorized, with important implications for both scholarly understanding and policy practice. Below, I discuss four key implications.

First, this study demonstrates that the institutional distinction between different types of kin-state engagement is deeply reflected in public opinion formation processes. The divergent effect patterns of cost and nationalist primes across policy domains reveals how the nature of specific kin-state policies fundamentally conditions public responsiveness to different types of information. Evidence suggests that citizens process distinct categories of kin-state policy through fundamentally different cognitive architectures rather than applying uniform evaluative criteria. While economic, diplomatic, and cultural assistance programs activate standard cost-benefit calculations, territorial questions appear to trigger more complex psychological processes. This pattern aligns with observations that present-day kin-state engagement manifests primarily through constitutionally anchored cultural and economic support rather than territorial claims ([Udrea 2025](#), 3).

The findings reshape theoretical insight into how citizens in kin-states form preferences regarding co-ethnics engagement policies. Existing theoretical frameworks have explained kin-state behavior through two lenses: one that views states as passive actors driven by moral imperatives of ethnic affiliation, and another that treats them as strategic actors motivated by material and political interests ([Waterbury 2010](#), 7). While these frameworks effectively characterize state-level behavior, this study demonstrates that their applicability to citizen preferences is fundamentally conditioned by the policy domain under consideration. This theoretical refinement helps resolve seemingly contradictory findings in previous research, where some studies emphasized that material considerations reduce public support for foreign assistance ([Heinrich et al. 2016](#)), while others highlighted how ethnic ties motivate external support for co-ethnic populations ([Davis and Moore 1997](#); [Horowitz 1985](#); [Petersen 2002](#); [Saideman 1997](#); [Saideman and Ayres 2000](#)). The findings validate both theoretical perspectives while establishing crucial boundary conditions for when each applies.

Second, the experimental results reveal significant differences in the malleability of public opinion

across different kin-state policy domains. Cost considerations consistently diminish support for cultural and economic assistance programs while having minimal impact on territorial revision attitudes. Meanwhile, nationalist appeals effectively mobilize support for general assistance but fail to boost territorial ambitions. The resistance of territorial attitudes to cost considerations indicates these preferences are not primarily shaped through instrumental calculations of material gains and losses. This finding aligns with [Petersen's \(2012\)](#) research on how emotions fundamentally alter belief formation and strategic calculations in ethnic politics. His analysis argues that emotional states can lead individuals to switch between different modes of strategic reasoning, particularly shifting away from standard utility maximization toward more defensive “avoid the worst” strategies in territorial contexts. While [Goddard \(2006\)](#) focuses on elite-level dynamics rather than mass attitudes, her analysis of territorial indivisibility reveals how actors become structurally constrained once they stake out territorial positions - they face high political costs for any deviation and come to believe that alternative positions would be seen as illegitimate by both supporters and opponents alike.

Third, historical experience helps explain these patterns of public opinion. [Jervis's \(1968\)](#) framework illuminates how historical traumas can sensitize states and their populations to particular types of risks, often leading them to be wary of repeating the “mistakes of the past.” In Serbia's case, the catastrophic outcomes of nationalist-driven territorial projects during the Yugoslav wars—particularly the de facto loss of Kosovo and the exodus of Serbs from Krajina—appear to have generated distinctive perceptual predispositions. This resonates with broader patterns of counterproductive kin-state activism in the region, as research on post-communist East-Central Europe identifies how aggressive forms of kin-state activism often triggered securitization responses that undermined cross-border relations ([Liebich 2021](#)). Recent comparative analysis reveals that while non-territorial forms of kin-state engagement rarely provoke significant policy changes, pursuit of territorial revision consistently triggers securitization processes that result in deteriorating conditions for minority populations ([Csörgő et al. 2025](#)).

The relative sophistication of Serbian public discourse regarding kin-state policies reflects this historical learning. Unlike many states where diaspora engagement remains peripheral to public debate, the unresolved conflict with Kosovo which affects Serbia's ontological security ([Subotić 2016](#)) and the constant rhetoric and calls for closer ties with Serbia coming from Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina ([International Crisis Group 2024, 4](#)) are evidence of extensive experience

with these issues. This suggests what [Jervis \(1968, 470\)](#) terms “opposite mistake” learning—where historical traumas generate systematic overcorrection in threat assessment.

The demographic findings further illuminate how historical experience and socialization shape responses to kin-state policies. Research on generational effects and collective memory suggests that direct or vicarious experience with the Yugoslav wars may create distinctive perceptual predispositions among older cohorts ([Schuman and Scott 1989](#)). The negative relationship between age and support for border changes provides empirical support for this theoretical framework, particularly given that age effects prove pronounced for territorial revision attitudes while showing no discernible impact on assistance preferences. The gender differences observed in the data - with women demonstrating consistently lower support across policy domains - align with established patterns in conflict attitude research that find women generally expressing lower support for military force ([Eichenberg 2003](#)) because of higher risk estimation ([Lerner et al. 2003](#)).

Fourth, while historical learning provides one compelling explanation for the observed patterns, alternative mechanisms also warrant careful consideration in explaining these observed patterns. The resistance of territorial attitudes to nationalist appeals could reflect broader processes of democratic consolidation in post-communist Europe, where institutional development has gradually shifted political discourse away from revisionist claims toward more normalized interstate relations. Similarly, recent comparative research indicates that deeper EU integration reduces both the applicability and intensity of kin-state appeals, particularly when neighboring states share EU membership. This results in diminishing public demand for urgent territorial “solutions” ([Johnston 2024](#)). Nonetheless, this relationship proves more nuanced than simple moderation, as evidence suggests EU accession processes can paradoxically intensify kin-state activism when confronted with practical challenges like Schengen borders and ambiguous minority rights frameworks ([Waterbury 2008](#)).

Fifth, these findings present a cautiously optimistic picture about the role of public opinion in constraining conflict over co-ethnic populations abroad. The data reveal that leaders have significant ability to shape public attitudes toward cultural and economic assistance through different messaging strategies, but face robust public resistance when attempting to mobilize backing for territorial revision, regardless of how it is framed. The resistance of territorial preferences to information frames reflects citizens’ implicit understanding that territorial disputes carry uniquely severe escalation risks ([Vasquez and Henehan 2001](#)). This suggests that even in cases where leaders might be

tempted to pursue aggressive policies, they face significant domestic constraints in building public support for territorial revision while retaining considerable flexibility to pursue non-conflictual forms of engagement. These findings generally align with institutional perspectives emphasizing how routine cross-border engagement has achieved normative acceptance while territorial revision remains firmly outside established parameters of legitimate state behavior ([Waterbury 2020](#); [Zacher 2001](#)). Nevertheless, the resistance of territorial attitudes to informational manipulation raises questions about standard mechanisms of democratic control. If citizen preferences regarding territorial revision prove largely immutable to elite messaging, this could indicate either enhanced democratic resilience or reduced accountability in this policy domain.

4.8 Conclusion

This paper advances our understanding of kin-state politics by demonstrating how information environments differentially shape public preferences across policy domains. The experimental findings reveal that citizens cognitively process distinct categories of kin-state policy through different evaluative frameworks rather than treating them as manifestations of a unified construct. This domain-specific preference formation and the varied overall levels of support between policy types helps explain why contemporary kin-state engagement manifests primarily through cultural and economic support rather than territorial revision. The systematic variation in treatment effectiveness across policy types suggests more complex preference structures than previously theorized in the literature.

Two methodological limitations warrant acknowledgment. In terms of research design considerations, this initial exploration of domain-specific preference formation in kin-state politics prioritized internal validity through random assignment in its experimental framework. Though not preregistered, the analytical approach adhered to established practices in political behavior research, with results maintaining robustness across multiple model specifications. On the question of external validity, although the experimental evidence derives from a single empirical context, the study's comparability with [Stoycheff and Nisbet's \(2017\)](#) Crimean analysis provides analytical leverage across kin-state settings.

Future research should examine how varying institutional frameworks and historical experiences

condition information effects. For institutional frameworks, EU member states like Croatia present opportunities to study how European integration shapes kin-state engagement with co-ethnics when one country is in the EU and the other one is not. In terms of historical experiences, the contrast between post-imperial cases, exemplified by Austria's relationship with German minorities, and post-socialist cases opens new theoretical terrain. Finally, comparing cases where past irredentist efforts had different outcomes - the success of Romanian-Moldovan unification versus the failure of Serbia's territorial projects - could explain how historical experiences shape contemporary attitude formation.

Beyond comparative case studies, several methodological refinements could advance this research agenda. Investigating how different information delivery mechanisms moderate the effectiveness of cost and identity appeals could reveal important variation in attitude formation processes. Exploring potential interaction effects between domestic political ideology and receptiveness to different policy appeals would enhance knowledge of how existing belief systems constrain preference formation. Additionally, examining how persistent exposure to competing narratives shapes long-term preference structures would complement this study's focus on immediate priming effects. Most crucially, future work should investigate how varying levels of perceived discrimination against external populations influences the relative effectiveness of different frames. This research ultimately exemplifies why granular understanding of public attitude formation in kin-state politics matters: it reveals both opportunities and constraints for policymakers navigating complex transnational relationships.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic discourse into practical policy realms. As states increasingly pursue influence through non-territorial means, comprehending public attitude formation becomes crucial for anticipating political constraints and opportunities. Digital technologies enable novel forms of cross-border engagement while simultaneously transforming how citizens encounter and process information about kin-state policies. This evolving landscape creates an urgent need for refined theoretical frameworks examining how information environments shape preference formation across the full spectrum of transnational engagement strategies.

5 Conclusion: Beyond Borders, Within Minds

In this dissertation, I have systematically interrogated the motivational structures animating territorial preferences across markedly different sociopolitical and territorial configurations. My empirical inquiry spans three distinct cases: the Greater Idaho movement in the United States, which represents intra-state secession with an ultimately irredentist goal; Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which exemplifies classic secessionist dynamics in a post-conflict setting; and Serbia, which offers insights into territorial politics from the perspective of a formerly irredentist kin-state. Despite the disparate contexts between the first two, in both cases the territorial and boundary preferences among ordinary citizens are predominantly shaped by two interconnected factors. First, a foundational identity base that enables populations to perceive themselves as distinct from other groups, thereby generating desires for self-governance. Second, economic grievances which emerge as the most tangible and immediate consequences of what is perceived as alien governance by outgroup members.¹ The main takeaway from the third study is that similar economic and identity dimensions apply to territorial considerations among the public in a kin-state, though they affect individual preferences with varying degrees of elasticity depending on how aggressive the policy under consideration is.

The dissertation arrives at these findings by utilizing a methodically escalating research design. Chapter 2 examines the Greater Idaho movement through a survey that operationalizes classical theories of secession at the individual level. The findings reveal that despite the absence of ethnic distinctions, separatist support in Eastern Oregon emerges through psychological mechanisms similar to those documented in ethno-national contexts—a combination of regional identity and economic

¹The primary distinction between these cases appears not in their basic motivational structure but rather in how conflict legacies in Bosnia and Herzegovina have hardened identity boundaries and institutionalized group separation to the point where those supporting secession perceive intergroup relations as irreconcilable.

grievances. This analytical framework is extended to post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina in Chapter 3. The measurement scales developed for the Greater Idaho case are refined in the Republika Srpska study, complemented by disaggregated measures of populist attitudes across its three constitutive components—people-centrism, anti-elitism, and Manicheanism—allowing for comparative assessment of their predictive power against classical drivers of secessionism. The results demonstrate that classical theories of secession far better explain the persistence of secessionist sentiment in Republika Srpska, with populism emerging primarily as a rhetorical strategy used by elites rather than a substantive factor driving territorial preferences among the population. Building on these insights, Chapter 4 examines how the two primary dimensions affecting secessionist attitudes—identity and economic considerations—operate in the context of kin-state politics and irredentism. Employing an experimental survey design that enables causal inference, I find that citizens rely on different evaluative criteria when considering non-irredentist and irredentist engagement.

This dissertation has three important implications for the study of territorial politics and boundary reconfiguration processes. First, it systematically connects macro-level theories of secession and separatism with empirical micro-level evidence. By operationalizing classical theories of secession through psychometric measurement instruments, the dissertation demonstrates how both normative and grievance-based explanatory frameworks manifest in individual attitudinal orientations. Following recent research by [Griffiths and Waters \(2023\)](#), who interrogate the alignment between scholarly explanations of secessionist dynamics and movement-level discourse, this dissertation extends analogous inquiries to the individual level through attitudinal research. The multi-attitudinal batteries employed across the Greater Idaho and Republika Srpska contexts illustrate how theoretically-grounded measurement instruments can be applied across dramatically different political environments while maintaining conceptual consistency. This methodological approach facilitates the identification of common psychological underpinnings across diverse manifestations of secessionist sentiment, while simultaneously acknowledging context-specific dimensions like legacies of conflict that modulate these underlying mechanisms. The findings suggest that despite the inevitable local specificities characterizing each territorial movement, there exist discernible psychological patterns that transcend particular cases, offering a more generalizable framework for understanding separatist phenomena across contexts.

Second, this dissertation expands the conceptual and geographical parameters of territorial

politics research beyond conventional ethno-nationalist paradigms and well-studied Western cases. The empirical investigation of the Greater Idaho movement demonstrates that non-ethnic separatist movements exhibit substantial cognitive and motivational similarities to ethno-nationalist movements, suggesting that existing theoretical frameworks possess considerable analytical utility when transposed to contexts characterized by ideological polarization, urban-rural divisions, and economic disparities rather than ethno-national differentiation. On the other hand, the Republika Srpska case study extends the geographical parameters of territorial politics research, addressing the notable disparity between extensive macro-level scholarly attention devoted to post-Yugoslav contexts (Burg and Shoup 1999; Gagnon 1994; Gordy 1999; Gow 1997; Pavkovic 1996; Posen 1993; Ramet 2006; Woodward 1995) and the comparative paucity of micro-level attitudinal research in these settings. By extending empirical inquiry beyond the well-documented cases of Quebec, Catalonia, and Scotland to contexts that have received limited micro-level analytical attention, this dissertation significantly enhances our understanding of the common psychological base pertaining to territorial politics.

Third, this dissertation contributes to ongoing scholarly debate regarding the relationship between populism and nationalism (Bonikowski 2017; Bonikowski et al. 2019; Brubaker 2020; de Cleen 2017; de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Jenne 2018, 2021) by empirically assessing the applicability of populist attitudes as explanatory factors in ethno-national secessionist contexts. This analysis augments the nascent body of literature examining populist dimensions of secessionist politics (Albertazzi et al. 2018; Barrio et al. 2018, 2019; Heinisch et al. 2018; Ruiz Casado 2020, 2024; van Haute et al. 2018) by specifically focusing on individual-level dynamics, addressing an important lacuna in current scholarship (Blanchet and Medeiros 2019).

Finally, this dissertation transcends the conventional analytical boundaries between secession and irredentism studies, addressing what Waterbury (2020, 799) describes as the “uncomfortable” conceptual distance between kin-state politics and irredentist phenomena. Chapter 4 applies the granular micro-level analytical approach typically reserved for secessionist contexts to examine preference formation along the continuum of kin-state and co-ethnic relationships. Through survey experimental methods, the research reveals the malleability and constraints of irredentist orientations and non-military engagement preferences, reflecting the contemporary dynamics of ethnic affiliation across state boundaries.

The findings of this dissertation acquire heightened salience amidst the current global reconfigu-

ration of territorial politics. The empirical evidence presented across these studies offers substantive theoretical contributions that resonate with three paramount contemporary developments. To begin with, ethno-national secessionist movements are not going anywhere. Estimates say that there are about 60 active secessionist movements in the world - from the highly covered ones in Catalonia and Scotland to the less known ones like Bougainville in Papua New Guinea ([Griffiths 2020](#)). These movements constitute a fundamental challenge to the prevailing international order, as they consistently destabilize established state structures and reconfigure political landscapes.

In addition, the dissertation's examination of non-ethnic separatism in the American context presciently identifies a growing phenomenon that has received insufficient scholarly attention. The Greater Idaho movement represents merely one manifestation of an emerging pattern of ideologically-driven regional territorial reconfiguration demands. Similar movements have surfaced across multiple states, including Colorado, Illinois, and Maryland ([Galliher and Forman 2023](#)). This phenomenon extends beyond county-level movements to encompass more consequential state-level secessionist aspirations, with California and Texas representing the most significant cases. In California, Governor Newsom's rhetorical framing of the state as a "nation-state" with "enormous purchasing power" and "the world's fifth-largest economy" exemplifies precisely the identity-economic nexus identified in this research as foundational to secessionist sentiment ([Cowan 2020](#)). Importantly, these identity-based territorial movements transcend American borders, as evidenced by Alberta's "Wexit" movement in Canada, where regional identity construction and economic grievances regarding resource distribution have similarly generated exit preferences. While these various movements face formidable institutional and constitutional barriers to achieving their territorial objectives, the ideological polarization catalyzing their emergence shows no indications of diminishing ([Abramowitz and McCoy 2019](#); [Abramowitz and Webster 2016](#); [Iyengar et al. 2019](#); [Iyengar and Westwood 2015](#); [Lee 2022](#)), warranting sustained scholarly attention as potential harbingers of a new paradigm in territorial politics wherein ideological, cultural, and economic grievances crystallize into increasingly consequential demands for boundary revision.

Lastly, Russia's 2022 territorial annexations in Ukraine present a profound challenge to post-World War II norms against territorial conquest, potentially precipitating a cascading deterioration of the normative framework that has constrained territorial revisionism since 1945 ([Zacher 2001](#)). This normative erosion would carry serious implications for the territorial politics examined in this

dissertation, as it may simultaneously embolden irredentist aspirations among kin-states while intensifying the security dilemmas facing secessionist regions. Although the ultimate trajectory of these normative structures remains contingent upon the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, available empirical evidence suggests significant latent public support for irredentist territorial configurations across multiple European polities. Public opinion polls indicate that substantial majorities in several countries—Hungary (67%), Greece (60%), Turkey (58%), and Bulgaria (58%)—endorse propositions that portions of neighboring countries rightfully belong to their nation-state (Fagan and Pushter 2020). These documented attitudinal predispositions, which likely extend beyond the limited subset of countries included in existing cross-national polls, illustrate the potential activation of irredentist sentiment under conditions of weakened international prohibitive norms.

The research undertaken within this dissertation yields several promising avenues for future scholarly inquiry. Methodologically, longitudinal panel studies would enable tracking the temporal evolution of secessionist and irredentist preferences over time. Such temporal frameworks would enhance our capacity to differentiate between ephemeral opinion shifts triggered by specific events and more durable transformations in underlying preference structures. Scholars have recently begun to engage in this form of research by tracking the longitudinal impact of preferences for secession on electoral outcomes (Daoust and Gareau-Paquette 2024a,b) and affective polarization (Balcells and Kuo 2023). Complementary ethnographic fieldwork would provide essential contextual depth to quantitative findings. Such methodological triangulation would significantly enhance understanding of how individuals construct and articulate territorial preferences within their lived experiences.

Theoretical advancements should pursue two interconnected trajectories. The first involves developing sophisticated analytical frameworks that highlight the mechanisms through which ideological polarization transmutes into territorial separatist preferences within established democratic systems. The second requires constructing comprehensive models that conceptualize institutional arrangements—federalism, consociationalism, and autonomy provisions—as moderating variables that condition the manifestation of latent psychological dispositions in political demands. Comparative research should extend empirical inquiry to contexts where economic or identity grievances exhibit minimal objective indicators yet generate significant subjective perceptions of difference, thereby illuminating the interpretive processes through which structural conditions become politicized. Additionally, systematic investigation of how international normative erosion regarding territorial

integrity permeates individual cognitive frameworks would enhance understanding of preference malleability. Finally, applying rigorous methodological assessments of populist-separatist attitudinal relationships in political contexts where populist movements function primarily as opposition forces rather than entrenched governing entities would provide critical comparative leverage against the Republika Srpska findings, potentially revealing whether the relationship between populist attitudes and separatist preferences is conditioned by populists' position within institutional power structures.

The persistent appeal of secessionist and irredentist movements across space and time is a testament to how these processes profoundly resonate with humans. It demonstrates that Aristotle's concept of *zoon politikon* (political animal) extends beyond merely living in a political community; humans also possess an inherent drive to reshape these communities through division or amalgamation when circumstances demand it. From the ancient Plebeian secessions in Rome to the Ionian Revolt against Persian rule, through medieval fragmentations and into modern independence movements, the fundamental human impulse to redraw political boundaries has remained remarkably consistent. By examining the psychological underpinnings of these separatist impulses, we gain the capacity to identify latent separatism before it manifests as conflict. This proactive understanding enables scholars to recognize the early signs of territorial discontent and allows policymakers to address underlying grievances before they escalate into destructive movements. Thus, studying citizens' attachments to territory and identity is not merely a worthy academic pursuit but a practical necessity for conflict prevention in our ever-fragmenting world.

A Appendix to Chapter 2

A.1 Survey Procedures

Cint conducted the survey between July 27 and September 14, 2023 in the following Oregon counties: Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco, and Wheeler. Complete secession has been proposed for only 13 counties. The secession in four (Deschutes, Klamath, Jefferson, and Wasco) was proposed to only be partial, excluding mostly urban areas like the city of Bend in Deschutes County. However, our survey was open to all residents in these four counties since they would all be eligible to vote in these referenda.

The survey firm financially incentivized participants to take the survey. Central European University's ethics review board approved the study.

At the start of the survey, we included screening questions to confirm respondents were adults, US citizens, and residents of the specified Eastern Oregon counties. This ensured only those meeting participation criteria entered the full survey. Of 294 people who opened the initial survey invitation link, 243 responded satisfactorily to all three screening criteria questions. The next step involved an attention check question to validate attentive survey participation and data quality. This attention check was positioned early in the survey to identify inattentive responses before unqualified participants spent significant time. 228 also passed the attention check. As an additional validation step, we examined the data for instances of straight-lining, which refers to selecting the same response option for all survey items. Straight-lining can indicate rushed or inattentive participation rather than legitimate responses. We identified and excluded five straight-lined cases. Given our focus on analyzing motivations behind secessionist attitudes, we excluded 20 respondents who did not provide

an answer to the survey item regarding support for secession. Finally, we also lost 9 cases due to missing one or more demographic variables and 1 case for missing a motivational factor variable. This left us with a final sample of 193 respondents for analysis. Descriptive statistics of all variables used in the regression (post-recoding) are presented in Table 2.2.

A.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table A.1: Comparison of U.S. Census Data (July 1, 2022 estimates) and Sample Data in the “Greater Idaho” Counties

Data source	65+ years old	Female	White alone	BA degree or higher	Median household income
US Census weighted average	21%	49%	91%	27%	\$68,469.34
Sample average	15%	68%	88%	23%	\$50,000–\$74,999

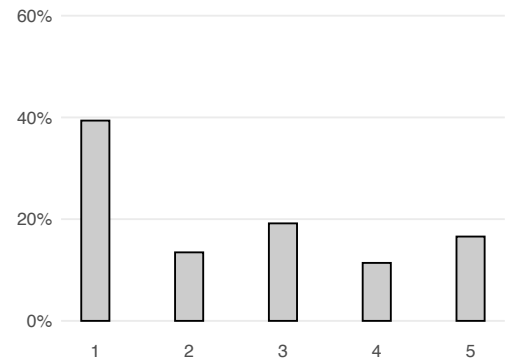


Figure A.1: Distribution of the Dependent Variable. This plot illustrates the distribution of responses to the question: ‘If offered the chance, how likely are you to vote for Eastern Oregon to leave Oregon and join Idaho?’ Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating ‘very unlikely’ and 5 indicating ‘very likely.’

A.3 Multiple Comparison-Adjusted Regression Results

Table A.2: Multiple Comparison Adjusted Estimates of Separatist Attitudes

Variable	Coef.	SE	Raw p	BH p	St. q	95% CI	90% FCR CI	95% FCR CI
<i>Identity Theories</i>								
Regional identification	1.928	0.669	0.004	0.067	0.020	[0.608, 3.249]	[0.433, 3.424]	[0.255, 3.601]
Entitativity	0.687	0.634	0.280	0.557	0.140	[-0.564, 1.938]	[-0.730, 2.104]	[-0.898, 2.272]
Ingroup bias	-0.605	0.635	0.342	0.557	0.151	[-1.858, 0.648]	[-2.024, 0.814]	[-2.192, 0.982]
Identity subversion	1.443	0.603	0.018	0.083	0.024	[0.254, 2.632]	[0.096, 2.790]	[-0.063, 2.949]
Right to dissent	-0.340	0.677	0.616	0.661	0.206	[-1.676, 0.996]	[-1.853, 1.173]	[-2.032, 1.353]
<i>Fears Theories</i>								
Threat perception	-0.151	0.870	0.862	0.862	0.266	[-1.868, 1.565]	[-2.095, 1.792]	[-2.325, 2.022]
Intergroup relations	0.679	0.780	0.385	0.557	0.158	[-0.860, 2.218]	[-1.064, 2.422]	[-1.271, 2.629]
<i>Economic Theories</i>								
Perceived economic grievances	2.111	0.910	0.021	0.083	0.025	[0.315, 3.907]	[0.077, 4.146]	[-0.164, 4.387]
<i>Control Variables</i>								
Age group	0.285	0.353	0.421	0.557	0.162	[-0.412, 0.983]	[-0.505, 1.075]	[-0.598, 1.169]
Female	-0.158	0.206	0.445	0.557	0.165	[-0.565, 0.249]	[-0.618, 0.303]	[-0.673, 0.358]
Education	0.395	0.406	0.333	0.557	0.150	[-0.407, 1.197]	[-0.514, 1.303]	[-0.621, 1.411]
Income	0.403	0.331	0.225	0.557	0.128	[-0.250, 1.056]	[-0.337, 1.143]	[-0.424, 1.230]
Non-white	-0.237	0.288	0.411	0.557	0.161	[-0.804, 0.331]	[-0.880, 0.406]	[-0.956, 0.482]
Partial counties	0.122	0.198	0.538	0.620	0.185	[-0.269, 0.513]	[-0.320, 0.565]	[-0.373, 0.617]
Leaning Republican	0.509	0.220	0.022	0.083	0.025	[0.074, 0.944]	[0.016, 1.001]	[-0.042, 1.060]

Notes: Analysis based on baseline model (Model 1). FCR = False Coverage Rate. BH p refers to Benjamini-Hochberg adjusted p -values. St. q refers to Storey's q -values. When using Benjamini-Hochberg at $\alpha = 0.05$, no hypotheses were rejected ($R = 0$), making 95% FCR intervals impossible to construct as the adjustment formula modifies the confidence level to 1. However, rejections at $\alpha = 0.10$ enabled construction of 90% FCR intervals. Using Storey's method allowed for both 90% and 95% FCR intervals where the 90% intervals are identical with BH because they both reject four null hypotheses. FCR adjusted thresholds: 90% = 0.973, 95% = 0.987. * indicates significance at $q \leq 0.05$. $n = 193$. $R^2 = 0.355$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.301$

A.4 Sensitivity Analysis of Model Specifications

Table A.3 shows estimates for Model 1 as presented in the paper. An additional four models are presented for completeness. Model 2 adjusts for the overrepresentation of women in our sample by weighting them according to their proportion in the overall population. Results remain largely consistent, with the exception of income, which becomes statistically significant ($\beta = 0.71, p = 0.039$).

¹ To address potential colinearity between the two socioeconomic variables, we estimated model 3 (without education) and model 4 (without income) to see whether this affects their results and significance levels. Without education, income's impact comes close but still falls short, of being statistically significant ($\beta = 0.51, p = 0.10$). Overall, since VIF values were generally low (most below 2.5), we elected to proceed with Model 1. Model 5 presents the alternative operationalization of partisanship we considered where Democrats, Independents, and those citing "Something Else" for their partisanship are compared to Republicans (the reference category). It shows that identifying as "Something Else" is statistically significant ($\beta = -0.79, p = 0.015$), which we found both puzzling and difficult to interpret. For this reason, we opted to present a model with dichotomized partisan leanings. We suspect the numerous proponents identifying as political independents or falling into the "Something Else" category, along with the sizable economic preoccupation and the significance of income in model 2, suggests that libertarianism and localized concerns exert a more potent role in this movement than the national Democratic-Republican divide.

¹Conventional OLS fit statistics are omitted from Model 2 in Table A.3 as they are not appropriate for probability-weighted regression. The model achieves 39.0% deviance reduction (null deviance = 456.1, df = 192; residual deviance = 278.7, df = 177).

Table A.3: Predictors of Separatism in Eastern Oregon, OLS Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Identity Theories</i>					
Regional identification	1.928** (0.669)	2.072** (0.654)	1.973** (0.668)	1.953** (0.670)	2.083** (0.672)
Entitativity	0.687 (0.634)	0.991 (0.625)	0.612 (0.629)	0.741 (0.633)	0.989 (0.643)
Ingroup bias	-0.605 (0.635)	-0.726 (0.660)	-0.551 (0.632)	-0.586 (0.636)	-0.607 (0.643)
Identity subversion	1.443* (0.603)	1.444* (0.602)	1.331* (0.591)	1.551* (0.597)	1.670** (0.606)
Right to dissent	-0.340 (0.677)	-0.353 (0.670)	-0.300 (0.676)	-0.369 (0.677)	-0.527 (0.685)
<i>Fears Theories</i>					
Threat perception	-0.151 (0.870)	0.411 (0.886)	-0.177 (0.869)	-0.113 (0.870)	-0.025 (0.881)
Intergroup relations	0.679 (0.780)	0.759 (0.791)	0.678 (0.780)	0.768 (0.778)	0.738 (0.793)
<i>Economic Theories</i>					
Perceived economic grievances	2.111* (0.910)	2.145* (0.976)	2.207* (0.905)	2.085* (0.911)	2.219* (0.937)
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Age group	0.285 (0.353)	0.101 (0.372)	0.341 (0.349)	0.258 (0.353)	0.265 (0.357)
Female	-0.158 (0.206)	-0.161 (0.194)	-0.181 (0.205)	-0.167 (0.206)	-0.197 (0.208)
Education	0.395 (0.406)	0.591 (0.395)		0.565 (0.382)	0.243 (0.421)
Income	0.403 (0.331)	0.708* (0.340)	0.514 (0.311)		0.226 (0.338)
Non-white	-0.237 (0.288)	-0.269 (0.245)	-0.260 (0.287)	-0.247 (0.288)	-0.150 (0.296)
Partial counties	0.122 (0.198)	0.296 (0.201)	0.131 (0.198)	0.170 (0.194)	0.155 (0.199)
Leaning Republican	0.509* (0.220)	0.499* (0.224)	0.475* (0.218)	0.474* (0.219)	
Democrat					-0.276 (0.292)
Independent					-0.292 (0.264)
Something Else					-0.795* (0.326)
Constant	-0.818 (0.902)	-1.398 (0.941)	-0.674 (0.890)	-0.889 (0.902)	-0.521 (0.967)
Observations	193	193	193	193	193
R ²	0.355		0.352	0.350	0.358
Adjusted R ²	0.301		0.301	0.299	0.296
Residual SE (df)	1.260 (177)		1.260 (178)	1.262 (178)	1.265 (175)
F Statistic (df)	6.502*** (15; 177)		6.901*** (14; 178)	6.842*** (14; 178)	5.740*** (17; 175)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

A.5 Questionnaire

A. Instructions

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

B. Separatist Attitudes Measures

1. Regional Identification

Code	Item
ID1	Eastern Oregon has a unique character and culture that is distinct from the rest of the country.
ID2r	The distinct identity of the people of Eastern Oregon is adequately protected by the government of Oregon.
ID3	My primary loyalty is to Eastern Oregon, not to the state of Oregon.
ID4	The people of Eastern Oregon are second-class citizens in Oregon.
ID5r	The people of Eastern Oregon are afforded the same rights as others in Oregon.
ID6r	Linz-Moreno Question: Do you see yourself as... Eastern Oregonian only More Eastern Oregonian than Oregonian Equally Eastern Oregonian and Oregonian More Oregonian than Eastern Oregonian Oregonian only I don't know

2. Entitativity

Code	Item
EN1	Despite their differences, all Oregonians are on the same team.
EN2r	The people of Eastern Oregon want different things than the people from other regions of Oregon.
EN3	The different people of Oregon are “as one.”
EN4r	The people of Oregon are deeply divided.
EN5r	The people of Oregon do not feel like one group to me.
EN6	The citizens of Oregon share the same fate.

3. Ingroup Bias

Code	Item
IB1	No region has given more to this state than Eastern Oregon.
IB2r	The people from Eastern Oregon overrate their importance.
IB3	It is always better to have someone from Eastern Oregon to represent the people of Eastern Oregon, even if their politics are different than mine.
IB4	The mayors of cities and towns in Eastern Oregon are a great example of political decision-making that others should try to emulate.
IB5r	I think the people from Eastern Oregon are the least reasonable people in Oregon.
IB6r	I tend to trust individuals from other regions of Oregon more than people from Eastern Oregon.

4. Identity Subversion

Code	Item
NIS1	The identity of Oregon today contradicts its historical values.
NIS2r	Oregon is currently the state that I think it should be.
NIS3	The current state of Oregon does not align with our values and traditions.
NIS4r	The dominant values of Oregon today reflect my personal values.
NIS5	The recent cultural shifts and political changes have undermined the core essence of Oregon’s identity.
NIS6r	The state of Oregon is heading in the right direction.

5. Right to Dissent

Code	Item
RTD1r	If you say that you are more loyal to Eastern Oregon, than to Oregon, people will call you a traitor.
RTD2	Dissenting opinions are valued in our society.
RTD3r	Those who disagree with majority opinions are discriminated against.
RTD4	There is a culture of open dialogue that encourages the expression of disagreement in Oregon.
RTD5r	Those who propose strengthening local institutions in Eastern Oregon are seen as destroyers of Oregon.
RTD6	You can publicly express support for Eastern Oregon without fear of consequences.

6. Threat Perception

Code	Item
F1	The government of Oregon wants to populate Eastern Oregon with outsiders.
F2	The government of Oregon makes decisions that harm the culture of Eastern Oregon.
F3	The government of Oregon continuously fails to protect the physical security of people in Eastern Oregon.
F4r	No one in Oregon is going to physically harm me simply for being a Democrat / Republican.
F5r	I feel safe visiting other regions of Oregon.
F6r	The survival of Eastern Oregonian culture in Oregon is not in doubt.

7. Intergroup Relations

Code	Item
IR1r	People from other regions of Oregon rarely show understanding or empathy towards the people of Eastern Oregon.
IR2	I do not blame the people in other regions of Oregon for the problems Eastern Oregon is facing.
IR3r	The people in other regions of Oregon look down on the people of Eastern Oregon.

IR4	The people in other regions of Oregon care about the same issues the people of Eastern Oregon care about.
IR5r	I have been in situations where I felt humiliated by others for being from Eastern Oregon.
IR6	The people in other regions of Oregon have good intentions towards the people of Eastern Oregon.

8. Perceived Economic Grievances

Code	Item
E1	Eastern Oregon subsidizes poorer regions of Oregon.
E2r	The economic interests of Eastern Oregon are the same as those of the rest of Oregon.
E3r	The government of Oregon does not make policies that hurt the economic interests of the people of Eastern Oregon.
E4r	Other regions of Oregon are not economically benefiting at the expense of Eastern Oregon.
E5	Eastern Oregon would be richer if it were not for the rest of Oregon holding it back.
E6	I would personally be better off if the government of Oregon was not interfering in Eastern Oregon's economy.

9. Dependent Variable

If offered the chance, how likely are you to vote for Eastern Oregon to leave Oregon and join Idaho?

- Very unlikely
- Unlikely
- Neither unlikely nor likely
- Likely
- Very Likely

C. Demographics

Age

- Under 18
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65+ years old

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to say

Hispanic Origin

- Yes
- No

Race (Select all that apply)

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American

- American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Education

- Some high school or less
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college, but no degree
- Associates or technical degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS etc.)
- Prefer not to say

Annual Household Income

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to say

Notes:

- Items marked with 'r' are reverse-coded
- All scale items use 5-point Likert response options unless otherwise noted

B Appendix to Chapter 3

B.1 Robustness Checks

The distribution of the multiplicative populism index exhibited notable right-skewedness in its original form, as illustrated in Panel A of Figure B.1. To address potential concerns about this non-normal distribution, additional analyses were conducted using a square root transformed measure of populist attitudes. As shown in Panel B of Figure B.1, this transformation helped normalize the distribution while preserving the conceptual relationship between the three components of populism: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and Manichean outlook.

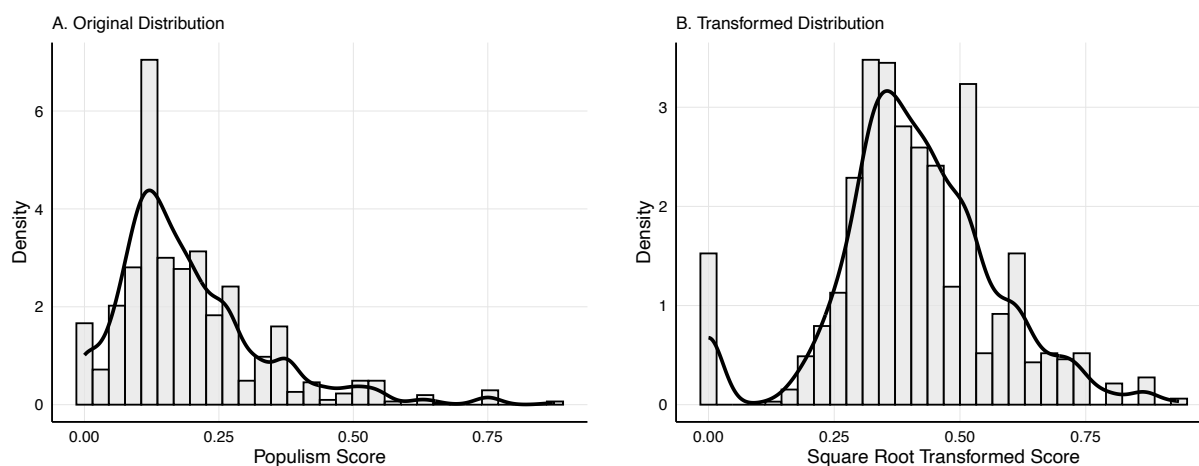


Figure B.1: Distribution of Populist Attitudes. Panel A shows the original distribution of the multiplicative populism index. Panel B shows the distribution after square root transformation. Both measures scaled to 0-1 scale.

The analysis of the relationship between populist attitudes, secessionist preferences and SNSD support was replicated using the transformed measure. The results remain substantively similar

to the main findings. The logistic regression using the square root transformed populism measure shows a significant negative relationship with SNSD support ($\beta = -2.412$, $p < 0.001$). Moving from the minimum to maximum values of the transformed populism measure is associated with a 38.2 percentage point decrease in the probability of supporting SNSD, comparable to the 41.4 percentage point change observed with the original measure. A one standard deviation increase in transformed populist attitudes corresponds to a 5.1 percentage point decrease in SNSD support probability (compared to 5.5 using the original measure). Figure B.2 illustrates this persistent negative relationship.

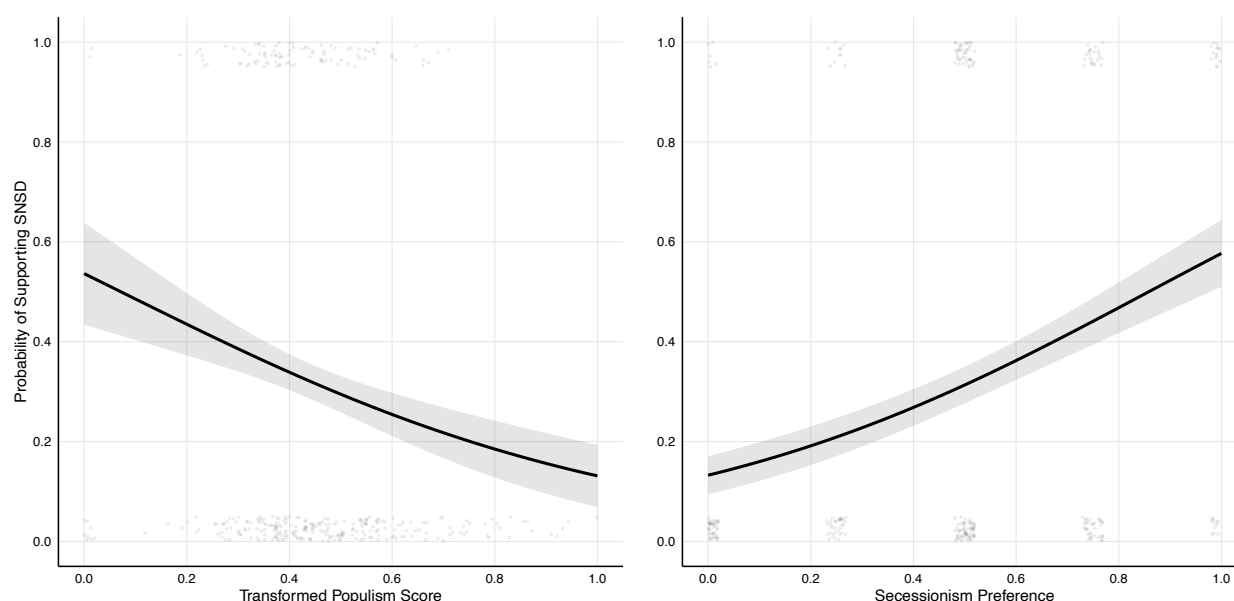


Figure B.2: Predicted Probabilities of SNSD Support by Transformed Populist Attitudes and Secessionist Preferences. Black curves show predicted probabilities from logistic regression models, with shaded regions indicating 95% confidence intervals. Gray points represent observed data (jittered to avoid overplotting), with 1 indicating SNSD support and 0 indicating non-support. All variables standardized to 0-1 scale.

Table B.1 presents regression models using the square root transformed populism measure. The results closely mirror the main findings, revealing consistently non-significant relationships between populist attitudes and secessionist preferences across all model specifications. Model 1 shows that transformed populist attitudes maintain a negative but statistically non-significant association with support for secession ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = 0.293$). This absence of statistical significance persists when incorporating additional controls for ethnic identity (Model 2: $\beta = -0.193$, $p = 0.349$) and partisan

affiliation (Model 3: $\beta = -0.282$, $p = 0.220$). Model 4 from the main analysis is omitted as it employed disaggregated components of populism rather than the composite measure. Model 5 is included as it examines the interaction between anti-elitism and education, which is further explored in Appendix [B.2](#).

Table B.1: Predictors of Secessionism in RS with Square Root Transformed Populism Measure, OLS Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(5)
Ethno-regional identification	1.025** (0.323)	1.002** (0.321)	1.133** (0.359)	1.015*** (0.323)
Entitativity	-1.155*** (0.274)	-1.391*** (0.280)	-1.142*** (0.316)	-1.190*** (0.275)
Ingroup bias	2.080*** (0.285)	1.912*** (0.288)	1.460*** (0.339)	2.061*** (0.293)
Identity subversion	-0.262 (0.276)	-0.166 (0.276)	-0.118 (0.316)	-0.084 (0.287)
Devolution	-0.004 (0.276)	-0.030 (0.274)	-0.011 (0.307)	0.036 (0.276)
Right to dissent	0.756** (0.240)	0.700** (0.239)	0.785** (0.278)	0.666*** (0.243)
Threat perception	0.395 (0.326)	0.218 (0.328)	0.042 (0.369)	0.401 (0.326)
Intergroup relations	-1.241*** (0.315)	-1.124*** (0.315)	-1.277*** (0.357)	-1.190*** (0.315)
Perceived economic grievances	1.602*** (0.310)	1.624*** (0.309)	1.904*** (0.346)	1.549*** (0.314)
Populism (Square Root Measure)	-0.218 (0.207)	-0.193 (0.206)	-0.282 (0.230)	-1.369** (0.446)
Anti-elitism				-1.105*** (0.376)
People-centrism				-0.074 (0.182)
Manichaeism				-0.078 (0.201)
Age	-0.164 (0.165)	-0.096 (0.165)	-0.280 (0.193)	-0.184 (0.165)
Education	0.061 (0.163)	-0.00001 (0.162)	-0.082 (0.188)	-1.116* (0.599)
Income	-0.030 (0.235)	-0.039 (0.233)	-0.254 (0.281)	0.049 (0.236)
Female	-0.080 (0.076)	-0.079 (0.076)	-0.073 (0.087)	-0.081 (0.076)
Rural	-0.086 (0.081)	-0.083 (0.080)	-0.143 (0.093)	-0.084 (0.081)
Serb		0.451*** (0.129)	0.361* (0.153)	
SNSD			0.205* (0.096)	
Anti-elitism \times Education				1.617** (0.786)
Constant	1.327** (0.500)	1.129* (0.500)	1.374* (0.572)	2.035*** (0.576)
Observations	913	913	670	913
R ²	0.425	0.432	0.470	0.430
Adjusted R ²	0.415	0.422	0.457	0.419
Residual Std. Error	1.043 (df = 897)	1.037 (df = 896)	1.035 (df = 652)	1.040 (df = 894)
F Statistic	44.125 (df = 15; 897)	42.656 (df = 16; 896)	34.061 (df = 17; 652)	42.240 (df = 18; 894)

Note: Standard Errors in parentheses.

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

B.2 Exploratory Analyses of Educational and Mediating Effects

This section presents additional exploratory analyses examining potential moderating and mediating relationships in the data. While these analyses reveal intriguing patterns, they should be interpreted with appropriate caution given their post-hoc nature.

B.2.1 Educational Effects

Given the complex nature of anti-elite attitudes and their potential variation across different social strata, this analysis explored whether educational attainment might moderate the relationship between anti-elitism and secessionist preferences. Previous research has found that less educated individuals typically show stronger support for populism compared to those with higher education (Spruyt et al. 2016). However, the findings here suggest a different pattern, likely for two key reasons. First, while Spruyt et al. examined support for populism as a whole, the analysis in this paper focuses specifically on anti-elitism as a component of populist attitudes. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the political context differs substantially. In Spruyt et al.’s (2016) study of Flanders, populist parties were opposition forces, with the main populist party (*Vlaams Belang*) having lost significant electoral support and other populist parties remaining marginal. In contrast, this study examines a context where the populist-secessionist leader and their party (SNSD) have held power for nearly two decades, effectively becoming the elite they rhetorically oppose.

This contextual difference may help explain these exploratory findings. Figure B.3 illustrates a statistically significant interaction between anti-elitism and education levels ($\beta = 1.617, p < 0.05$), demonstrating that the impact of anti-elitist sentiments on secessionist attitudes varies across educational strata. For individuals with lower levels of education, anti-elitism exhibits a strong negative effect on secessionist attitudes ($\beta = -1.105, p < 0.01$). However, this negative effect diminishes as educational attainment increases, eventually crossing the zero-effect threshold at the highest education levels. The widening confidence intervals at higher education levels necessitate cautious interpretation of this pattern. These findings indicate that more educated individuals may engage with anti-elitist ideas in ways that are more compatible with secessionist thinking, possibly due to a more sophisticated understanding of political structures and grievances. Alternatively, this pattern could reflect varying conceptualizations of “elites” across educational levels, with more

educated individuals potentially focusing their anti-elitist sentiments more narrowly on Bosniak or international elites, aligning more closely with secessionist narratives. However, these interpretations remain speculative and warrant further theoretical development and empirical testing.

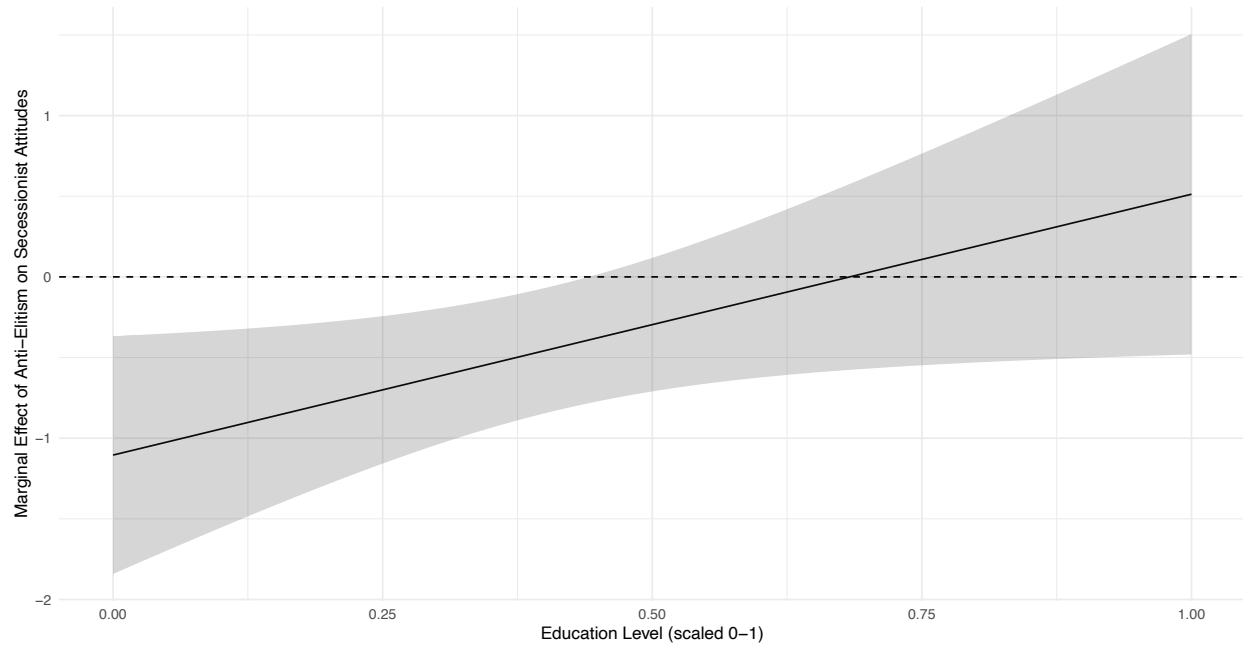


Figure B.3: Interaction Effect of Anti-Elitism and Education on Secessionist Attitudes. The plot shows the marginal effect of anti-elitism on secessionist attitudes across different levels of education (scaled 0-1). The solid line represents the estimated marginal effect, and the shaded area indicates the 95% confidence interval. The dashed horizontal line at $y=0$ represents no effect.

B.2.2 Mediating Mechanisms

Given that both anti-elitism and secessionist attitudes involve group-based considerations, this analysis explored ingroup bias as a potential mediating mechanism. The theoretical logic for this exploration stems from how anti-elitist attitudes might affect group-based thinking: individuals who are generally skeptical of elites might be less susceptible to elite-driven narratives about group superiority or distinctiveness. This relationship becomes particularly intriguing in light of research showing that high-status group members typically exhibit stronger ingroup bias than low-status group members (Bettencourt et al. 2001). In the context of RS, where political elites often emphasize ethnic distinctiveness and group interests to justify secessionist demands, anti-elitist attitudes might reduce support for secession by weakening individuals' acceptance of such group-centric narratives,

particularly among those who might otherwise be most susceptible to ingroup favoritism.

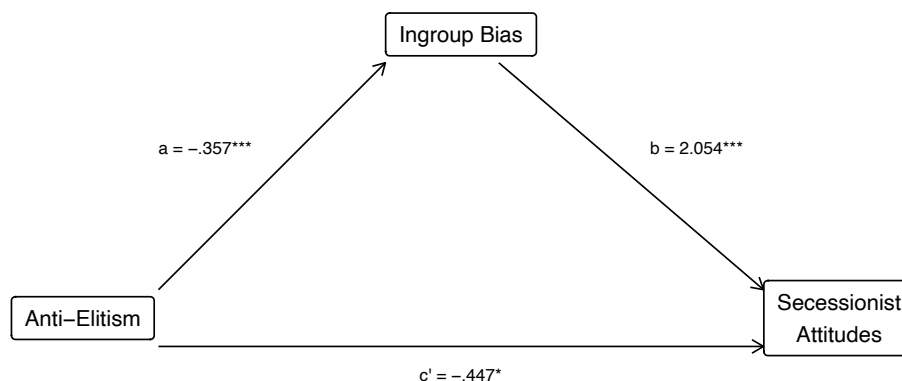


Figure B.4: Mediation Analysis of the Relationship Between Anti-Elitism and Secessionist Attitudes. Ingroup bias operates as a mediator. Path coefficients are standardized. *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$.

Figure B.4 presents results from this exploratory mediation analysis. The analysis reveals that anti-elitism's negative relationship with secessionist attitudes operates substantially through ingroup bias. Specifically, anti-elitism exhibits a significant negative indirect effect through ingroup bias (ACME = -0.357 , $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[-0.527, -0.22]$), accounting for 44.4% of the total effect. This suggests that individuals with stronger anti-elitist attitudes tend to show lower levels of ingroup bias, which in turn predicts lower support for secession. Concurrently, anti-elitism maintains a significant direct negative effect on secessionist attitudes (ADE = -0.447 , $p < 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.827, -0.03]$), even after accounting for this indirect pathway. The total effect remains robustly negative (Total Effect = -0.804 , $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[-1.219, -0.38]$).

While these patterns are statistically significant and theoretically intriguing, they should be interpreted with appropriate caution. The relationship between anti-elitism and group-based attitudes in divided societies is likely context-dependent. Future research could productively examine whether this mediating relationship holds in other cases where political elites employ ethnic narratives to advance secessionist goals.

B.3 Questionnaire

A. Instructions

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

B. Separatist Attitudes Measures

1. Ethno-regional Identification

Code	Item
ID1	Republika Srpska has a unique character and culture that is distinct from the rest of the country. <i>Republika Srpska ima jedinstven karakter i kulturu koja se razlikuje od ostatka države.</i>
ID2r	The distinct identity of Serbs is adequately protected by the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Jedinstveni identitet Srba adekvatno je zaštićen od strane vlade Bosne i Hercegovine.</i>
ID3	My primary loyalty is to Bosnia and Herzegovina, not to Republika Srpska. <i>Moja primarna odanost je prema Bosni i Hercegovini, a ne prema Republici Srpskoj.</i>
ID4	Serbs are second-class citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Srbi su građani drugog reda u Bosni i Hercegovini.</i>
ID5r	Serbs are afforded the same rights as others in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Srbi imaju ista prava kao i drugi narodi u Bosni i Hercegovini.</i>
ID6r	Linz-Moreno Question: Do you see yourself as... <i>Da li sebe vidite:</i> Serb only

Samo kao Srbina/Srpkinju

More Serb than Bosnian and Herzegovinian

Više kao Srbina/Srpkinju nego kao Bosanca i Hercegovca/Bosanku i Hercegovku

Equally Serb and Bosnian and Herzegovinian

Jednako kao Srbina/Srpkinju i Bosanca i Hercegovca/Bosanku i Hercegovku

More Bosnian and Herzegovinian than Serb

Više kao Bosanca i Hercegovca/Bosanku i Hercegovku nego kao Srbina/Srpkinju

Bosnian and Herzegovinian only

Samo kao Bosanca i Hercegovca/Bosanku i Hercegovku

2. Entitativity

Code	Item
EN1	Despite ethnic differences, all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are on the same team. <i>Unatoč nacionalnim razlikama, svi građani Bosne i Hercegovine žele najbolje za ovu državu.</i>
EN2r	Serbs want different things than Bosniaks and Croats. <i>Srbi žele drugačije stvari od Bošnjaka i Hrvata.</i>
EN3	The three peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina are “as one.” <i>Tri naroda Bosne i Hercegovine su ujedinjeni kao jedan.</i>
EN4r	The three peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina are deeply divided. <i>Tri naroda Bosne i Hercegovine duboko su podijeljena.</i>
EN5r	The three peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina do not feel like one united group to me. <i>Tri naroda Bosne i Hercegovine mi se ne čine kao jedna složna grupa.</i>
EN6	The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina share the same fate. <i>Gradani Bosne i Hercegovine dijele istu sudbinu.</i>

3. Ingroup Bias

Code	Item
IB1	No one has done more for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s prosperity than Serbs. <i>Niko nije učinio više za prosperitet Bosne i Hercegovine od Srba.</i>
IB2r	Serbs overrate their importance. <i>Srbi precjenjuju svoju važnost.</i>
IB3	It is always better to have someone from Republika Srpska to represent the people of Republika Srpska, even if their politics are different than mine.

Uvijek je bolje da gradane Republike Srpske predstavlja neko iz Republike Srpske, čak i ako se ne slažem sa njegovim/njenim političkim stavovima.

IB4 The leaders of Republika Srpska are great examples of political decision-making that others should try to emulate.

Vodstvo Republike Srpske je odličan primjer političkog odlučivanja koje bi drugi trebali slijediti.

IB5r I think Serbs are the least reasonable people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Srbi su najmanje razumni ljudi u Bosni i Hercegovini.

IB6r I tend to trust individuals from other national groups more than Serbs.

Više vjerujem pojedincima iz drugih naroda nego Srbima.

4. Devolution

Code	Item
D1	Local elections should have more impact on one's life than national elections. <i>Lokalni izbori bi trebali imati veći utjecaj na naš život od državnih izbora.</i>
D2r	Policies that affect everyday life should be made at the state and not the local level. <i>Politike koje utječu na svakodnevni život trebaju se donositi na državnom, a ne lokalnom nivou.</i>
D3	The state government should take care of only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level. <i>Državna vlada se treba baviti samo zadacima koji se ne mogu obaviti na lokalnom nivou.</i>
D4r	Problems are handled most effectively when dealt with by the state government instead of local government. <i>Državna vlada bolje rješava probleme od lokalnih organa vlasti.</i>
D5	I care more about how things are going in my municipality than about how things are going in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. <i>Više mi je bitno kako stvari idu u mojoj opštini nego kako idu u Bosni i Hercegovini kao cjelini.</i>
D6r	Having a good president of the country is more important than having a good mayor. <i>Imati dobrog predsjednika države je važnije od imati dobrog gradonačelnika.</i>

5. Identity Subversion

Code	Item
NIS1	The identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina today contradicts its historical values. <i>Trenutni identitet Bosne i Hercegovine je u suprotnosti sa njenim historijskim vrijednostima.</i>
NIS2r	Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently the country that I think it should be. <i>Bosna i Hercegovina je trenutno država kakva bi trebala biti po mom mišljenju.</i>
NIS3	The current state of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not align with our national values and traditions. <i>Trenutno stanje Bosne i Hercegovine nije u skladu sa našim nacionalnim vrijednostima i tradicijama.</i>
NIS4r	The dominant values of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian society today reflect my personal values. <i>Dominantne vrijednosti bosanskohercegovačkog društva danas su u skladu sa mojim ličnim vrijednostima.</i>
NIS5	The recent cultural shifts and political changes have undermined the core essence of Bosnia and Herzegovina's identity. <i>Nedavne kulturološke i političke promjene potkopale su srž identiteta Bosne i Hercegovine.</i>
NIS6r	Bosnia and Herzegovina is heading in the right direction. <i>Bosna i Hercegovina ide u pravom smjeru.</i>

6. Right to Dissent

Code	Item
RTD1r	If you say that you are more loyal to Republika Srpska than to Bosnia and Herzegovina, people will call you a traitor. <i>Ako kažete da ste više odani Republici Srpskoj nego Bosni i Hercegovini, ljudi će vas nazvati izdajnikom.</i>
RTD2	Dissenting opinions are valued in our society. <i>Oprečna mišljenja se cijene u našem društvu.</i>
RTD3r	Those who disagree with majority opinions are discriminated against. <i>Oni koji se ne slažu sa mišljenjima većine su diskriminirani.</i>
RTD4	There is a culture of open dialogue that encourages the expression of disagreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>U Bosni i Hercegovini postoji kultura otvorenog dijaloga koja podstiče izražavanje neslaganja.</i>

- RTD5r Those who propose strengthening of Serb institutions are seen as destroyers of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Oni koji predlažu jačanje srpskih institucija smatraju se rušiteljima Bosne i Hercegovine.
- RTD6 You can publicly express support for Republika Srpska without fear of consequences.
Možete javno izraziti podršku Republici Srpskoj bez straha od posljedica.

7. Threat Perception

Code	Item
F1	The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to populate Republika Srpska with outsiders. <i>Vlada Bosne i Hercegovine želi da Republiku Srpsku naseli onima koji nisu iz Republike Srpske.</i>
F2	The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina makes decisions that harm Serb culture. <i>Vlada Bosne i Hercegovine donosi odluke koje štete kulturi Srba.</i>
F3	The Bosnian government continuously fails to protect the physical security of Serbs. <i>Vlada Bosne i Hercegovine kontinuirano ne uspijeva zaštititi fizičku sigurnost Srba.</i>
F4r	No one in Bosnia and Herzegovina is going to physically harm a Serb just for being Serb. <i>Niko u Bosni i Hercegovini neće fizički napasti Srbina/Srpkinju samo zato što su Srbin/Srpkinja.</i>
F5r	I feel safe visiting non-Serb areas. <i>Osjećam se sigurno prilikom posjeta područjima koja nisu većinski naseljena Srbima.</i>
F6r	The survival of Serb culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not in doubt. <i>Opstanak srpske kulture u Bosni i Hercegovini nije doveden u pitanje.</i>

8. Intergroup Relations

Code	Item
IR1r	Bosniaks and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina rarely show understanding or empathy towards Serbs. <i>Bošnjaci i Hrvati u Bosni i Hercegovini rijetko pokazuju razumijevanje ili empatiju prema Srbima.</i>
IR2	I do not blame Bosniaks and Croats for the problems Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are facing. <i>Bošnjaci i Hrvati nisu krivi za probleme s kojima se suočavaju Srbi u Bosni i Hercegovini.</i>

- IR3r Bosniaks and Croats look down on Serbs.
Bošnjaci i Hrvati misle da su bolji od Srba.
- IR4 Bosniaks and Croats in the country care about the same issues Serbs care about.
Bošnjaci i Hrvati u Bosni i Hercegovini brinu o istim pitanjima o kojima brinu Srbi.
- IR5r I have been in situations where I felt humiliated by others for being a Serb.
Bio sam u situacijama kada sam se osjećao poniženim od strane drugih zbog toga što sam Srbin/Srpkinja.
- IR6 Bosniaks and Croats have good intentions towards Serbs.
Bošnjaci i Hrvati imaju dobre namjere prema Srbima.

9. Perceived Economic Grievances

Code	Item
E1	Republika Srpska subsidizes other regions of the country. <i>Republika Srpska finansijski izdržava ostale dijelove Bosne i Hercegovine.</i>
E2r	The economic interests of Republika Srpska are the same as those of the rest of the country. <i>Ekonomski interesi Republike Srpske su isti kao i interesi ostalih dijelova Bosne i Hercegovine.</i>
E3r	The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not make policies that hurt the economic interests of Serbs. <i>Vlada Bosne i Hercegovine ne donosi odluke koje štete ekonomskim interesima Srba.</i>
E4r	Other nationalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not economically benefiting at the expense of Serbs. <i>Drugi narodi u Bosni i Hercegovini ne profitiraju na račun Srba.</i>
E5	Republika Srpska would be richer if it were not for the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina holding it back. <i>Republika Srpska bi bila bogatija da je ostatak Bosne i Hercegovine ne koči.</i>
E6	I would personally be better off if the Bosnian government were not interfering in Republika Srpska's economy. <i>Lično bih bio/bila u boljem finansijskom stanju da se vlada Bosne i Hercegovine ne miješa u ekonomiju Republike Srpske.</i>

C. Populist Attitudes Measures

9. Populist Attitudes

Code	Item
------	------

People-centrism

PPL1	Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people.
------	---

	<i>Političari trebaju uvijek pažljivo slušati probleme ljudi.</i>
--	---

PPL2r	Politicians don't have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.
-------	--

	<i>Političari ne trebaju provoditi vrijeme među običnim ljudima da bi dobro radili.</i>
--	---

Anti-elitism

ANT1	The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.
------	--

	<i>Vlada radi samo na korist nekoliko krupnih interesnih grupa koje brinu samo o sebi.</i>
--	--

ANT2r	Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.
-------	--

	<i>Vladini dužnosnici koriste svoju moć kako bi unaprijedili živote ljudi.</i>
--	--

Manichaeen outlook

MAN1	You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.
------	---

	<i>Jasno je je li neko dobar ili loš na temelju toga koju politiku podržava.</i>
--	--

MAN2r	The people I disagree with politically are not evil.
-------	--

	<i>Ljudi s kojima se politički razilazim nisu zli.</i>
--	--

10. Dependent Variable: Secessionist Preferences

Code	Item
------	------

DV	If offered the chance, how likely are you to vote for Republika Srpska to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina and form an independent country?
----	---

	<i>Ako vam se pruži prilika, kakve su šanse da biste glasali da Republika Srpska napusti Bosnu i Hercegovinu i formira nezavisnu državu?</i>
--	--

	1 = Very unlikely / <i>Vrlo niske</i>
--	---------------------------------------

	2 = Unlikely / <i>Niske</i>
--	-----------------------------

	3 = Neither likely nor unlikely / <i>Ni niske ni visoke</i>
--	---

	4 = Likely / <i>Visoke</i>
--	----------------------------

	5 = Very likely / <i>Vrlo visoke</i>
--	--------------------------------------

D. Sociodemographic Variables**1. Party Affiliation**

- Party Support: Generally speaking, which of these parties most closely represents your political views?

Općenito govoreći, koja od ovih stranaka najbliže predstavlja vaše političke stavove?

- Socijaldemokratska Partija Bosne i Hercegovine - SDP
- Srpska Demokratska Stranka - SDS
- Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH
- Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA
- Partija Demokratskog Progres - PDP
- Demokratski Narodni Savez - DNS
- Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD - Milorad Dodik
- Naša Stranka - NS
- Demokratska Fronta - DF
- Za Pravdu i Red - Lista Nebojše Vukanovića
- Ujedinjena Srpska
- Narod i Pravda - NiP
- Narodna Partija Srpske - Darko Banjac - PUS - Prva SDS
- Narodni Front
- Some other party / *Neku drugu stranku*
- Don't know / *Ne znam*
- Refuse to answer / *Odbijam odgovoriti*

2. Gender

- Gender: Please indicate your gender.

Molimo Vas označite spol.

- Male / *Muški*
- Female / *Ženski*

3. Age

- Age: How old are you?

Koliko imate godina?

4. Residential Setting

- Type of Settlement: What type of settlement do you live in?

Tip naselja

- Urban / *Urbano*
- Rural / *Ruralno*

5. Educational Attainment

- Education: What is your highest completed level of education?

Koji je Vaš najviši završeni stepen obrazovanja?

- No education/Incomplete primary school / *Bez obrazovanja/Nezavršena osnovna škola*
- Completed primary school / *Završena osnovna škola*
- Trade school - three-year secondary education / *Zanat - trogodišnja srednja škola*
- Four-year secondary school / *Četvorogodišnja srednja škola*
- Higher education (6th level) / *Viša škola (6.stepen)*
- University - Bachelor's Degree - first cycle of higher education / *Fakultet - Bachelor ili Baccalaureat - prvi ciklus visokog obrazovanja*
- Master's Degree - second cycle of higher education / *Master - drugi ciklus visokog obrazovanja*
- University Degree (7th level) / *Fakultet (7.stepen)*
- Master of Science / *Magisterij nauke*
- Doctorate / *Doktorat*
- Specialization / *Specijalizacija*
- I do not wish to answer / *Ne želim da odgovorim*

6. Economic Status

- Income: Please think about the last three months. What was your PERSONAL average monthly income, including all sources of income?

Molimo Vas da razmislite o posljednja tri mjeseca. Koliki je bio Vaš LIČNI prosječni mjesečni prihod, uključujući sve izvore prihoda?

- No personal income / *Bez ličnih prihoda*
- Up to 195 KM / *Do 195 KM*
- More than 195 KM to 390 KM / *Više od 195 KM do 390 KM*
- More than 390 KM to 590 KM / *Više od 390 KM do 590 KM*
- More than 590 KM to 780 KM / *Više od 590 KM do 780 KM*
- More than 780 KM to 980 KM / *Više od 780 KM do 980 KM*
- More than 980 KM to 1170 KM / *Više od 980 KM do 1170 KM*
- More than 1170 KM to 1370 KM / *Više od 1170 KM do 1370 KM*
- More than 1370 KM to 1560 KM / *Više od 1370 KM do 1560 KM*
- More than 1560 KM to 1760 KM / *Više od 1560 KM do 1760 KM*
- More than 1760 KM to 1960 KM / *Više od 1760 KM do 1960 KM*
- More than 1960 KM to 2150 KM / *Više od 1960 KM do 2150 KM*
- More than 2150 KM to 2350 KM / *Više od 2150 KM do 2350 KM*
- More than 2350 KM to 2540 KM / *Više od 2350 KM do 2540 KM*
- More than 2540 KM to 2740 KM / *Više od 2540 KM do 2740 KM*
- More than 2740 KM to 2930 KM / *Više od 2740 KM do 2930 KM*
- More than 2930 KM to 3130 KM / *Više od 2930 KM do 3130 KM*
- More than 3130 KM to 3320 KM / *Više od 3130 KM do 3320 KM*
- More than 3320 KM to 3520 KM / *Više od 3320 KM do 3520 KM*
- More than 3520 KM to 3720 KM / *Više od 3520 KM do 3720 KM*
- More than 3720 KM to 3910 KM / *Više od 3720 KM do 3910 KM*

- More than 3910 KM to 4110 KM / *Više od 3910 KM do 4110 KM*
- More than 4110 KM to 4300 KM / *Više od 4110 KM do 4300 KM*
- More than 4300 KM to 4500 KM / *Više od 4300 KM do 4500 KM*
- More than 4500 KM to 4700 KM / *Više od 4500 KM do 4700 KM*
- More than 4700 KM to 4890 KM / *Više od 4700 KM do 4890 KM*
- More than 4890 KM to 5090 KM / *Više od 4890 KM do 5090 KM*
- More than 5090 KM to 5280 KM / *Više od 5090 KM do 5280 KM*
- More than 5280 KM to 5480 KM / *Više od 5280 KM do 5480 KM*
- More than 5480 KM to 5670 KM / *Više od 5480 KM do 5670 KM*
- More than 5670 KM to 5870 KM / *Više od 5670 KM do 5870 KM*
- More than 5870 KM / *Više od 5870 KM*
- I do not wish to answer / *Ne želim odgovoriti*

Notes:

- Items marked with 'r' are reverse-coded
- All scale items use 5-point Likert response options unless otherwise noted
- The survey was administered in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language

C.1 Data Validation and Representativeness

Table C.1: Sample Characteristics Compared to Population Parameters

Characteristic	Census (%)	Sample (%)	Difference
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	51.4	50.3	-1.1
<i>Region</i>			
Belgrade	25.3	24.8	-0.5
Vojvodina	26.2	21.1	-5.1
West and Central Serbia	28.4	28.4	0.0
South and East Serbia	20.1	25.7	+5.6
<i>Age</i>			
18-24	9.2	11.8	+2.6
25-34	14.6	14.4	-0.2
35-44	17.9	19.1	+1.2
45-54	17.8	21.0	+3.2
55-64	17.7	21.0	+3.3
65+	22.8	12.6	-10.2

Note: Census data from 2022 Serbian Statistical Office. Sample data from survey conducted April 4-18, 2024 (N = 1,050).

C.2 Experimental Design and Treatment Effects

Table C.2: Sample Characteristics by Treatment Condition and Balance Tests

Panel A: Descriptive Statistics by Treatment Condition			
	Control	Cost Prime	National Prime
N	350	349	351
Female (%)	46.6	51.6	52.7
Age (mean)	45.7	46.4	45.7
Rural (%)	19.1	23.8	19.9
College degree (%)	38.5	36.2	40.1
Income (mean EUR)	644	628	569

Panel B: Balance Tests		
	F-statistic	p-value
Female	1.493	0.225
Age	0.193	0.824
Rural	1.297	0.274
College degree	0.553	0.575
Income	2.066	0.127

Note: Balance tests conducted using one-way ANOVA. Income measured in euros (EUR), calculated from reported monthly personal income. N = 1,050. Missing values excluded from calculations.

C.3 Primary Model Specification

Table C.3: Ordered Logistic Regression Results Comparing Border Changes and General Assistance

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
<i>Treatment Effects</i>				
Cost Prime (Border)	-0.231	0.136	-1.695	0.090
National Prime (Border)	-0.347	0.135	-2.570	0.010
Cost Prime (Assistance)	-0.529	0.136	-3.875	0.000
National Prime (Assistance)	0.667	0.141	4.738	0.000
<i>Threshold Coefficients (Border)</i>				
1 2	-1.898	0.140	-13.557	0.000
2 3	-0.640	0.135	-4.741	0.000
3 4	0.667	0.135	4.941	0.000
4 5	1.973	0.142	13.894	0.000
<i>Threshold Coefficients (Assistance)</i>				
1 2	-2.504	0.141	-17.809	0.000
2 3	-1.775	0.119	-14.952	0.000
3 4	-0.472	0.102	-4.635	0.000
4 5	1.282	0.110	11.636	0.000
<i>Model Fit Statistics</i>				
Border Changes: N = 1,050, Log Likelihood = -1,620.03, AIC = 3,252.06				
General Assistance: N = 1,050, Log Likelihood = -1,473.06, AIC = 2,958.13				
<i>Note:</i> Estimates from ordered logistic regression with flexible thresholds. Treatment effects are relative to control condition. Response variables are 5-point ordinal scales of support for border changes and general assistance policies.				

C.4 Probability Distribution of Treatment Effects in the Primary Model

This appendix provides comprehensive data on the distributional effects of experimental treatments across response categories. Table C.4 presents the complete numerical estimates of probability changes relative to the control condition with corresponding 95% confidence intervals. These values quantify the precise magnitudes of treatment effects across the response spectrum, complementing the graphical representation in Figure 4.3. Additionally, Figure C.1 presents the visualization of these treatment effects with corresponding confidence intervals.

Table C.4: Changes in Predicted Probabilities by Treatment Condition and Response Category

Treatment	Response Category				
	Strong Opposition	Opposition	Neutral	Support	Strong Support
<i>General Assistance</i>					
Cost Prime	4.6 [2.1, 7.1]	3.2 [1.4, 5.0]	5.2 [2.3, 8.1]	-5.3 [-8.4, -2.2]	-7.7 [-11.2, -4.2]
National Prime	-3.5 [-5.3, -1.7]	-3.0 [-4.6, -1.4]	-7.7 [-10.7, -4.7]	0.8 [-2.5, 4.1]	13.4 [7.1, 19.6]
<i>Border Changes</i>					
Cost Prime	2.3 [0.2, 4.4]	3.0 [0.4, 5.6]	-0.4 [-3.5, 2.7]	-2.9 [-5.4, -0.4]	-2.0 [-3.7, -0.3]
National Prime	3.4 [1.1, 5.7]	4.6 [1.8, 7.4]	-0.5 [-3.7, 2.7]	-4.5 [-7.2, -1.8]	-3.0 [-4.9, -1.1]

Note: Values represent percentage point changes in predicted probabilities relative to control condition. 95% confidence intervals in brackets. Estimates derived from ordered logistic regression models.

C.5 Robustness Analyses and Alternative Model Specifications

C.5.1 Weighted Analysis and Composite Indices

To evaluate the stability and generalizability of the domain-specific findings, I conducted several supplementary analyses examining treatment effects under alternative model specifications and measurement approaches. First, to ensure the findings remain robust against potential sampling biases, I estimated weighted models incorporating post-stratification adjustments based on the 2022 Serbian census data. These adjustments correct for any disparities in gender, age, education, and

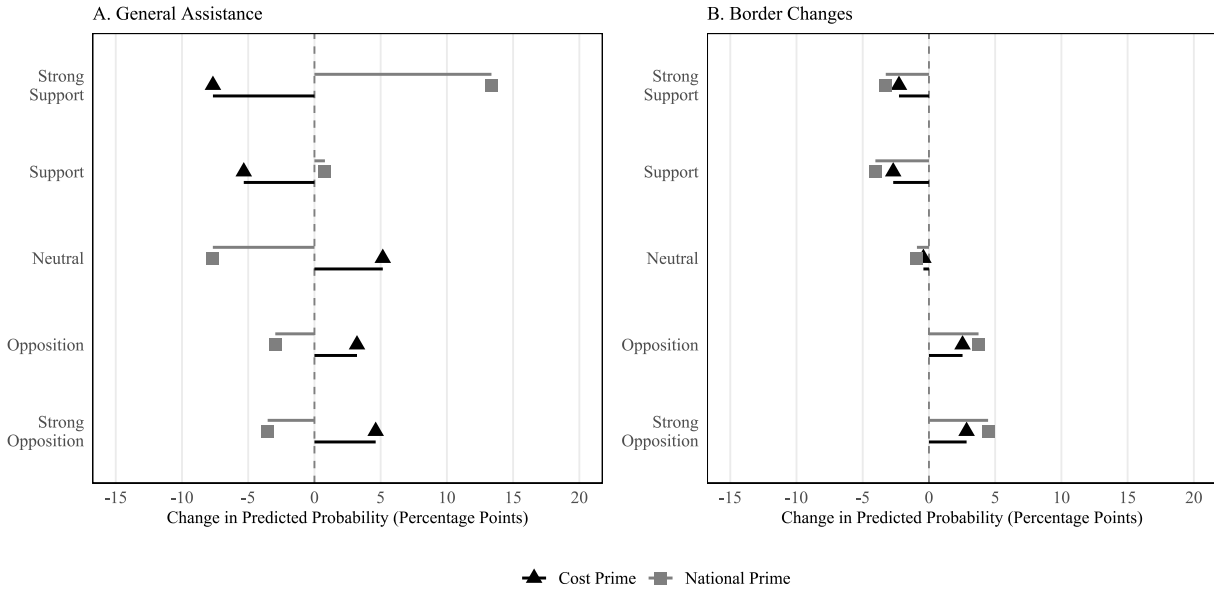


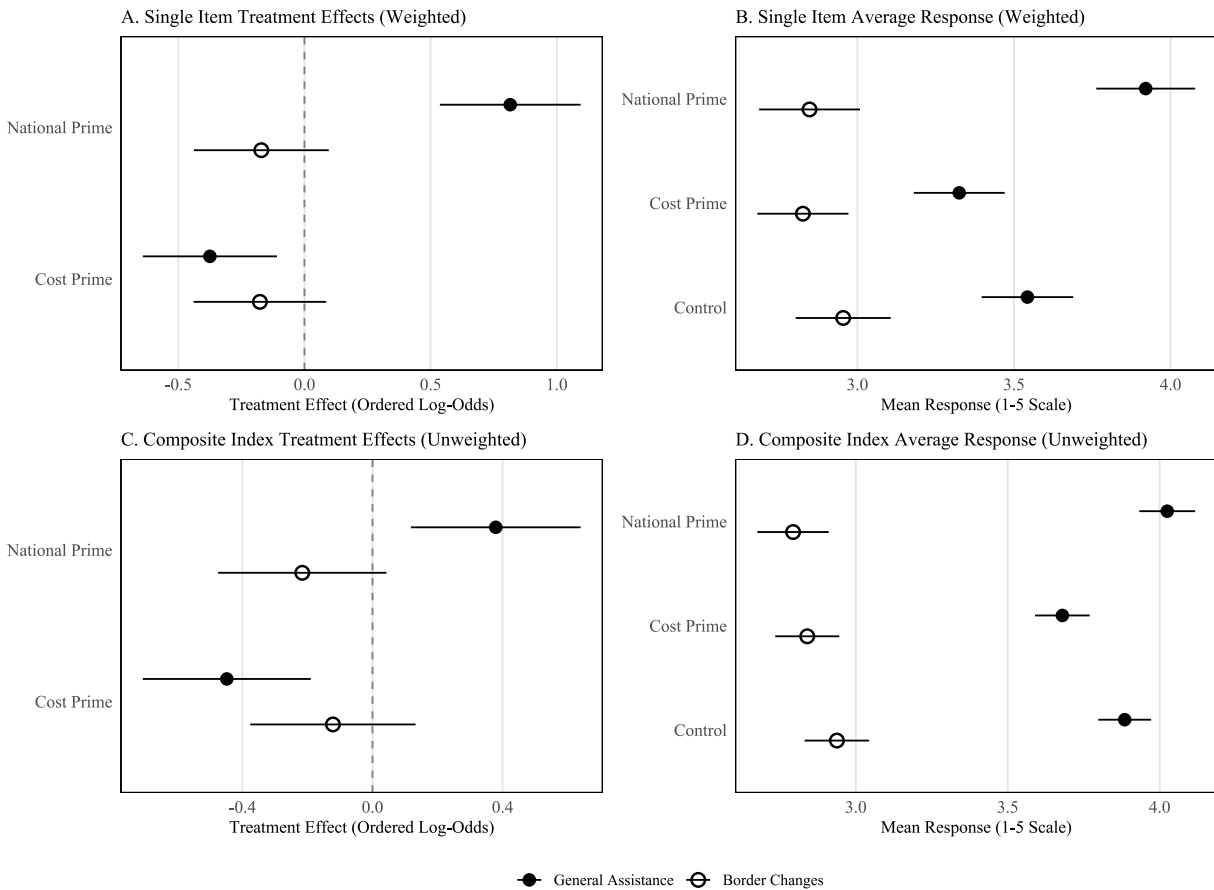
Figure C.1: Treatment Effects on Response Probabilities with 95% Confidence Intervals. Points show changes in predicted probabilities relative to control condition. Horizontal line at zero represents no change from control.

region of residence. Second, based on the factor analytical results, I constructed composite indices to address potential measurement error in individual items. Following the two-factor structure identified in the CFA, I created a general assistance index and a territorial changes index. Figure C.2 displays the treatment effects and raw means for both robustness checks.

The weighted analysis largely substantiates the core findings, with significant implications for interpreting effects on border change policies. For general assistance policies, the cost prime continues to exert a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.37$, $p = 0.006$) and the national prime generates an even stronger positive effect ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$) than observed in the unweighted analysis. However, for border change policies, both treatments yield modest negative effects that fail to reach conventional significance thresholds (Cost Prime: $\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.188$; National Prime: $\beta = -0.17$, $p = 0.210$), suggesting that the initially observed negative effect of nationalist appeals on border change attitudes in the main model should be interpreted with caution.

The composite indices analysis reveals a similar pattern. The general assistance index confirmed the robustness of earlier observations, with the cost prime exerting a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and the national prime yielding a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, the border changes index revealed attenuated effects that did not reach

Figure 2. Comparing Treatment Effects: Single Items and Composite Indices



Note: Panels A and B show weighted results for single items (AMM1 and AMM6). Panels C and D show unweighted results for composite indices derived from multiple related items. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure C.2: Comparison of Treatment Effects on Composite Policy Indices. Panel A displays treatment effects from ordered logistic regression models. Panel B shows raw mean responses by condition. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

conventional significance thresholds (Cost Prime: $\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.35$; National Prime: $\beta = -0.22$, $p = 0.10$). The consistency of results for assistance policies alongside the inconsistent findings for border change attitudes across multiple specifications further reinforces the domain-specific nature of information effects in kin-state politics, confirming that these different policy domains operate through fundamentally different preference structures.

C.5.2 Heterogeneous Treatment Effects Across Latent Classes

To investigate potential heterogeneity in treatment effects of the nationalist prime on support for border changes, I conducted latent class analysis using all policy items. The optimal model identified

six distinct classes based on BIC criteria. Treatment effects were then estimated separately within each class using ordered logistic regression. The analysis identifies Class 1 (18.1% of respondents) as distinct, demonstrating a strong negative response to nationalist appeals ($\beta = -1.25$, $p < 0.01$) while other classes show no significant treatment effects. This heterogeneity helps explain the overall negative effect observed in the analysis, as illustrated in Figure C.3.

The demographic composition of Class 1 provides additional insight into these differential treatment effects. Members of this class are older than the rest of the sample (mean age 49.2 vs 45.2 years, $p < 0.001$), more affluent (mean income 688 vs 597 EUR, $p < 0.05$), and predominantly male (38% vs 52% female, $p < 0.001$). Notably, they are not more educated ($p = 0.261$) and do not come disproportionately from border regions ($p = 0.760$).

Table C.5: Treatment Effects of Nationalist Prime Across Latent Classes

Characteristic	Latent Class					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Class Size (%)	18.3	17.6	19.3	10.4	20.2	14.2
Treatment Effect (β)	-1.25**	-0.20	-0.39	-0.50	-0.13	-0.50
Standard Error	(0.41)	(0.40)	(0.39)	(0.50)	(0.38)	(0.35)
95% CI Lower	-2.19	-0.93	-1.21	-1.64	-0.89	-1.22
95% CI Upper	-0.46	0.53	0.49	0.50	0.60	0.20

Note: Effects estimated using ordered logistic regression. Confidence intervals based on 1,000 bootstrap resamples.
 ** indicates $p < 0.01$.

Table C.6: Demographic Characteristics of Class 1 versus Other Classes

Characteristic	Class 1	Other Classes	t-statistic	p-value
Age (years)	49.2	45.2	3.38	0.001
Female (%)	38.0	53.0	-3.84	< 0.001
Income (EUR)	688.0	597.0	2.15	0.033
College Degree (%)	41.9	37.4	1.13	0.261
Border Municipality (%)	12.0	11.2	0.31	0.760

Note: Results from two-sample t-tests comparing Class 1 (n = 192) with other classes (n = 858).

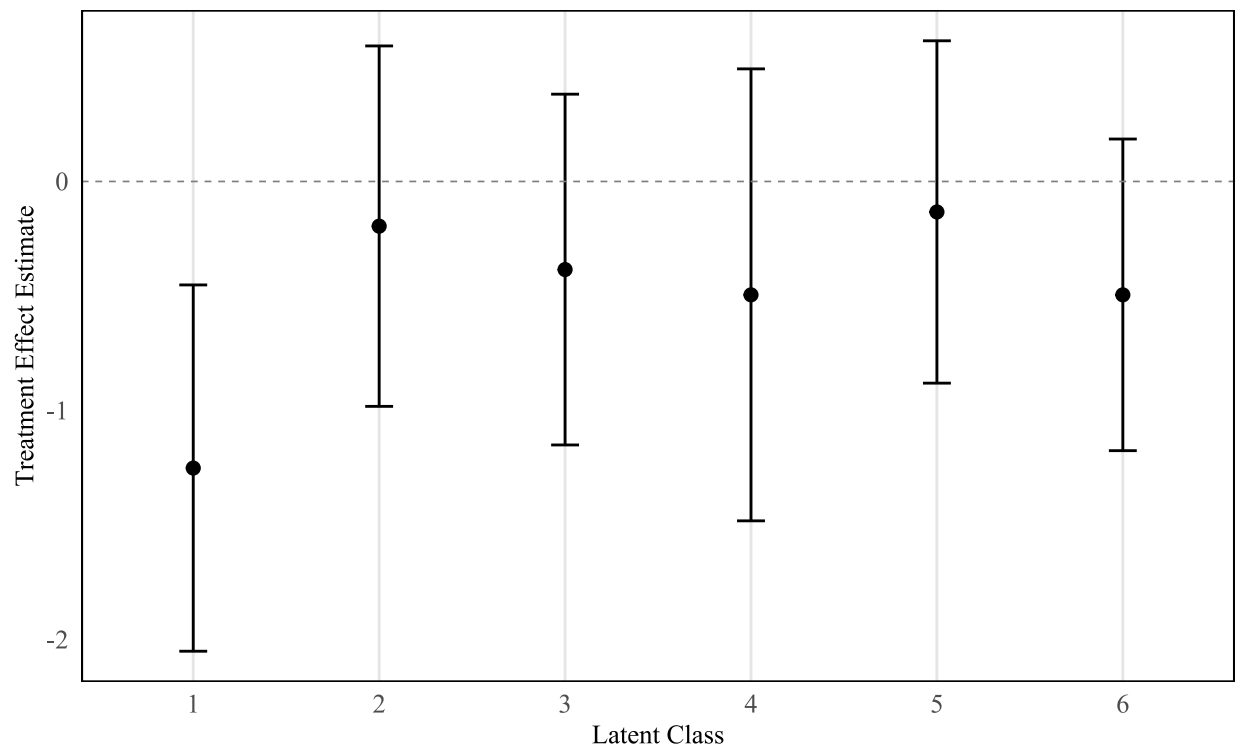


Figure C.3: National Prime Treatment Effects on Support for Border Changes Across Latent Classes

C.5.3 Demographic and Geographic Controls

Table C.7: Ordered Logistic Regression Results with Demographic and Geographic Controls

	General Assistance		Border Changes	
	Estimate	Std. Error	Estimate	Std. Error
<i>Treatment Effects</i>				
Cost Prime	-0.520***	0.147	-0.193	0.145
National Prime	0.637***	0.151	-0.349*	0.146
<i>Individual Controls</i>				
Age (Standardized)	0.072	0.059	-0.308***	0.060
Education (Standardized)	0.055	0.064	-0.024	0.064
Income (Standardized)	-0.018	0.065	-0.072	0.064
Female	-0.337**	0.124	-0.221†	0.122
Border Municipality	-0.286	0.187	0.236	0.191
<i>Regional Controls</i>				
Vojvodina	-0.213	0.171	-0.323†	0.172
West/Central Serbia	-0.009	0.175	0.323†	0.172
South/East Serbia	0.185	0.183	0.228	0.181
<i>Model Fit</i>				
N	921		921	
Log Likelihood	-1,287.19		-1,400.93	
AIC	2,602.38		2,829.86	

Note: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, †p < 0.10. Estimates from ordered logistic regression with Belgrade as the reference category for regions. Border municipalities include those adjacent to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo. 129 observations deleted due to missingness.

C.6 Treatment Effect Heterogeneity

Table C.8 presents a systematic examination of potential heterogeneous treatment effects across age and gender demographics. Our interaction analyses reveal limited evidence of demographic heterogeneity in treatment responsiveness. The sole notable exception emerges in border change attitudes, where we observe a marginally significant positive interaction between female gender and cost prime exposure ($\beta = 0.561, p < 0.10$). This interaction pattern suggests that while men demonstrate a significant negative response to cost considerations ($\beta = -0.503, p < 0.05$), this effect appears neutralized among women (combined effect: 0.058). However, given the marginal significance level and substantial standard errors, these findings should be interpreted with appropriate

caution. No other interaction terms—neither age \times treatment nor remaining gender \times treatment combinations—achieve statistical significance at conventional levels, suggesting generally consistent treatment effects across demographic categories.

Table C.8: Demographic Interaction Effects in Treatment Response

	General Assistance		Border Changes	
	Estimate	Std. Error	Estimate	Std. Error
<i>Age Interactions</i>				
Cost Prime	-0.519*	0.207	-0.503*	0.206
National Prime	0.675**	0.218	-0.430*	0.216
Age (Standardized)	0.125	0.103	-0.262**	0.100
Cost Prime \times Age	0.023	0.143	0.028	0.143
National Prime \times Age	-0.198	0.148	-0.141	0.144
<i>Gender Interactions</i>				
Cost Prime	-0.517*	0.207	-0.503*	0.206
National Prime	0.675**	0.218	-0.430*	0.216
Female	-0.323	0.214	-0.476*	0.206
Cost Prime \times Female	0.018	0.291	0.561 [†]	0.289
National Prime \times Female	-0.057	0.299	0.246	0.291
<i>Model Fit</i>				
N	921		921	
Log Likelihood	-1,291.22		-1,409.42	
AIC	2,606.44		2,842.84	

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, [†] $p < 0.10$. Estimates from ordered logistic regression models with flexible thresholds. All models include controls for education and income (standardized). Treatment effects are relative to control condition. Models estimated separately for age and gender interactions. 129 observations deleted due to missingness.

C.7 Questionnaire

A. Instructions

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

B. Experimental Priming Conditions

1. Cost Prime Treatment (T=1)

Code	Item
	<p>English: It is important to consider the economic costs of assisting Serbs in neighboring countries. This assistance (cultural support, economic aid, and security assistance) come from the state budget, which is paid by Serbs in Serbia. Giving financial support to Serbs abroad therefore reduces the amount of money that can go to Serbs within Serbia.</p> <p>Serbian: Važno je razmotriti ekonomske troškove pružanja pomoći Srbima u susednim državama. Ova pomoć (kulturna podrška, ekonomska pomoć i bezbednosna pomoć) dolazi iz državnog budžeta, koji se puni novcem od poreza koje plaćaju Srbi u Srbiji. Davanje finansijske podrške Srbima u susednim državama stoga smanjuje količinu novca koja može biti usmerena ka Srbima unutar Srbije.</p>
AMM1	<p>English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should provide assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries?</p> <p>Serbian: Da li se slažete ili ne slažete da vlada Srbije treba da pruži pomoć Srbima u susednim državama?</p>

2. National Identity Prime Treatment (T=2)

Code	Item
	<p>English: Serbs in neighboring countries face discrimination and unequal treatment. Serbia's commitment to protecting Serbs from discrimination follows from our shared national identity and solidarity, which transcends borders. Serbia's assistance serves as a crucial safeguard against such discrimination, preserving the cultural and national heritage of Serbs abroad.</p>

Serbian: Srbi u susednim državama se suočavaju sa diskriminacijom i nejednakim tretmanom. Posvećenost Srbije zaštiti Srba od diskriminacije proističe iz našeg zajedničkog nacionalnog identiteta i solidarnosti, koji prevazilaze granice. Pomoć Srbije služi kao ključna zaštita od takve diskriminacije, očuvavajući kulturno i nacionalno nasleđe Srba u drugim državama.

AMM1 **English:** Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should provide assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries?

Serbian: Da li se slažete ili ne slažete da vlada Srbije treba da pruži pomoć Srbima u susednim državama?

3. Control Group (T=0)

Code	Item
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AMM1	English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should provide assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries?
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	Serbian: Da li se slažete ili ne slažete da vlada Srbije treba da pruži pomoć Srbima u susednim državama?
--	--

C. Types of Assistance

Code	Item
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	English: There are lots of different types of support that kin states give to their co-ethnics, including diplomatic assistance, support for cultural organizations, economic assistance and military aid. Let us ask you about each of these specifically. ¹
--	---

	Serbian: Postoje različite vrste podrške koju matične države pružaju svojim sunarodnicima, uključujući diplomatsku pomoć, podršku kulturnim organizacijama, ekonomsku pomoć i vojnu pomoć. Pitaćemo vas posebno za svaku od ovih vrsta podrške.
--	--

AMM2	English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should provide diplomatic assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries?
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	Serbian: Vlada Srbije treba da pruži diplomatsku pomoć Srbima u susednim državama.
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¹All survey items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

AMM3	<p>English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should provide economic assistance to Serbs in neighboring countries?</p> <p>Serbian: Vlada Srbije treba da pruži ekonomsku pomoć Srbima u susednim državama.</p>
AMM4	<p>English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should support cultural organizations of Serbs in neighboring countries?</p> <p>Serbian: Vlada Srbije treba da podrži kulturne organizacije Srba u susednim državama.</p>
AMM5	<p>English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should intervene militarily to support Serbs in neighboring countries, if necessary?</p> <p>Serbian: Vlada Srbije treba da vojnom intervencijom podrži Srbe u susednim državama, ako bude potrebno.</p>

D. Border Changes

Code	Item
AMM6	<p>English: Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government might under some circumstances change the border to include Serbs in neighboring countries?</p> <p>Serbian: Vlada Srbije u nekim okolnostima može da promeni granicu kako bi uključila Srbe iz susednih država.</p>
	<p>English: Sometimes kin states act to annex territory to their state, as Russia did in the case of Crimea. There are many arguments for why states can legitimately annex territory, including economic, humanitarian, historical and other reasons. Let us ask you about each of these specifically.</p> <p>Serbian: Ponekad matične države deluju da bi pripojile teritoriju svojoj državi, kao što je Rusija učinila u slučaju Krima. Postoje brojni argumenti zašto države mogu legitimno da pripoje neku teritoriju, uključujući ekonomske, humanitarne, istorijske i druge razloge. Pitaćemo vas posebno za svaki od ovih.</p>

E. Border Change Reasons

Code	Item
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-
- AMM7 **English:** Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government should expand its borders to include territories where Serbs live in neighboring countries because they share the same national identity as Serbs in Serbia?
Serbian: Vlada Srbije treba da proširi granice Srbije i pripoji teritorije u susednim državama gde žive Srbi, jer su oni istog nacionalnog identiteta kao i Srbi u Srbiji.
-
- AMM8 **English:** Do you agree or disagree that the Serbian government has the right to annex all historically Serb territory?
Serbian: Vlada Srbije ima pravo da pripoji sve istorijski srpske teritorije.
-
- AMM9 **English:** Do you agree or disagree that Serbia has the right to change its borders to help Serbs in neighboring countries if they are struggling economically?
Serbian: Srbija ima pravo da promeni granice kako bi pomogla Srbima u susednim državama ako se ekonomski muče.
-
- AMM10 **English:** Do you agree or disagree that Serbia has the right to change its borders when the neighboring governments are persecuting Serbs?
Serbian: Srbija ima pravo da promeni granice kada vlade susednih država progone Srbe.
-

F. Sociodemographic Variables

1. Gender

- Gender: Please indicate your gender.

Molimo Vas navedite Vaš pol.

- Male / *Muški* (1)
- Female / *Ženski* (2)

2. Regional Classification

- Region (RS_REGIONS4): In which region do you live?

U kom regionu živite?

- Belgrade City / *Grad Beograd* (1)
- Vojvodina / *Vojvodina* (2)
- Western and Central Serbia / *Zapadna i Centralna Srbija* (3)

- Eastern and Southern Serbia / *Istočna i Južna Srbija* (4)

3. Settlement Type

- Type of Settlement (STTYPE): Type of settlement.

Tip naselja.

- Urban / *Urbano* (1)
- Rural / *Ruralno* (2)

4. Educational Attainment

- Education (EDU0): What is your highest completed level of education?

Koji je Vaš najviši završeni stepen obrazovanja?

- No Education/Incomplete Primary / *Bez obrazovanja/Nezavršena osnovna škola* (1)
- Complete Primary Education / *Završena osnovna škola* (2)
- Vocational Training (3-year secondary) / *Zanat - trogodišnja srednja škola* (3)
- Complete Secondary Education (4-year) / *Četvorogodišnja srednja škola* (4)
- Higher Education (6th level) / *Viša škola (6. stepen)* (5)
- Bachelor's Degree / *Fakultet - Bachelor ili Baccalaureat - prvi stepen visokog obrazovanja* (6)
- Master's Degree / *Master - drugi stepen visokog obrazovanja* (7)
- Complete University Degree (7th level) / *Fakultet (7. stepen)* (8)
- Master of Science / *Magistar nauka* (9)
- Doctoral Degree / *Doktorat* (10)
- Specialization / *Specijalizacija* (11)

5. Monthly Personal Income

- Income (INCOMEPI): Please think about the last three months. What was your PERSONAL average monthly income, including all sources of income (Salary with all supplements, fees,

pensions, scholarships, unemployment benefits, etc.)?

Molimo Vas, razmišljajte o poslednja tri meseca. Koliki je bio Vaš LIČNI prosečni mesečni prihod, uključujući sve izvore prihoda (Plata sa svim dodacima, honorari, penzije, stipendije, naknade za nezaposlene ili sl., itd.)?

Values coded at intervals of 100 EUR throughout, with each value representing the midpoint of its bracket. First non-zero bracket (up to 100 EUR) coded as 50, subsequent brackets coded at midpoint value (e.g., 100-200 EUR coded as 150), continuing at 100 EUR intervals until the final open-ended bracket (>3000 EUR) which is coded as 3050.

Notes:

- All survey items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) unless otherwise noted
- The survey was administered in Serbian language

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