EXPLORING ETHNO-NATIONALIST EXTREMISM IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ATLANTIC INITIATIVE
2021

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Atlantic Initiative
2021

IMPRESUM

Autors:
Majda Halilović and Nejra Veljan

Title:
Exploring ethno-nationalist extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Copyeditor:
Madeleine Ryle

Reviewers:
Mirnes Kovač and Michael Colborne

Design:
Sanin Pehlivanović

Publisher:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

This paper presents the results of research on ethno-nationalist extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, while it reveals some worrying trends, which cut across gender and age categories, the research does also highlight some opportunities.

Demonstration of extreme ethno-nationalist views ranges from the readiness of participants to support their "ideals" only at a rhetorical level, through to a readiness to justify and directly support acts of violence or to commit acts of violence themselves. However, the research also indicates where potential lies for building resilience to extremism. There is a strong indication that respondents who had more interactions with people from other ethnic/identity groups were much less likely to support violence, even though they harbour very strong ethno-nationalist views and were recognised as extremists in their communities.

This research also indicates how the promotion of nationalism by political parties in BiH provides a "key concept" and "main framework" for ethnonationalist extremism. It further points to some paradoxes and tendencies in the development of illiberal democracy - processes which, on the one hand, indicate greater trust in strong leadership, while at the same time weakening trust in formal state institutions. It is this trend - alongside the consensus of most respondents regarding corruption, organized crime and politicians - that represents the most serious security threat in BiH. This is the most alarming part of the study's findings, which call for broader social action and the involvement of all internal sectors - from politicians, intellectuals and public figures to the media and international organizations - to preserve the most important values of pluralism and democracy.

In addition, although earlier research has neglected the important role of religion in understanding such social movements, this research takes into account the latest studies which suggest that religion (and especially its abuse and radical interpretations) reinforce ethnonationalism and contribute to extremism. This is further confirmed in this analysis by the percentage of respondants expressing religious devotion, with almost all respondents

saying that religion plays a significant role in their lives, while three quarters (74%) said they accept all the teachings and demands of their religion.

The analysis of results included here represents a departure from previous research on extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina for two reasons. Firstly, because previous research has largely focused on Syrian fighters and Salafi communities. Secondly, this paper reveals commonalities among ethno-national extremists that cut across their Bosniak, Serb and Croat identities. While acknowledging that their ideologies are based in opposition to each other, analysis shows that the attitudes and world-views of ethno-nationalist extremists from all three Bosnian communities contain more commonalities than differences.

In a complex political and social scenario in which ethno-nationalism is on the rise, this research adds to our understanding of how far-right and extreme right ideas are being put forward in BiH, and the ways in which the regional and international context is contributing to this. The research identified issues similar to the rest of Europe: anti-immigration and anti-Islamic narratives and sentiments; opposition to gender equality; promotion of conspiracy theories; and the manipulation of the COVID-19 crisis. Conservative religious discourse is on the rise as well, and it seems this is not being adequately challenged. In BiH this far-right narrative integrates and mirrors the ethno-nationalism coming from political parties. Community and online activities are taking on these narratives and further developing them through a language of othering, fear of immigrants, affective social distance, and undermining the rights of women and peace building efforts.

Some key findings include:

▸ Respondents were *more* likely to accept violence if they had lower levels of education or were dissatisfied with their income, family life, and prospects.
▸ There is a direct relationship between respondents' views on gender equality and their support for violence, with those who reject gender equality and espouse "traditional values" expressing more support for violence.
▸ Respondents who had *less* resistance to an idea of reconciliation with other ethnic/identity groups; who understood that the celebration of war criminals from their group is offensive to other ethnic groups; and who were not strongly opposed to the idea of mixed marriages, befriending people outside their ethnic group, or having them as their civic representatives, doctors, and teachers, were also less likely to accept or support violence.
▸ Respondents who expressed less animosity toward migrants were also less likely to support or condone violence.

▶ A trust in democracy strongly correlated with less support for violence; however, a majority of respondents (61%) answered that a strong leader is *more* important than democracy.

▶ Women show *the least* sympathy for violent extremism.

▶ Younger respondents (18-35) are more supportive of violent extremism

▶ A majority of respondents believe that corruption, organized crime and politicians represent the most serious security threat in BiH.

▶ Belief in Bosnian collective traditions is expressed in different and sometimes unexpected ways, even among individuals who have extreme ethnonationalist views. Also, analysis has shown surprisingly clearly that the degree of common characteristics among extremists is far higher than their differences.

▶ There is a strong correlation between respondents who claim to be highly religious and those who feel that violence is justified as revenge or to defend their ethnic and religious group.

▶ This research has shown that the abuse of religion acts as an intensifier of extreme ethnonationalism and causes further division.

▶ Among the particularly interesting findings of the research are data indicating the connection between employment status (i.e. employment or unemployment) with support for ethno-nationalist views and far-right organizations. It is noticeable that those permanently employed were those most closely associated with the ruling political parties, either as members or activists (69%) - and this relationship and alliance with the ruling ethnonationalist parties is not disguised. Meanwhile it was the unemployed (31%) who were members of far-right organizations and football hooligan groups.

▶ When it comes to "migrating" between entities within BiH for employment or better education, almost half of respondents said they would most likely decide to relocate because of opportunities for better employment or better education for them or their children. In the case of war a majority of respondents (51%) would choose to leave BiH and, despite their extreme ethnonationalist views, they would refuse to take up weapons.

1. INTRODUCTION - EXTREMISMS AND IDENTITIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Ethnic and nationalist groups form around common points of contact such as history, language, religion, culture and connection to the homeland, whether perceived or real.[1] Unlike civic nationalism which is based on citizenship, ethnic nationalism is less inclusive and is based on the myth of common descent.[2] However, recent research shows that the distinction between these two forms of nationalism, while clear in theory, is in reality much more blurred.[3] This has been particularly emphasised with the global rise of populism and the far right. Extremist ideologies on the far-right, whether inspired by exclusivist version of nationalism or ethno-nationalism, are rooted in nativism, xenophobia, chauvinism, homophobia and other reactionary ideas. Both forms draw strength from imagining the superiority of their own over other groups they define as a social enemy. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not an exclusive case; ideologies built upon the superiority of "us" against "them" are based on emphasising differences in culture, religion, and the interpretation of recent and ancient history. For extremists in general, loyalty to the group and the deployment of symbolism is an important basis for social life.[4] It is this loyalty that makes them more prone to manipulation and the acceptance of myths – which often leads to radicalization and extremism. Furthermore, the acceleration of extremism can lead to justification of violence towards the 'out-group'.[5]

The 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina permanently disrupted Bosnian and Herzegovinian multicultural society and introduced new ethnic divisions not previously known in the history of the country. After the war, political elites from the three

1   Chandra K (2006), 'What is ethnic identity, and does it matter?', Annual Review of Political Science 9: 397–424.

2   Florian Bieber, 'Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends', *Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Volume 17, 2018 - Issue 5, doi:/10.1080/17449057.2018.1532633

3   Yael (Yuli) Tamir, 'Not So Civic: Is there a Diffference Between Ethnic and Civic Nationalism?', *Annual Review of Political Science,* Volume 22:419-434, 2019.

4   Daniel Druckman, 'Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective', Mershon International Studies Review**,** Vol. 38, No. 1 (Apr., 1994)

5   'Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism: A Concise Report', prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, 2008, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20080500_cscp_report_vries.pdf

dominant ethnic groups have continued to encourage narratives of division between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has never been a nation state in the way Serbia and Croatia were and currently are. While there is a history of ideas around the creation of a Bosnian nation, this has never materialised in the political sense, and today the project seems more unrealistic than ever before. Nonetheless 'being Bosnian' - regardless of ethnic belonging - is a cultural concept that was and still is recognised within the country, as well as across the region and internationally.[6] Those with in-depth knowledge of Bosnian history have recognised the special cultural and religious ties that Bosnian Serbs and Croats have with Serbia and Croatia respectively, and how these are perceived in nationalist narratives as "home states". But they have also insisted that they share "distinctively Bosnian" characteristics together with Bosniaks and all other citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[7]

Despite this most journalists, academics and international researchers have accepted the ethnic paradigm for analysing the Bosnian war as well as the post-war situation. Given the divisions imposed by ethnic elites that narrative is hard to resist - and the authors of this report have also taken this approach in previous work, particularly when researching extremism. Yet, the work of the Atlantic Initiative on many other topics has revealed that ethnic boundaries are much more blurred in day-to-day life, and that personal relations and "Bosnianes" (*Bosanstvo*) often mean more than the ethnic differences emphasised by political elites and the media devoted to them. The belief in a Bosnian tradition of "common life" (*zajednički život*) came across in surprising ways even in this research, in which only persons seen as holding extreme ethno-nationalist views were interviewed. This Bosnian way of life includes common beliefs about close family relations, shared food and culture, language, sense of humor and a similar style of everyday life regardless of ethnic background.

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6   For more on Bosnian cultural identity see: 'Carved in Stone, Etched in Memory: Death, Tombstones and Commemoration in Bosnian Islam since c.1500' (Farham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015*)*

7   See Rabia Ali, 'Separating History from Myth: An Interview With Ivo Banac', *in* Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds, 'Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War' (Stony Creek, Connecticut: Pamphleteer's Press, 1993)

2. RESEARCH SAMPLE AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

From December 2019 to March 2020, the Atlantic Initiative collaborated with a number of civil society organizations (CSOs) and researchers across Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to explore ethno-nationalist extremism and the potential for violent ethno-nationalist extremism in BiH.[8]

The research captured the views of 758 respondents who were identified at the local level as either members and supporters of organisations promoting ethno-nationalist extremism, or members of mainstream ethno-nationalist parties and religious representatives recognised in their communities for publicly advocating such views.

During briefings with researchers at the local level significant attention was paid to definitions and concepts, along with comparisons between the understanding of extremism by the European far-right and extreme ethno-nationalist views in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[9] However the experiences, perceptions and final judgement of local researchers themselves - who were able to reflect the perspectives on extremism within communities in their areas - were crucial in determining the selection of individuals to participate in the survey. Using an ethnographic approach, only those recognised by the local community as ethno-nationalist extremists, and those who expressed and publicly advocated such views, were selected for interview.[10]

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8   This research is part of the project, 'The Prevention of Ethno-nationalism and Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina', supported by the Matra funding scheme.

9   A workshop for researchers was held prior to commencing the research.

10   We utilised participatory research – meaning that local and community-based researchers collected data from their respective communities. Local researchers (activists familiar with the contours of radicalization in their local communities) approached potential respondents from these groups and, if they were willing to participate in the research, recruited other subjects from among their social networks. They mapped members who hold extreme ethno-nationalist views through their local networks or online. Those individuals (respondents) either publicly express their views on social media or are sympathizers of such groups. Additionally, findings were discussed with community-based researchers and community-embedded individuals (police, NGO representatives, social workers, teachers, psychologists, policy makers), and their perspectives were taken into account before finalising the policy paper. It is worth noting that the ethnicity sample was chosen based on their location, meaning that almost all participants belong to the dominant ethnicity in their local community.

This cross-sectional research[11] approach helped to address the lack of sufficient data when it comes to identifying members of groups harbouring extreme ethno-nationalist ideologies, the individuals offering strong political support for an extremist agenda at the local level, or their open sympathisers. As such, the knowledge and experience of local researchers about these individuals, and about the ways ethno-nationalist extremism affects their communities, also informed the development of the research instrument (questionnaire).

Research questions were developed on the basis of a rigorous literature review of sources addressing ethno-nationalism, far-right extremism, radicalization, and violent extremism. To capture quantitative and qualitative data, the questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire collected the following: i) personal data about the respondent and voting behaviour ii) sense of personal satisfaction and success iii) views on security and justice issues in BiH iv) views on democracy, religion, and ethnicity v) views on gender and gender-based violence vi) views on violence per se vii) views on inter-ethnic relations and history, and reconciliation. The Bogardus scale measuring affective social distance[12] and the Sympathies for Radicalization scale[13] were employed as assessment tools.[14] This approach helped researchers unpack certain views expressed by respondents and assess their relationship to ethno-nationalist and far-right ideologies.

Research locations were selected based on their relevance during previous Atlantic Initiative studies, but also following three months of desk/online research and social media monitoring. They are: Banja Luka, Bratunac, Čapljina, Doboj, Hadžići, Hrasnica, Ilidža, Istočno Sarajevo, Milići, Mostar, Pale, Prijedor, Prozor-Rama, Rudo, Sarajevo, Sokolac, Srebrenica, Široki Brijeg, Tuzla, Ugljevik, Višegrad, Vlasenica, Zenica, and Zvornik.

In total 758 respondents participated, of which 33% were women and 67% were men. The most represented respondents in the sample were those aged 24 to 26. The youngest respondent was 18 years old, and the oldest was 86, but nearly half (49%) were 18–35 years old. Nearly half (49%) reported having a high school education, over two-thirds (38%) said they have an undergraduate degree, 7% have masters or doctoral degrees, while 6% said

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11   A cross-sectional study is a type of research design in which data is collected from many different individuals at a single point in time. In cross-sectional research, you observe variables without influencing them. See: https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/cross-sectional-study/

12   Affective social distance is among the greatest causes of concern among sociologists. Defined by Emory Bogardus, who created the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, affective social distance refers to the degree to which a person from one group feels sympathy or empathy for persons from other groups. The Bogardus scale measures this distance by establishing the willingness of a person to interact with people from other groups. See: Darin M. Mather, Stephen W. Jones, and Scott Moats, "Improving upon Bogardus: Creating a More Sensitive and Dynamic Social Distance Scale," Survey Practice 10, no. 4 (2017).

13   The Sympathies for Radicalization scale (SyfoR) was modified and adapted in this case to measure violent extremism in BiH. It is depicted on a Likert scale, with a higher score indicating greater sympathies for violent extremism (e.g., if a respondent answers positively that they would use violence if they perceive their ingroup as endangered). In this study, the subscales of the SyfoR had high reliability, in line with recommendations of acceptability put forth by Cronbach. See: Roger Bougie and Uma Sekaran, Research Methods for Business: A Skill-building Approach (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

14   For more on this, see: Kamaldeep Bhui, Nasir Warfa, and Edgar Jones, "Is violent radicalisation associated with poverty, migration, poor self-reported health and common mental disorders?" PLoS One 9, no. 3 (2014).

they were part-time students, studying while working. 66% of respondents were permanently employed, a quarter (25%) indicated that their employment was seasonal or short term, while 22% of the participants were unemployed. When correlated with other demographic data it could be seen that those permanently employed were in close connection with ruling political parties – either as members or activists (69%) – while those without employment (31%) tended to be members of far-right organisations and football hooligan groups.

Given the subject, the survey was conducted with a strong awareness of ethnic belonging/identity among participants; nonetheless the analysis offers an "ethnicity blind" interpretation of the survey results. Initially the survey design was conceived with the idea of analysing results according to ethnic group affiliations, and to look for differences in attitudes, opinions, values and characteristics of extremists from different ethnic backgrounds. However this analysis made it strikingly clear that the degree of commonality among extremists was far greater than their differences. This justified an approach which presents the key findings based on a conceptual category of "extremists" as a whole across BiH, rather than extremist Serb, extremist Bosniaks or extremist Croats.

3. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Extreme ethno-nationalist organizations tend to be highly effective at manufacturing enemies, and "othering them" by focusing popular frustrations and anxieties in their direction. Given the history of mass violence in the past, the differences in historical interpretation, and the frustrations with present economic and social difficulties, focusing grievances on "others" in this way is also the most favoured method of ethno-national elites in BiH. In this research, when responding to questions about why they feel threatened, respondents frequently repeated truisms about "the other'' that are commonly seen in online discussions and regularly used by ethno-nationalist - such as "*Croats are marginalized by Bosniaks*'' or "*NATO doesn't want Serbs in BiH*" or "*No one cares about genocide committed against Bosniaks.*"

Given how normalized this kind of inter-ethnic division and "othering" has become in BiH, the idea that elements of the country's far-right could come together across ethnic lines may seem paradoxical; but there are several themes that appear to be uniting ethno-nationalist extremists in the country – such as immigration, anger at endemic corruption, and their sense of religiosity. Ethno-nationalists' narratives have also crossed ideological boundaries to mobilize anti-feminist attitudes and promote the "traditional" family.

The relationship between extreme ethno-nationalist groups - including hooligans and some war veteran groups - with mainstream political parties tends to be more overt than hidden. It can be safely stated that in BiH political parties which promote nationalism provide the "master concept" and "master frame"[15] for ethno-nationalist extremism. Similarities which can be observed between the narratives of mainstream ethnic political parties and those of extreme ethno-nationalist groups include:

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15   Tamir Bar-On, 'The Radical Right and Nationalism' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, edited by Jens Rydgren (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2018).

▸   emphasising threats to national, religious or cultural identity;
▸   either a dismissal of multiculturalism and presenting it as dangerous, or only no-
minally supporting it while in reality (and especially on a local level) advocating
ethnic homogenisation;
▸   a strong opposition to immigration;
▸   a longing for ethno-national domination and spreading fears that the EU is either
undermining national sovereignty or distrusting that the EU has clear intentions
with regards to BiH statehood.[16]

3.1.   LIFE SATISFACTION AND VOTING BEHAVIOURS

Our analysis results shed some light on the characteristics of people who are attracted
to extreme ethno-nationalist ideologies in BiH, but as is often true in research of this nature,
their diversity belies a typical "profile" or easy generalization. It is, however, worth mentio-
ning some previous studies that have focused on the cognitive and psychological bases for
right-wing attitudes and prejudices. A recent meta-analysis found, for instance, that people
with lower cognitive ability are more likely to adhere to right-wing attitudes and tend to be
more prejudiced toward ethnic minority groups, whereas those with higher cognitive ability
are more likely to endorse left-wing beliefs and to be less prejudiced.[17] A recent study exami-
ning emotional abilities (to identify, understand, express and regulate emotions) similarly
found that people adhering to right-wing ideologies exhibited lower emotional ability and
were more likely to endorse authority and strong leadership and find inequality acceptable.[18]

**The vast majority of participants in our survey (as many as 93%) expressed sa-
tisfaction with their social life, and 82% of them said they were satisfied with their
love life. Just over one-third (40%) of respondents also reported being satisfied or
very satisfied with the opportunities offered in their cities, and one-third (32%) said
they are satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities available to them in BiH.**

**Those respondents who showed lower life and business satisfaction tended to
show more support for violent extremism. Those who admitted not being happy with
their social life (8%) and those not happy with their love life (18%) showed the hig-
hest approval of violent extremism.**

16   See more in Semir Mujkić, 'Bosnian Branch of 'Putin's Angels' Enjoys Political Backing', 2019. https://detektor.ba/2019/03/15/
bosnian-branch-of-putins-angels-enjoys-political-backing/?lang=en; Nermina Kuloglija, 'Ultra-Right Groups Show Their Face in
Bosnian Town', 2020.

17   Emma Onraet, et al., "The Association of Cognitive Ability with Right-wing Ideological Attitudes and Prejudice: A Meta-analytic
Review," *European Journal of Personality* 29 (2015): 599–621.

18   Alain Van Hiel, et al., "The relationship between emotional abilities and right-wing and prejudiced attitudes," *Emotion* 19, no. 5
(2019): 917–922.

Satisfaction with personal and business life plays an important role in the process of radicalisation. McGregor et al. concluded that extreme beliefs were determined by personal insecurity resulting from the defeat of an active achievement goal. Extreme convictions and an idealistic mindset are used as a defence when individuals feel insecure and face personal uncertainty because of active threats to their life goals (achievements, relationships).[19] People who tend to demonstrate low satisfaction with life tend to be more exposed to violent extremism.

Respondents who reported higher satisfaction with social life tend to vote regularly. Despite the fact that less than half of respondents were party activists/members, 76% said they vote regularly and 14% reported voting sometimes.[20]

Research on "Happiness and Voting Behaviour" conducted in France after the 2017 presidential elections, which saw a significant rise of the right-wing populist candidate Marine Le Pen, showed that across all income levels "happier individuals were much less likely to have voted for her."[21] In BiH research results suggest different patterns regarding voting behaviour. There are many similarities between the values of far-right parties and ethno-nationalist parties in BiH, and especially in the values of extremist groups and individual extremists across Europe (advocating "traditional values"; opposition to LGBT rights and gender equality; anti-immigration), but extremists in BiH seem to differ from those in France in their proclaimed levels of happiness/unhappiness. The higher percentages of "happy" and "social" people who promote ethno-nationalist extremism on a local level in BiH may suggest they are doing so for the purposes of "being in line" and connecting with the dominant extremist political discourse coming from most of the leaders of the parties they belong to. It could also be that survey participants were not being fully honest, and that petit-bourgeois attitudes inhibited them from expressing personal life dissatisfaction to their interviewers.

3.2. THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN INFORMING EXTREME ETHNO-NATIONALIST VIEWS

Although much has been written about the causes of ethnic conflicts, the connection with religion remains relatively unexplored. As Fox states, research on ethno-nationalism and ethnic conflicts has considered religion as marginal and irrelevant, dealing mostly with

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19   McGregor, I., Prentice, M., and Nash, K. (2013), 'Anxious uncertainty and reactive approach motivation (RAM) for religious, idealistic, and lifestyle extremes'. *J. Soc. Issues* 69, 537–563. doi: 10.1111/josi.12028

20   This is a very high turnout compared to the general population in BiH, which voted at a rate of 54% in the 2018 parliamentary elections. See: Council of Europe, "ElecData: Bosnia and Herzegovina," 2020, https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/elecdata-bosnia-and-herzegovina (accessed 14 June 2020).

21   George Ward «Happiness and Voting Behaviour» https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/happiness-and-voting-behavior/ (Accessed 18 February, 2021)

economic and political influences and the desire for self-determination.[22] However, recent research suggests that religion is a reinforcer of ethno-nationalism.[23] One of the reasons why religion acts as a reinforcer is that ethnic identity has a strong religious dimension - whereas most conflict researchers have treated religion as a subset of ethnicity.[24] This view is also supported by statements made by our respondents, for whom ethnic identities are 97% aligned with religion (*viz.* Bosniaks - Muslims; Serbs - Christian Orthodox; Croats - Roman Catholics). Furthermore, conflicts involving religious sectarianism are often more intense and unresolved in nature.[25] Because this dual theoretical approach exists, we decided to include the religious dimension of ethno-national identity to explore whether it acts as a reinforcer, or a buffer, to extreme ethno-nationalist views.

Declarations of religious commitment

Nearly all respondents stated that religion plays a significant role in their lives, and three-quarters (74%) said they accept all the teachings and requirements of their religion.

▸ Some caution must be exercised in interpreting the claim of a layperson to adhere to everything their religion requires. Faith is an intimate matter for each individual, while religion is manifested through the fulfillment of rituals and responsibilities that require unwavering devotion, so it is difficult to verify the extent to which a person adheres to religion in everyday life. However, *their need to make that claim* indicates that religion shapes the everyday lives of these respondents in very specific ways.

▸ This also implies that religion likely plays a part in influencing respondents' attitudes towards others and towards violent extremism. There was a strong correlation between respondents who are highly religious and those who consider that violence is justified as revenge or in order to defend their ethnic and religious group. This further reveals the interconnectivity between ethno-nationalism and religion in BiH, and the power of religious figures to inspire ethno-nationalism.

▸ In this context, it is important to note that a considerable majority of respondents (82%) admitted thinking little about the tenets and ideology of their religion or religious instruction, which implies that they practice their religion in an uncritical manner.

22   Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013); Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion and the States: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

23   John D. Brewer & Bernadette C. Hayes (2016), 'The Influence of Religion and Ethnonationalism on Public Attitudes towards Amnesty: Northern Ireland as a Case Study', Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 22:4, 393-411, DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2016.1239444

24   Frances Stewart, *Religion versus Ethnicity as a Source of Mobilisation: Are There Differences?* CRISE Working Paper No. 70 (Oxford, UK: University of Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2009

25   Jonathan Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 Through The New Millennium* (Lan- ham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004)

These results confirm the importance of maintaining the image of a "religiously committed" person for those in extreme ethno-nationalists' ideological circles in BiH. The online research we conducted has also shown the connection of certain religious officials with extremist groups and individuals in local communities.[26] Arguably this link between religious figures and ethno-nationalism holds a dangerous potential, and especially so in BiH - a country in which, for many Bosnians, memories of religious officials marking them as "the other" and unworthy are still very much alive.

The percentage of those who hold extreme ethno-nationalist views and believe that they "adhere to everything that their religion demands of them" indicates that religion is still used as a means of spreading extremism and social division. However, it is noteworthy that so many respondents (82%) reported approaching their religion without a critical eye and do not engage in re-examining religious teachings or its interpretations.

Sectarianism and perceived threat to religious/ethnic community

When given the option to completely agree, agree, disagree, or completely disagree that their religion is endangered, over one-third (35%) of respondents answered in agreement. Furthermore, asked whether they sense a current threat to their ethnic group, 52% of respondents answered in agreement.

▸ Given the rhetoric which these individuals are being fed in extremist online spaces (which they admitted to visiting often), these figures are perhaps lower than might be expected.

▸ More than one in two respondents feels that his/her ethnic group is currently threatened, which aligns with the heated rhetoric that prominent ethno-nationalist leaders have when talking about the 'other'.

▸ It is again worth mentioning that all of the survey participants are living in the local communities where their ethnic group is in a majority and dominant.

Extreme ethno-nationalist narratives in BiH are strongly linked with religion. Among the survey participants were individuals active at the local level in groups from all three official religious communities - Orthodox Church, Catholic Church and Islamic Community - seeking to create social division between religious/ethnic groups. In open-ended survey questions the answers of some religious officials were hostile towards other religious groups, and kept recycling stereotypes propagated in the media and by ethnically-identified

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26   In January this year, a few dozen members of the club MC Serbs gathered in Prijedor to mark the Orthodox Christian Feast of the Holy Cross. The gathering was marked with a joint photo with religious officials uploaded to MC Srbi – Prijedor Chapter's page. See more in Nermina Kuloglija, Ultra-Right Groups Show Their Face in Bosnian Town, 2020: https://detektor.ba/2020/05/12/desnicarske-i-neonacisticke-organizacije-neometano-isticu-simbole-u-prijedoru/?lang=en

political leaders. Recurring phrases included: "They want to dominate us", "We are endangered", "These (judicial processes) are all staged events against (my) group", and so on.

Religiosity and Affective Social Distance

Of particular significance in BiH, where the leading political parties form along explicitly ethnic alignments, 40% rejected leadership by representatives from other identity groups. Furthermore, respondents who are more religious tend to show greater affective social distance (see footnote number 12) from other ethnic groups in BiH.

Respondents were asked whether they would accept someone from another ethnic or religious identity group in various roles or relationships, from a spouse or partner to a work colleague.

- A majority of respondents (59%) answered that they would not marry someone from another ethnic or religious group.
- As one would expect, far fewer respondents applied this restriction to work colleagues or neighbours (10%).
- 27% said they are not/would not be happy to have teachers for their children from another ethnic group.

When we correlate these findings with levels of religiosity, affective social distance increased in line with expressions of religious adherence, but so did their sense of endangerment. Also, 60% of highly religious respondents rejected leadership by representatives from other identity groups. On marital issues 80% answered they would not marry someone from another ethnic or religious group. Furthermore, 41% of them stated they are not happy to have teachers for their children from another ethnic group, while 12% think this when it comes to their neighbours or work colleagues.

Religious authority and views on family, women's rights and sexual freedoms

While the answers of religious officials about "the other" vary in ways that reflect current ethnic political alliances, both at the state and local level they are in unison on some issues.

- All of them are very explicit in employing "traditional family" values and other patriarchal norms to undermine or attack all those they see as outside that circle - such as LGBT+, feminists, and in general those with liberal views.

▸ Through the lens of religious officials, a family is comprised of an exclusively heterosexual couple of the same religion and ethnicity, and as many children as they can possibly have - seen as necessary in order to sustain their endangered ethnic group.

Cas Mudde emphasizes that, "at the heart of far-right gender politics is the effort to control women within the heteronormative family and to exclude/punish those whose sexual orientation and gender identity and expression do not conform."[27]

Overall the attitudes of survey participants - especially those with the most extreme views - reflect the attitudes expressed by religious officials in open-ended questions.

▸ Across ethnic categories, 54% of survey participants believe that abortion should be banned while 30% see women's empowerment as a threat to the family.
▸ It is interesting that as many as 20% believe the *Law on preventing violence in the family* is disrupting traditional values, and the same percentage believes that the media often over-exaggerate the consequences of rape.

The role of religion and ethno-nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a contentious and complex issue. This, along with previous research, has shown once again what an important role local religious officials play in framing the narrative, not only about other ethnic groups, but also around LGBT and women's rights. Moreover the abuse of religion acts as an amplifier of extreme ethno-nationalism and creates further division. That said, previous research shows that religion can also act as a transformative doctrine by overcoming opposing ethnic identities in an attempt to create community; as such it indicates a space in which preventive mechanisms can operate and be built. Since religion plays a major role in the daily lives of the respondents, the role of the Interreligious Council could be of utmost importance. The Interreligious Council in BiH is an active partner of international stakeholders, and representatives of the Interreligious Council have been attending international conferences and presenting papers on the importance of religion in the prevention of extremism and violent extremism.[28] Interreligious Council members and local congregation members belong to the same respective religious communities, and it would be valuable if local religious officials reflected the narrative of tolerance and inclusivity held by the state-level Interreligious Council.[29] It would be useful to see educational and practical activities that address the issue of extreme nationalism and right-wing ideologies included in the

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27   Cas Mudde, *The far-right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), p10.

28   "Međureligijski dijalog kao doprinos prevenciji nasilnog ekstremizma" ('Interreligious dialogue as the contribution in prevention of violent extremism') March 26, 2019. https://mrv.ba/lat/clanci/vijesti/medureligijski-dijalog-kao-doprinos-prevenciji-nasilnog-ekstremizma/ (accessed on February 18, 2021)

29   Moreover, while religiosity has been linked to positive outcomes such as higher well-being (e.g., Carlucci et al., 2015) and life satisfaction (e.g., Bergan and McConatha, 2001), religious fundamentalism and extremism have been linked to more negative outcomes such as prejudice (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992), hostility (Koopmans, 2015), or even armed conflict (Cornell, 2005).

programs of the Interreligious Council in BiH, given that they have proven to be an active and effective partner of international and domestic organizations in violent extremism prevention programs.

3.3. MIGRATION TRENDS AND VIEWS ON EDUCATION

Many theories state that education is one of the most important institutions for creating ethnic identity. It is also stated that education can play a dual role in post-conflict societies. On the one hand, schools can have a major impact in creating social division and segregation among different ethnic groups. On the other, the education system can be a preventative factor against social divisions and build the resilience of young people.[30]

Given the high percentage (80%) of respondents who have a perception of corruption and inequality in the education system, it is no surprise to see this result in a high willingness to migrate within the country for better opportunities. It is worth noting that this view of corruption is seen not in terms of a violation of criminal law, but as a normative category - that is, they have a perception of experiencing inequality or marginalization even though they belong to a majority group in their local communities.

Attitudes towards choices around migration

Nearly one in two respondents is willing to relocate within BiH, while 43% are considering departing BiH.

▸ Taking into account the political climate in BiH and migration trends that are now decades old, these figures are perhaps not surprising.

▸ When it comes to "migrating" between the entities within BiH for job opportunities or better schooling, almost half of the respondents said they were most likely to be motivated to relocate by the chance of a better job or a better education for themselves or their children.

Given that the question concerned possible relocation from one territory (within BiH) where respondents felt dominant in relation to other ethnic groups, to a territory where they would be in the minority, this percentage is significant. It implies that at least a third of those currently openly expressing extremist views are ready to give them up or silence them

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30   Gabriella Elgenius & Jens Rydgren (2019) 'Frames of nostalgia and belonging: the resurgence of ethno-nationalism in Sweden', European Societies, 21:4, 583-602, DOI: 10.1080/14616696.2018.1494297; Kenneth D. Bush and Diana Saltarelli, 'The Two Faces Of Education In Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children', UNICEF, 2000

for better opportunities within BiH. When it comes to those willing to contemplate leaving BiH the percentage is similar (43%).

Attitudes to education

When asked about the educational system specifically, there were significant differences between those inclined to endorse violent extremism, and those who are advocating non-violent extremism on a local level.

▸ It was to be expected that the 23% of all respondents who think that schools in the country should be divided on an ethnic basis correlate with those who expressed the most extremist views. This means that those respondents who support segregation within schools are more supportive of violence and violent extremism.
▸ It is encouraging that on the issue of whether the "two schools under one roof" system that still exists in parts of BiH represents a security threat, a majority (57%) of respondents agreed that it does.
▸ It is interesting that a significant percentage (58%) of all respondents said that schools throughout BiH should use the "same" curriculum. There is some ambiguity and scope for different interpretation here however. Since respondents were not obliged to specify their answer alongside views already expressed on the vulnerability of their own groups, the answer "same curriculum" could be understood differently for each separate group, according to their already indicated attitudes towards "others".
▸ One thing that respondents from all ethnic groups came together on, and that almost 80% of respondents overall believe, is that corruption is a problem in the Bosnian educational system.

3.4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE STATE AND TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Transformations of post-conflict societies and post-totalitarian political systems into stable and healthy democracies require widespread acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the new system, and political behaviour that is consistent with fundamental democratic norms.[31]

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31   Richard Gunter with Jose Ramon Montero, 'Attitudes Toward Democracy in Seven Countries: Dimensional Structure and Behavioural Correlates': http://www.globalbarometers.org/publications/16af8809e9d3b6d9d4a9a967c94f3357.pdf

Promisingly, the vast majority of respondents (75%) in this research answered that the principles of democracy should be respected. However, a majority (61%) also said that a strong leader is more important than democracy and, when doing a breakdown of respondents by ethnicity, the results indicated an affection for figures such as Putin, Erdogan or Orban over democratic leadership. This indicates that participants are inclined to accept undemocratic leadership as well as leadership which is prepared to crack down on opposition and exert undue control over citizens.

Lavrič and Bieber in their recent study found an increase in support for authoritarian leaders in the Western Balkans, and a majority of their respondents believed strong leadership to be compatible with democracy. They emphasized: "when competitive authoritarian regimes become entrenched, it becomes more likely that media narratives and political propaganda will tend to normalize and actively promote strong leadership, which logically results in the detected shifts in public opinion."[32]

The vast majority of respondents showed a lack of trust in formal institutions. Overall, 72% answered that Bosnian and Herzegovinian state institutions (police, judiciary and government) do not treat all citizens equally.

▸ 82% agreed that laws are overly complicated, allowing authorities to manipulate citizens. The dismissal of democracy may be linked to the fact that almost all respondents were sceptical about whether laws and institutions had been designed to protect them, or to benefit those in power.

▸ At the entity level, three-quarters of Croat respondents indicated that institutions in both the Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH could not be trusted to offer equal treatment.

▸ Notably, an examination of the data beyond ethnicity reveals that football hooligans were the most likely to say they would disrespect laws - followed *not by members* of far-right groups, but by people who identified as far-right sympathizers. According to this data, these sympathizers may represent more of a "lone wolf" security threat than individuals who have joined organized far-right groups.

▸ Similarly, when asked to rank security issues for themselves and BiH in general, across all ethnic categories in BiH 91% of respondents believed that corruption is the first and foremost security problem, while 87% ranked organised crime as the second most significant security problem.

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32   Miran Lavrič & Florian Bieber, 'Shifts in Support for Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Western Balkans, Problems of Post-Communism', 2020, p.8.

These findings are concerning for several reasons. Trust is a key element in the success of a wide range of public policies that depend on citizen response, cooperation, or compliance. Institutions ought to contribute to stability, especially in times of uncertainty, and anchor expectations. In times of global political upheaval, when the foundations of multilateralism are being challenged and new economic powers are flexing their muscles around the world, it is undoubtedly even more important to have trustworthy institutions. This also speaks to the need to "deradicalize" political parties in order to build strong democratic institutions, since people who lack trust in official institutions can support ad hoc (para) formations and (para)institutions to provide them with certainty and security.

Results also indicate that low trust in government is affected by respondents' perceptions of high levels of government corruption. This suggests that respondents have an increased fear of white-collar crime, while taking into account an extremely weak rule-of-law. Moreover, this could explain why high levels of corruption and insecurity are related to an increased likelihood of reporting sympathy for violent extremism.

Some would argue this has already occurred in relation to media spaces, with so many people now seeking news online, outside traditional channels and outlets. This research revealed very low trust in Bosnian media, with only 17% of respondents seeing the media as objective. Interestingly, one set of findings also suggests that those who do trust and consider the media offers an objective picture of reality are more likely to show support for violent extremism - which could perhaps indicate the influence over media narratives of those with strong ethno-nationalist views, in particular political elites.

4. CONFLICT, SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION

On questions about the possibility of war and military mobilization, a significant 46% said they would mobilize without hesitation in the case of war. On the other hand, 47% said they would leave the country in the case of war.

▸ The willingness of respondents to mobilize in the case of war was not matched by a sense of insecurity in their everyday lives, and a vast majority of respondents (87%) said they feel secure in the cities where they live.

This portion of the questionnaire included an open-ended question that researchers asked in order to understand why individuals may not feel safe in their *own* city or entity, but most respondents instead answered why they feel insecure in *another* city or entity. One of the most common responses was that they would not be protected by corrupt law enforcement officials.

In 2017 BiH saw a large increase in immigration, and since 2018 close to 70,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in BiH via the Western Balkans migration route.[33] Using illegal means of arrival, most migrants come from Syria, Libya, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Algeria, and Iraq.[34]

Nearly a quarter (22%) of all respondents said that the use of violence by Croatian police against migrants is justified.

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33   European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. Fact sheet. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/bosnia-and-herzegovina_en

34   United Nations, 2018. REFUGEE AND MIGRANT SITUATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA JAN-MAR 2018www.ba.one.un.org1Refugee and Migrant Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. MIRA Report. Available at: file:///Users/admin/Downloads/UNCT_BiH_MIRA_Full%20report_May2018.pdf

The feeling among so many respondents that they are excluded or targeted by other groups does not translate into empathy for immigrants. This lack of empathy is coupled with Islamophobia among supporters of far-right groups. Still, if we dig into the data beyond ethnicity once again, it is football hooligans and far-right sympathizers who are most supportive of the use of violence against migrants.

In BiH it is the views of ethno-nationalists on immigration and on immigrants themselves that most commonly unifies extremists from all three ethnic identity groups, each of which frames immigrants as "invaders." In fact, 56% of respondents in this research said migrants are unwelcome in BiH. This does not come as a surprise since migrants are vilified in both mainstream political discourse and by far-right groups. Withdrawing support for migrants, and rejecting any responsibility for providing migrants with shelter, has been a dominant discourse among political leadership in Republika Srpska. Moreover, in online spaces far-right groups tend to promote conspiracy theories about Islamization at the hand of migrants, or post exaggerated fake news about violence committed by migrants. All this has contributed towards stigmatizing migrants and framing them as less worthy of support, as being unable to fit into society, and as troublemakers. This process of "othering" has been observed in many societies and is used to justify violence and hate by majority groups towards minorities.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research adds to our understanding of how far-right and extreme right ideas are on the rise in BiH, and the ways in which the regional and international context is serving as a platform for such organisations and narratives to flourish. Right wing parties have been on the scene in Europe for quite some time now. Anti-migrant and anti-Islamic sentiment have been growing stronger and stronger in the past decade. Hatred and discrimination towards Roma has been a part of culture in Eastern Europe for too long, and has gone without proper policy and legal attention. Gender equality efforts around the world, and in BiH, have yielded undeniable legal and practical results, yet opposition has been strong from clergy and from conservative political figures. The push for gender equality has been challenged with populist narratives about the endangerment of traditional and "family" values. The Church has been a very strong defender of traditional values, and of patriarchy. Critiques of misogyny, patriarchy and toxic masculinity have been important but are still confined to circles of activists and intellectual elites, and a portion of the younger population. Analysis of social media shows that the vast majority of right-wing groups obsessively portray religious symbols, pointing out right-wing members as frequent guests in all places of worship, and often openly showing how they include religious ministers in their ranks.

At the same time Bosnia and Herzegovina is faced with a number of issues. Nationalist political parties are promoting an ethno-nationalist agenda the propagation of which is key to their existence, and they are feeding far-right narratives on a daily basis. Repetitive messages of misrepresented and threatened Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks are the hymn of political discourse in BiH. We have witnessed recently how attempts to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, or to prosecute corruption related to Covid-19, were immediately manipulated as an attack on ethnicity. Online analysis shows that a large majority of right-wing groups are obsessive about displaying religious symbols, and that they are frequently guests in Churches, or include the participation of clergy among their ranks.

Women's empowerment emerged as a complex issue in our research. Whilst we know that the far-right is not supportive of women's empowerment and gender equality in general, among our cohort members of extreme Serb organisations did show some inclination towards empowerment. This could be explained by the fact that women in Serbia are starting to occupy important places in far-right movements. However, this does not mean members will advocate for democratic ideas around gender equality, but rather for a traditional protection of women.

Right wing groups seem to be inclined towards conspiracy theories and attempts to explain a complex political and economic world in simple terms. Blaming George Soros or Bill Gates, or turning people against immunisations, seems to be a way for people to simplify reality rather than looking into the deeper causes of political problems - such as corruption, unemployment or low standards of living. Political narratives of ethnic groups under threat or war criminals being tried unjustly takes away from real existential problems. Othering, blaming, scapegoating and victimisation of your own identity group are narratives employed in both mainstream nationalist parties, but also drawn on and then turned up by several degrees by extremists. When considering a far-right spectrum, political parties and religious officials occupy a far-right mainstream, while the extreme right exists not in opposition to the mainstream but on the end of the spectrum. Finding a way out of this is a major challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It appears that the mainstream media, education sector and other institutions are not ready to confront narratives coming from the far-right spectrum. This also includes their ignorance of the dangerous trends and problems that the far right is producing in Europe and the United States, which can threaten even the strongest of current democracies. Ignorance is obviously not the only issue however. It is very likely that the "convenient marriage" which sees nationalist parties making use of right-wing narratives to mobilize voters during elections and thus efficiently and cheaply ensure their survival in power (despite the disastrous results) sits well alongside ignorance. This "unholy alliance" is actually modeled on some European democracies, in which the ruling parties sought to weaken and completely destroy the opposition through the targeted strengthening of right-wing parties. The best example of this dynamic is in Germany with the growth of the AfD, which grew from a marginal right-wing party into a serious political threat; in some other EU countries far-right parties have managed to become part of the government through coalitions. Similar political movements and tactics by ruling parties can already be seen in the Western Balkans, with Serbia being the best example of how the opposition was almost destroyed by the targeted cultivation of far-right parties and groups.

The negative effects of far-right activities are rarely talked about, and it seems that these effects are being accepted and normalised. The recommendations below have been developed and validated through Atlantic Initiative workshops with diverse stakeholders, who are invested in combating the ethno-nationalist, far-right influences and forces undermining human rights in BiH.

- Support independent media outlets to partner with CSOs in order to have a conversation about the far-right discourse.
- Initiate local level public discussion around historical revisionism, and emphasise historical periods of peaceful coexistence among various ethnicities in BiH.

- ▸ CSOs encouraged to contribute towards the development of a new Strategy and Action Plan for the prevention of violent extremism, using evidence-based recommendations.
- ▸ Present research results on the damaging effects of far-right discourse and its negative effect on minorities, in particular to politicians who promote a rhetoric of national exclusivity and homogenisation.
- ▸ Counter fake news and conspiracy theories with straightforward messages and answers; make these messages more accessible to the average member of the public
- ▸ Intensify work with the judiciary to prosecute hate speech and threats such as incitement to violence, etc. Police and judiciary need to show determination in sanctioning extremist calls to violence.
- ▸ Counteract support for right wing groups coming from Russia with support for peace-building and democratisation.
- ▸ Outlaw all extreme right wing organisations, based not only on their program but also their public messaging and activities.
- ▸ Current election law makes it advantageous for politicians to appeal to ethical exclusivity in their election campaigning; changes should be made to the election law to counteract this. Such changes should include solutions that could legally oppose the promotion of intolerance towards vulnerable groups, hate speech and incitement to violent extremism, especially during election campaigns.
- ▸ Continue work towards adopting anti-fascist policies, with a clear set of measures for prevention.
- ▸ More actively involve religious communities in education programs and raise awareness of the dangers of far-right organizations and narratives for traditional religious communities themselves, especially through the Interreligious Council of BiH (as in the case of programs to prevent violent extremism).
- ▸ In the new strategy and action plan for the prevention of terrorism, define and identify far-right extremism as a threat to peace and security.

In BiH, the rhetoric of division has become normalized, and is used to excuse the many economic, political, and developmental shortcomings of the state. At the same time, a vibrant Bosnian civil society, independent media outlets, informed citizens, and some rare political voices are actively working to provide a counterbalance to ethno-nationalist tropes. Such voices are critical to reimagining Bosnian society today.

REVIEWS

Eschewing the usual distinctions between the country's three separate constituent peoples—Bosniak, Serb and Croat—that underpin most research in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Atlantic Initiative has in this report shown how ethno-nationalist extremists from all three groups are much more similar than different. One key point in their report is the discussion and analysis of attitudes towards violence; the authors show that, among other factors, low levels of education, dissatisfaction with life circumstances, perceived religiosity (regardless of religion) and resistance to reconciliation or relationships across different ethnic groups are correlated with acceptance or support of violence. As countries around the world face an increasing threat from right-wing extremism, findings like these are of critical importance for researchers and policymakers.

Importantly, we learn from this report about how the mainstream in BiH enables the extremes: ethnic differences are reinforced and strengthened by mainstream ethno-nationalist political parties who benefit from division over unity. We learn how these same parties lay the foundations, intentionally or not, for more extreme and even violent versions of ethno-nationalism. But we also learn, for example, that support for gender equality and expressing conciliatory attitudes towards different ethnic groups (e.g., supporting relationships between members of different ethnic groups) is correlated with *less* acceptance or support of violence, a finding with implications for our broader understandings of violent extremism. As well, the report reveals that a dangerous mix of attitudes that can be seen across Europe and beyond is laying a foundation for so-called "illiberal democracy" in BiH—citizens distrusting their nation's political institutions while simultaneously believing in the need for strong leadership.

In all, this report highlights the need to confront ethno-nationalist extremist ideas and the groups and personalities that promote them from becoming accepted and normalized—a challenge facing not just Bosnia, but the Balkans and beyond.

Michael Colborne
Journalist Bellingcat
Policy and Practitioner Fellow,
Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR)

This study represents an important new step towards detecting threatening trends that have the potential to seriously endanger the fragile tissue of BiH society and the state. The relevance and scientific nature of this research is confirmed by the findings of the authors, which correspond to previous research of similar scope, such as a person's personal status, economic stability and education, and cognitive and psychological abilities.

Particularly important findings of this study are the parts that address the psychological profiles and behaviour of people based on their personal lifestyles, levels of happiness or sociability, which in BiH are somewhat different from European patterns. When it comes to religion, its important role in forming attitudes about others and violent extremism has been recognized in this research. The analysis of data in this research most comprehensively covered the influence of religion in the formation and acceptance of ethnonationalist views, where the authors Halilović and Veljan spotted different dimensions of commitment, interpretation and understanding of religion in respondents. In the context of the religious factor, it is very important that this study was determined neutrally and impartially according to the phenomenon of religiosity, considering the previous dominance of research that focused on Islamist extremism based on radical and extreme interpretations of Islam. Given the nature and manifestations of right-wing and ethno-nationalist extremism and its ideological sources in different religious traditions, both in BiH, the wider region and Europe in general, this approach will be an important step and incentive for other researchers to shed light on radical interpretations and abuses of Orthodox and Catholic Christian traditions and their harnessing and incorporation into ethnonationalist and far-right narratives and views.

Finally, the key findings of this study, which identified the interconnections of the far-right spectrum, political parties and religious officials, and warned that corruption, organized criminals and politicians pose the most serious security threat in BiH, are an alarming call for action by all relevant actors.

Mirnes Kovač
Journalist and political analyst