

# DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: EXPLORING CROATIA'S NON-DOMINANT GROUPS ELECTORAL TURNOUT

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DOI: 10.20901/an.16.03

Preliminary scientific report

Accepted: November 2019

**Abstract** The series of ethnic conflicts in the Western Balkans over the 1990s involved primarily the constituent nations of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, and later, Albanians and Macedonians. Ethnic violence has equally affected other numerically smaller groups residing in the geographic areas affected by conflict between the dominant, de facto state-founding ethnic groups. The paper investigates the continuous importance of ethnic identity for political participation of non-dominant groups affected by the ethno-political dynamics of dominant groups in post-conflict Croatia. Analyses of the political mobilisation of non-dominant groups in regions previously affected by conflict offer evidence that their ethno-political mobilisation reflects the continuous importance of identity-politics in the context of highly ethnicised institutions ensuring political representation at national and municipal levels.

**Keywords** Political participation, Non-Dominant Minorities, Local Elections, Post-conflict Society, Croatia

## Introduction

The region of former Yugoslavia has experienced a series of violent ethnicity-based conflicts throughout the 1990s when dominant republican majority groups (Slovenes, Croats, Bosniaks, Kosovo Albanians) wrested control over 'their' republic from Serbs. Scholars have long studied the ethno-political mobilisation and violence by Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, and Kosovo Albanians and analysed their impact on state bu-

ilding, minority accommodation and the establishment of the rule of law after the conflict. Far less attention, however, has been granted to minor groups, those who were affected by the conflict but did not play a central role in its resolution. These minority groups often participated in politics from the margins but contributed to peace and state building.

Reasons for political participation vary greatly, but social and economic motives set the context in which con-

temporary relationships between the political interactions of members of formerly conflicting groups have been formed. Crises and violent conflict in particular support the emergence of new ethno-political identities. Thus, in societies emerging from violent conflicts, ethnic identities hold a particular degree of significance and continue to galvanise electorates to ensure representation of the 'likes by the likes' (Wimmer 1997). Comparative research on conflict has focussed to some extent on the effects of conflict on multidimensional identity transformation during and after violence (Kalyvas 2008; Wood 2015). However, the primary focus of research has been on the radicalisation of identities in the conflicting parties (Fearon and Laitin 2003) and the underlying relationship between identities and causal effects on their change in conflict (Gurr 1994), or the process of identity transformation within the conflicting parties (Wilhelmsen 2005). Others point out that the effect of political institutions privileging certain group identities in access to state resources, as well as offering individual opportunities for social advancement, is far more important for increasing the salience of ethnic identities (McLaughlin 2007). Institutional incentives, thus, trump individual identity preferences.

We focus specifically on Croatia, where conflict took place in several regions with high levels of ethnic diversity, including Hungarians, Roma, Czechs, Ruthenians, Slovaks and many others. Following Juon (2020), we focus on minority groups with the size of 'less than half the one of the next larger minority group of the groups whose size is below 10% of a country's population'. This allows us to reflect the context of the country and to make it clear that although the Serbs are the largest minority (population share of 4.36%), all other groups

account for less than 1% of the entire population (Krasniqi 2015).<sup>1</sup> The focus of our study is all ethnic groups, except for Serbs, present in the former conflict zones, contested territories and/or directly affected by the violence between the dominant Croats and Serbs.

We proceed in three steps; first we present a brief outline of the 'nationalisation' process in Croatia by setting the context in which contemporary politics takes place. We then discuss the electoral dynamics at the municipal level where it is clear that ethnic politicking takes the upper hand over politicking on civic issues, despite the (presumed, shared) interest of all citizens in the best possible policy outcomes. Finally, we draw upon the sets of our qualitative interviews conducted over the past five years with representatives of non-dominant groups that illustrate data offered by our descriptive statistics.<sup>2</sup>

## **Ethnopolitical Mobilisation in Croatia**

Since the mid-1960s, for the ethno-politically mobilised Croats, national sovereignty, and ultimately nation-state independence, crystallised as the focal point of political mobilisation that escalated with the break-up of Yugoslavia in early 1990s. However, the Serbs, who until 1991 constituted about 12% of the republic's population, opposed the independence of the Croat nation-state setting the two groups on course for interethnic violence. The war in Croatia (1991-1995) directly affected ma-

<sup>1</sup> Popis stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2011. godine.

<sup>2</sup> We have conducted considerable desk-based and field research, collating the municipal-level electoral data from eleven elections for the period of 2003-2017 and triangulating it with the qualitative data collected in more than 20 interviews, all of which underlie the present study.

inly the areas claimed and temporarily controlled by the rebel Serb structures, comprising about 30% of the Croatian territory. Hundreds of thousands had to leave their homes as a result of ethnic expulsions committed by both warring parties. The vast majority of Serbs fled the Serbs-controlled areas of Krajina and Western Slavonia as a result of Croatian military offensive in 1995, and just half of the pre-war Serb population remained in Eastern Slavonia, the area temporarily taken out of control of the central institutions by the international transitional administration after the violent conflict (Živić and Pokos 2004).

During the conflict, areas settled by non-dominant groups were subject to territorial claims both by the Serbs and the Croats. All non-dominant communities had to take sides in the conflict or remain neutral (Perić Kaselj, Škiljan, and Vukić 2015; Cocozzelli 2008); they faced a social environment marred by inter-ethnic tensions and a general atmosphere of intolerance towards ethnic 'others' during and after the conflict (Trifunovska 1998). Some groups, such as particular local communities of the Slovaks and the Roma, remained neutral throughout the conflict, while others, including the Hungarian or the Czech community, openly supported one of the conflict parties (Szabolcs 2012; Perić Kaselj, Škiljan, and Vukić 2015; Pap 2015; Rygolová 2016). Many smaller local groups, such as the Ruthenians and the Hungarians in Eastern Slavonia, largely fled, only to partially return after the end of the war (Klemenčič and Zupančič 2004; Kocsis and Kocsis-Hodosi 1998). Furthermore, minority groups were frequently internally divided over their political position towards the Croatian-Serb conflict as well as in their decisions whether to stay or flee the warzone, which led to further intra-group splits among them (Škiljan 2013).

Similar to the case of the Turks settled in Southern Kosovo, non-dominant minorities have been 'squeezed not only between the conflicting majority nationalism... and the larger minority nationalism...', but also between their own ethnic, religious and civic identities' (Kut 2000, 1).

The final political settlements of the conflict ultimately granted the minority groups some, albeit weak, special status. Beyond elementary citizen rights, all minorities were granted the right to return to their pre-war places of residence and minority political representation at different institutional levels was institutionally guaranteed (Caspersen 2008). Serbs in Eastern Croatia were allowed to form a special quasi-territorial entity in the form of an association of municipalities intended to consolidate their ethno-territorial autonomy (Barić 2011). Despite the end of hostilities and the partial political settlement, ethnic conflict between the majority Croats and the Serb minority has remained present in municipal politics well until the present day and political, economic and societal interactions between the Croats and the Serbs remain limited (Čermák 2017; Jelić, Čorkalo Biruški, and Ajduković 2013; Gregurović 2014).

In the post-conflict period, smaller communities again disappeared in a shadow of the dominant groups' competition. For example, tiny Italian communities in Western Slavonia residing in the area affected by conflict are rarely mentioned in the media, whereas most Italians settling in Istria – not affected by violence – frequently feature in Italian and Croatian reports. Similarly, Hungarians that have been the dominant group in large parts of Eastern Croatia, and Czechs in rural areas of Central Croatia are held up as examples of integration into Croatian politics. However, the political appearance of smaller com-

munities of Ruthenians and Slovaks that have been present in Eastern and Central Croatia, as well as Bosniaks living in central Croatia and have co-resided with both dominant Serbs and Croats for decades, are rarely granted any attention. All these communities have long been participating in municipal, local, and national politics at various stages of Croatian statehood, but were neglected in the conflict settlement.

This omission is also reflected in the scant attention granted to non-dominant groups in post-conflict Yugoslavia. As in post-conflict Croatia, Kosovo's Bosniaks, Gorani, Turks, Roma and Bosnia and Herzegovina's Roma and Jews, and post-Ohrid Macedonia's Roma and Turks have been the focus of research in political participation as autochthonous, historically resident minority populations of these states, but less so as citizens endowed with equal political rights to the majority.

The focus on national-level politics might be justified because Croatia, alongside all other post-Yugoslav states, is a nation-state of its dominant ethnic group. The Preamble of the Croatian Constitution states that 'the Republic of Croatia is established as the nation state of the Croatian people and the state of the members of autochthonous national minorities'. The national statehood was designed – at least in part – as a response to the national majority's experiences with statehood aspirations, interethnic competition in Yugoslavia, and later, ethnicity-based violence during the 1990s. Following the end of conflict, ethnic communities went through the process of consolidating their ranks in the view of ethnic polarization of Croatia's society (Zlodi 2005; Peternel and Škiljan 2017; Božić 2010). Additionally, the first years of independence saw the nation-centred HDZ tutelage in politics that fostered the ideal of the Croat nati-

onal state with but token concessions to non-Croat citizens (HRW 1999).

## Electoral Rules and Minority Representation

It was not until the early 2000s that Croatia's prospective accession to both NATO and the EU sparked international attention to the rights of minority groups other than the Serbs. When the new Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP) took the power from the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in 2000, they put into place a set of minority policies to ensure the start of the EU accession negotiations. Today, Croatia boasts the complex guaranteed representation of non-dominant groups' interests in the formal political process.

The Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities (2002) was the centrepiece of the EU-accession-related law-making flurry. It explicitly grants special individual and group rights to all citizens who identify themselves as members of *ethnically, linguistically, culturally or religiously defined traditional minorities*.<sup>3</sup> Hence, all Croatian citizens have the *individual* right to identify in ethnic terms. This right has been a precursor to exclusive rights for the political representation of all ethnic minorities at all levels of political institutions: all minority citizens can now directly elect their exclusive representatives to municipal, regional and state-level institutions based solely on the individual declaration of ethnic identity. As was the case of other accession countries, 'as long as Croatia was in the process of EU accession, minority policies were developed under the EU pressure. But now, as Croatia has become a full EU member, there is no need to work with minorities. Minority policy looks great on paper; it is a different story in practice. In

<sup>3</sup> Ustavni zakon o pravima nacionalnih manjina, Art. 5.

principle, (minorities) have everything, but there is no budget for anything.<sup>4</sup>

This suggests that electoral politics are focal points for assessing the political mobilisation of ethnic issues. In this regard, we should see the electoral rules in place as an effect of political aspiration of the state-building nation, offering opportunities and challenges for voters, candidates and nominating groups to strategise in accomplishing their (ethno)political agendas (Birch 2003: 17). Electoral rules therefore are mechanisms for establishing the accountability of the elected to those electing based on past performance, while at the same time they should be seen as avenues to extending (some) representation to diverse segments of the electorate (Herron 2009: 3; Thomassen 2014).

Croatia's electoral system incentivises ethno-political mobilisation by ensuring the exclusive representation of minorities by minorities. At state level, those registered as minority members ought to choose between voting for 'civic' units, i.e. regular electoral lists, or 'ethnic' units, i.e. using their exclusive right to elect representatives from the designated ethnic electoral list. At regional and municipal level, for elections to executive bodies, minority voters can use the double suffrage right and cast their ballot for a regular and/or a minority candidate. Furthermore, minority members can express their preference by casting an ethnic vote in the special elections for national minority councils, which are minorities' dedicated advisory bodies. Beyond the structure of guaranteed seats, minorities can also set their own 'ethnic' candidate lists in the regular proportional elections for the legislative bodies at all levels, as well as negotiate the inclusion of their candida-

<sup>4</sup> Interview with an Advisor to the Minority Deputy in Croatian Parliament, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

tes on civic parties' lists in exchange for support during the electoral cycle.

At the level of the state legislature, national minorities are allocated a total of eight (out of 140) reserved seats in the otherwise proportionally-elected Parliament (*Sabor*). The number of seats reserved for a single community generally reflects its demographic weight: the largest community of Serbs has three reserved seats, large Italian and Hungarian minorities have one each, relatively numerous Czechs share one seat with a tiny Slovak community, and an additional two seats are reserved for smaller autochthonous and the 'new' post-Yugoslav minorities.<sup>5</sup> Hence, each eligible minority voter has to choose either to cast a 'civic' or an 'ethnic' vote for their representative in the state-level legislature. All citizens who declare themselves as members of these minorities have the right to decide if they will cast their ballot within the ethnically exclusive state-level minority electoral unit, or if they will vote in the regular proportional electoral district, which is organized regionally.

At the level of regional and municipal self-government, provisions for minority representation are more fine-grained. Depending on their demographic weight in the overall population, minority citizens can directly elect 'their ethnic' representatives into executive, legislative and advisory bodies at both institutional

<sup>5</sup> Members of the so-called old minorities (Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Russian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vallachian and Jewish) together elect one representative to Parliament, and members of the 'new minorities' (Albanian, Bosniak, Montenegrin, Macedonian and Slovenian national minorities) equally elect one joint representative (Act on Election of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament, Art 16; <http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?art=16930> Accessed 2018/11/01).

levels. In elections of regional and municipal executive members, in contrast to the state level, minorities are granted the so-called 'double suffrage' in exclusively ethnic minority run-off elections: All voters registered as minority members can vote both for the regular mayor/prefect as well as for their minority deputy. Minorities are granted their directly-elected deputy prefect in the regional executives of counties with 5% or more minority residents, and deputy mayor in the municipal executives of municipalities with 15% or more minority residents. Moreover, since 2013, minorities are additionally granted reserved seats in municipal legislatures with 5% of minority voters; once their proportion in the demographics reaches the 15% threshold locally, or 5% regionally, minorities are represented proportionally according to their demographic share by means of a proportional electoral mechanism (i.e. vote for a 'non-ethnic' list of candidates).<sup>6</sup>

To ascertain whether voters strategically use their 'ethnic' voice, we focus on non-dominant ethnic minorities' political participation in municipal, regional and national elections.<sup>7</sup> Due to the localized character of minorities' presence, we conduct our analysis at the

<sup>6</sup> There is an additional guarantee to make minorities' voices heard in regional and municipal legislatures for cases when the granted seat is not filled or the proportionality is not reached: the number of councillors is then extended to co-opt the highest-ranking minority candidate from the successful parties, *Ustavni zakon o pravima nacionalnih manjina*, Art. 20, see also (Jakešević, Tatalović, and Lacović 2015)

<sup>7</sup> While some of the non-dominant minorities covered by the research are concentrated mainly within the former conflict zones (Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians), this distinction is important for Bosniaks and Roma who settle in larger numbers also in other parts of Croatia that were less affected by the previous conflict.

level of municipalities. Croatia's municipalities serve as the primary administrative units, and they are also the main municipal socio-political and self-government administrations, as well as the basic electoral units. The municipal level is appropriate for the analysis of the political choices made by non-dominant groups because non-dominant communities account for a non-negligible share of total populations, but often form a plurality in the electorate. In all post-conflict municipalities, we have identified the relevant non-dominant ethnic groups based on the 2011 municipal population census data. We have only included those municipal minority communities that fulfil the demographic criteria to be granted ethnically exclusive political rights.

Altogether, we have identified 27 municipalities as relevant electoral battlegrounds in the post-conflict areas of Croatia where six different non-dominant groups compete (Bosniaks, Czechs, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Roma, Slovaks). While Hungarians, Czechs and Bosniaks populate larger areas consisting of several adjacent municipalities, other ethnic groups are present in only a few isolated municipalities. The relative share of all these groups in municipal populations ranges from 5% of Hungarians in Erdut up to 47% of Czechs in Končanica and their absolute population goes from just 141 Hungarians in the rural municipality Tompojevci to as much as 2,485 Czechs in the urban town of Daruvar. While most communities (23) live as a municipal minority together with the dominant majority (the Croats), three are settled in areas where the dominant minority (the Serbs) is in the position of municipal majority, and two communities are themselves in the position of municipal majority (the Czechs in Končanica and the Hungarians in Kneževi Vinogradi).

**Table 1.** Non-dominant minorities in post-conflict areas of Croatia covered in this study

Minority	Municipality	Pop	Pop %
Bosniaks	Gunja	1.108	30%
	Drenovci	352	7%
	Vojnić	318	7%
	Cetingrad	314	15%
Czechs	Daruvar	2.485	21%
	Končanica	1.110	47%
	Grubišno Polje	1.109	17%
	Dežanovac	627	23%
	Sirač	251	11%
	Hercegovac	196	8%
Hungarians	Kneževi Vinogradi	1.784	39%
	Bilje	1.671	30%
	Beli Manastir	801	8%
	Draž	680	25%
	Darda	482	7%
	Ernestinovo	422	19%
	Tordinci	371	18%
	Erdut	370	5%
	Petlovac	330	14%
	Vladislavci	172	9%
	Tompojevci	141	9%
Roma	Darda	650	9%
	Jagodnjak	154	8%
Ruthenians	Bogdanovci	444	23%
	Tompojevci	272	17%
Slovaks	Našice	1.078	7%
	Ilok	935	14%
	Punitovci	666	37%

Source: Official census data (2011)

### Non-Dominant Groups' Participation in Elections

As outlined above, every Croatian citizen can self-declare as member of an ethnic community for electoral purposes

with further political rights attached to this self-selected ethnic identity. Each citizen thus can cast a ballot following a choice of their primary identity as either a 'member of an ethnic community', or 'only' as a Croat citizen. The perceptions

**Table 2.** Levels of ethno-political identification and mobilisation for single groups across election types

### Index of ethno-political identification

= share of voters **registered** as minority (on total voters registered) divided by minority share on population:

Election type	year	HU	CZ	SK	RU	RO	BO	Ø
<b>Parliament</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>43%</b>	62%
	2003	79%	63%	51%	88%	36%	29%	<b>58%</b>
	2007	73%	50%	38%	77%	48%	36%	<b>54%</b>
	2011	76%	54%	56%	69%	64%	42%	<b>60%</b>
	2015	83%	55%	56%	70%	98%	51%	<b>69%</b>
	2016	90%	59%	56%	73%	96%	57%	<b>72%</b>
<b>Local</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>102%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>94%</b>		<b>55%</b>	84%
	2013	100%	86%	82%	94%		47%	<b>82%</b>
	2017	103%	89%	83%	94%		64%	<b>86%</b>
<b>Minority</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>50%</b>	77%
	2003	100%	93%	80%	97%	33%	9%	<b>69%</b>
	2007	91%	79%	79%	94%	52%	84%	<b>80%</b>
	2011	91%	76%	80%	91%	62%	42%	<b>74%</b>
	2015	98%	86%	85%	95%	95%	63%	<b>87%</b>

### Index of ethno-political mobilisation

= share of votes **cast** in minority electoral units (on total votes casted) divided by minority share on population:

Election type	year	HU	CZ	SK	RU	RO	BO	Ø
<b>Parliament</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>52%</b>
	2003	69%	57%	34%	67%	21%	36%	47%
	2007	73%	46%	16%	51%	35%	42%	44%
	2011	81%	51%	49%	36%	54%	56%	55%
	2015	88%	37%	35%	25%	111%	53%	58%
	2016	115%	35%	28%	18%	84%	50%	55%
<b>Local</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>94%</b>		<b>63%</b>	<b>78%</b>
	2013	104%	72%	68%	99%		61%	81%
	2017	98%	75%	45%	90%		66%	75%
<b>Minority</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>44%</b>
	2003	65%	17%	50%	54%	9%	13%	35%
	2007	67%	17%	32%	40%	60%	50%	44%
	2011	80%	16%	26%	34%	57%	8%	37%
	2015	96%	20%	29%	38%	121%	64%	61%

Source: Authors' calculations based on the official census and electoral data

about the utility of ethnically self-identifying for political purposes would thus determine the levels of ethno-political mobilisation of that group at the ballot

box. This, in turn, would enhance the visibility of ethnic minority political representatives in the elected government office.

We are primarily interested in three interrelated issues that will help us assess the impact of incentive-driven ethno-political representation of non-dominant groups in divided societies. First, does the opportunity to elect ethnic representatives translate into higher preference for 'ethnic' voting in elections overall? Second, is there an observable difference in ethnic voting across different types of elections? Finally, do non-dominant ethnic communities differ in their participation in light of institutional incentives for *ethno-political* representation?

To assess the relationship between mobilisation and representation in non-dominant groups, we collected the available demographic data (minority headcounts in electoral registers and those who have effectively voted) and created two indexes to estimate the levels of ethno-political *identification* and the level of ethno-political *mobilisation* in non-dominant groups. We constructed the first index by taking the share of voters who identify as a minority on all registered electors divided by the population share of the minority group in any given electoral district. The second is constructed analogously, but with the share of actual ethnic votes cast rather than the share of voters merely registered as 'ethnic'. The index of ethno-political mobilisation indicates the share of minority groups who align their ethno-social identities with the ethno-political choice, which does actively express its ethnic identity through voting. This allows us to assess whether the political mobilisation of non-dominant groups takes place exclusively along the ethnic lines, thus reflecting their overall share in the electorate. As members of the non-dominant groups registered participate in elections, we do not expect them all to use their 'ethnic' vote and as such the higher correlation between the

indexes would indicate higher ethnicisation of political participation.<sup>8</sup>

Our data suggests that the levels of ethno-political identification across the set of elections between 2003 and 2017 are significantly higher for municipal elections (84%) and for minority elections (average 77% across groups) where voters can use their dual vote. In contrast, levels of ethno-political mobilisation in parliamentary elections where minorities have to choose between a 'civic' and an 'ethnic' vote is at 62%, which is relatively modest. However, here the levels of ethno-political identification have been rising steadily since 2007, which reflects the growing entrenchment of nation-wide minority protection mechanisms (Glaudić and Vuković 2015). Unsurprisingly, the declared identification with an ethnic group is generally significantly higher than the level of mobilisation across all types of elections (75% compared to 58%). The discrepancy between levels of identification and mobilisation indicates that there are large parts of all minorities who do identify with an ethnic electorate, yet they prefer casting their 'civic' vote, or absent from the elections.

As Table 2 shows, a large part of the minority population generally makes use of their 'ethnic' vote, yet as we observe that the instrumental use of ethnic identification for political ends significantly drops in the national level elections. This difference shows that large segments of minorities primarily identify as a 'voter', rather than as a 'member of an ethnically defined community': the small number of registered minority voters within the minority electoral unit is compounded by even lower numbers of ballots cast for the 'majority' candidates.

<sup>8</sup> For minorities settled in several municipalities, values are calculated as the simple average of single municipal values, regardless of differences in population.

Arguably 'it is uncomfortable for (registered minority voters) to vote for minority candidates – despite being registered as minority, they need to ask for the special ballot'<sup>9</sup>, adding to peer-pressure at the polling station. The results could therefore suggest that all those groups too numerically small to meet the threshold would be more likely to cast a 'civic' vote, pushing down the ratio of ethnic votes in comparison to the overall share of the ethnic population in the constituency.

Additionally, and given the negligible number of reserved seats for minority representatives as well as the absence of minority veto clauses, we take these findings as a counterfactual *confirmation* of the effects that institutionalised ethnic voting has: casting a ballot for a candidate from one's own group would likely result in the *loss of the vote in national elections*. This results from the electoral rules stipulating that representatives of all non-dominant groups run in the specially created, non-geographic electoral District XII that cumulates the ballots for the seat reserved for all non-dominant groups and is shared across minority groups (Tatalović 2007; Omejec 2004; Baketa and Kovačić 2010; Petričušić 2002).

However, as we noted from the descriptive data in the table above, there is an observable difference in ethnic voting across different types of elections. We have data on parliamentary and minority council elections dating back to 2002 which show uneven paths in the political mobilisation of ethnic identity over the period for all non-dominant groups in conflict-affected regions of Croatia. As we have seen above, institutional incentives for ethnicity-based representation make ethno-political mobilisation

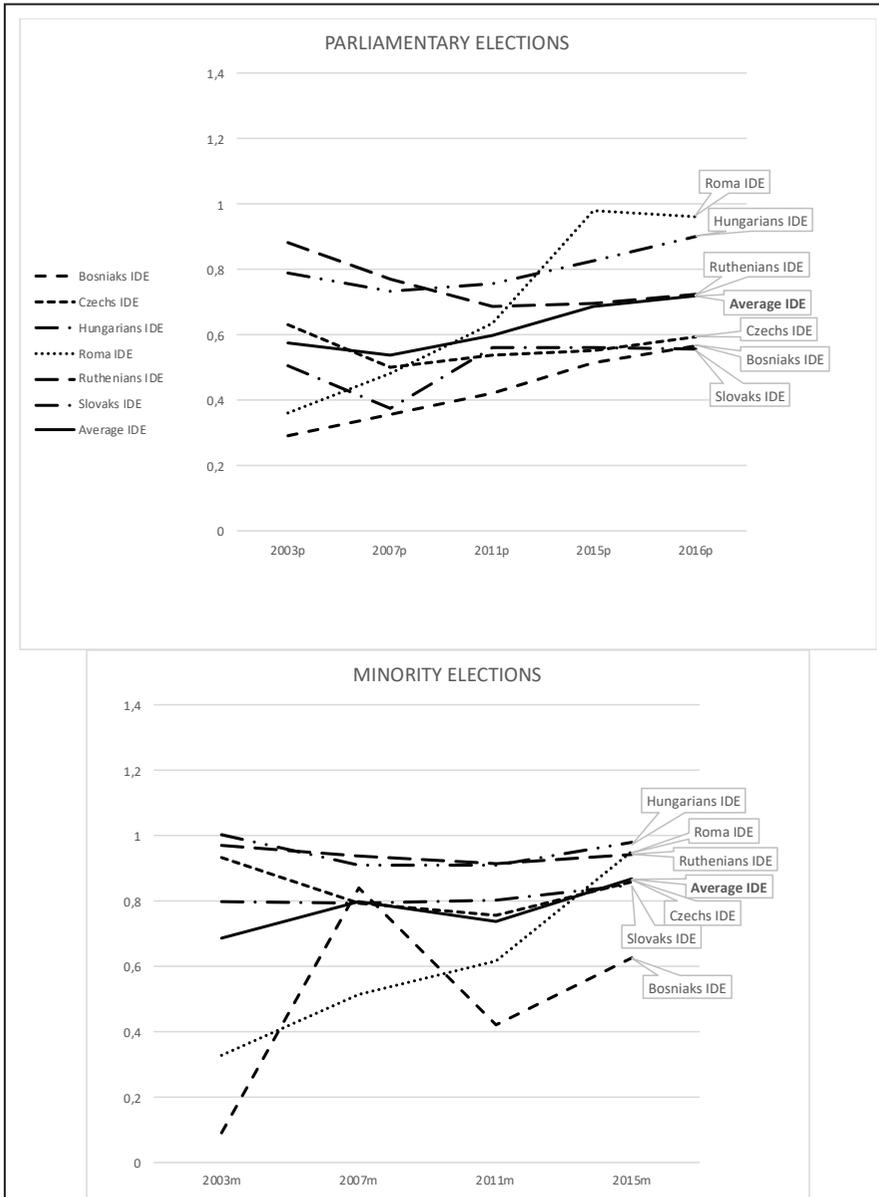
sufficiently attractive for the electorate to avail themselves of their 'ethnic' vote at the expense of their 'civic' vote. Yet, it is also important to note that in minority council elections, members of minority communities are already limited in their choice of representatives for a fixed number of reserved seats within their own groups and regardless of their actual turnout (Petričušić 2012). Our findings note the particularly remarkable rise of ethno-political mobilisation of the Hungarians, Roma and Bosniak groups over the said period of time in minority council elections, but only a sustainable upward mobilisation in the Hungarian community once we switch the focus to national elections. For example, an upward trend within the Hungarian electorate is widely believed to be a result of the intensified intra-ethnic competition between two competing candidates, Robert Jankovics and Sandor Juhas, both of whom were running for the same minority seat in the national parliament in 2015.

Consequently, we should assume that the choice of minority voters to cast their ballots in an ethnic vote at the national elections, where they compete for representation with a 'generic' non-dominant groups' representative, is divorced from their perception of the political empowerment of their community. This would merely result in their choice of a 'civic' vote over their 'ethnic' ballot and a 'waste' of their vote to an other non-dominant group.

Indeed, despite the relatively high levels of identification there is only low level mobilisation in minority elections (77% and 44%, respectively) and low level identification reflects the high levels of mobilisation in parliamentary elections (62% and 52%, respectively). This shows a relatively high propensity for voting for one's own 'ethnic' candidate to the state-level institutions,

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Member of the Bosniak SDAH Party Presidency, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

**Figure 1.** Levels of ethno-political identification across minorities in time

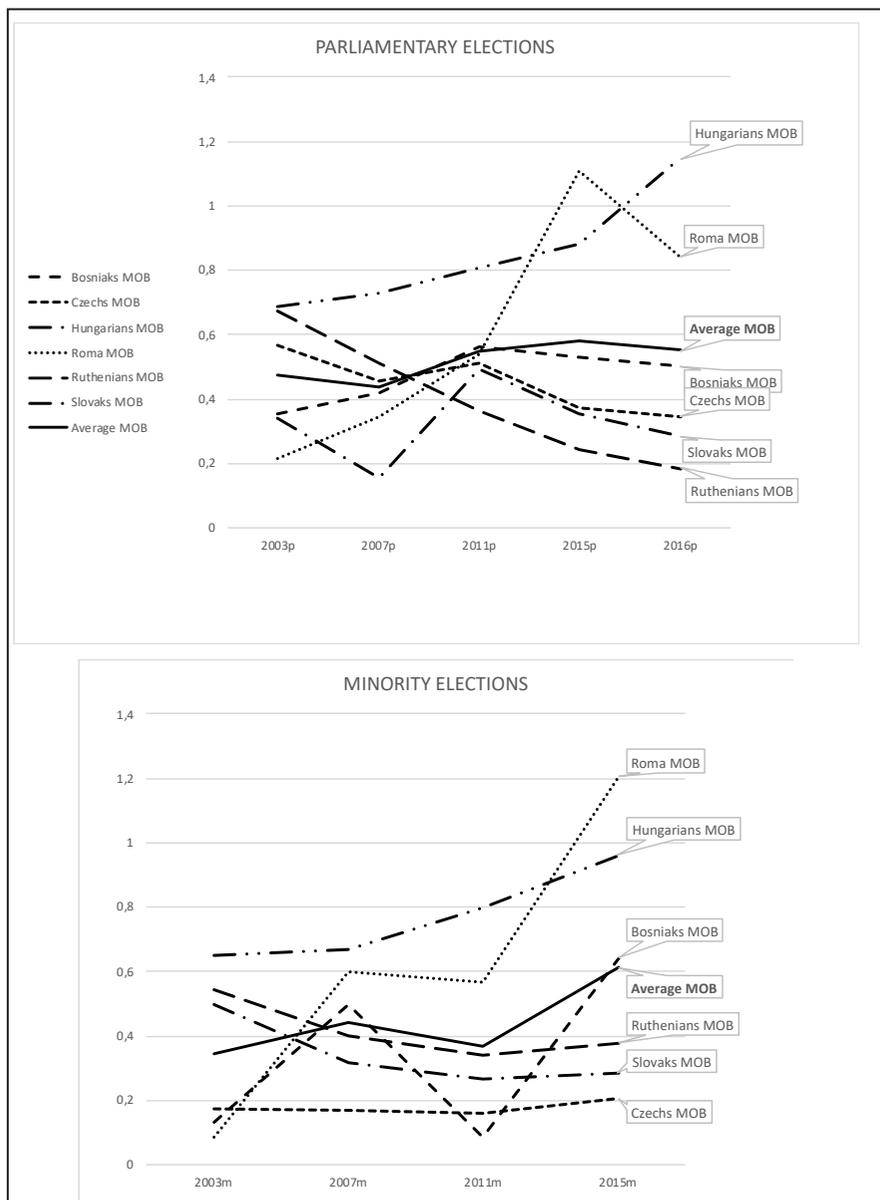


Source: Authors' calculations based on official census and election data

despite the potentially discouraging factor of the necessary choice between civic and ethnic vote. However, levels of mobilisation are still relatively high in the state level elections considering the fact that by voting ethnically, minority members are 'wasting' their ci-

vic vote. This indicates a relatively high (or at least some) degree of confidence of minorities in their state-level representatives: the upward trend in ethno-political mobilisation among the non-dominant Hungarians is suggestive of just that.

**Figure 2.** Levels of ethno-political mobilisation across minorities in time



Source: Authors' calculations based on official census and election data

Minorities are particularly mobilised in elections to municipal structures where they can concurrently vote for 'non-ethnic' candidates. Similar to the degree of identification, the level of mobilisation is highest for the municipal elections (78%), indicating that most

of the voters who identify as minority also do use their exclusive 'ethnic' vote to elect the representative of their ethnic community in elections where they are likely to know the candidate's policy content, *and* their identity. At the same time, levels of ethno-political mobilisa-

tion are clearly lowest in the elections to local minority institutions, which demonstrates that citizens have only scant interest and weak trust in the effectiveness of these bodies as political representative organs. In the context of political competition where voters assess politicised identities rather than political content, as in municipal elections or in minority elections, there are arguably tangible pay-offs for ethnic identification for casting an 'ethnic' vote instead. For Bosniaks, "The Islamic community has become a "grounding" structure; it is the centre of [their] cultural and political life."<sup>10</sup> Overall, the findings indicate that minority voters are the most mobilised at the municipal level of governance, significantly less for the state level institutions, and the least for their own minority institutions.

We have looked at the levels of ethno-political identification and mobilisation and would like to explore how non-dominant minority groups fair in municipal level elections, where they mobilise primarily along ethnic lines. While we have observed the gradual decline of ethno-political mobilisation in parliamentary and minority elections for all the minorities above, there are significant differences among non-dominant groups' mobilisation in minority elections: these are elected separately in special minority elections in areas with designated demographic thresholds, with participation criteria set significantly lower than for representation in legislature and executive institutions.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Interview with a Bosniak Religious Representative, Cetingrad, 10 June 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Even tiny municipal or regional communities counting at least 100 people can elect 'their ethnic' representative directly. Those communities accounting for more than 1.5% or 200 people (500 at the regional level) can then elect their special minority council consisting of 10 to 25 members (Petričušić 2011).

Across the board, we find similar group-based patterns of ethno-political mobilisation across all non-dominant minorities. For most groups, the recorded level of mobilisation of single municipal communities is relatively similar regardless of the population share of the community. This suggests that the level of ethno-political mobilisation remains stable, reflecting ethnic groups' pattern of political mobilisation over time. Importantly, we can clearly see from the longitudinal data that there is generally no link between the relative or absolute population of minority communities and the level of their ethno-political mobilisation.

Different minorities reside in separate electoral units, which vividly illustrates the much less stable levels of ethno-political mobilisation at this level of politics with significant differences between 'old' (Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Ruthenians) and 'new' minorities (Roma, Bosniaks). The 'old' minorities experience stable and high levels of ethno-political identification, yet show fluctuating mobilisation over time for municipal and minority elections. For the most part, the levels of ethno-political mobilisation in 'new' minorities have fluctuated greatly: while the Bosniak minority recorded both rapid ups and downs, the Roma show stable and fast growth of their ethno-political participation. This is also reflected in these groups' cooperation across Croatia: as one of our interviewees claims, 'Bosniaks who do not cast their ballot within the minority unit mainly vote for the option "left of centre" [SDP], and in Istria (an area with a strong regional identity), perhaps also for the Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS), a regional party.'<sup>12</sup> At the same time, 'Local Bosniaks in Topusko used to

<sup>12</sup> Interview with an Elected Municipal Representative of the Bosniak Community, Cetingrad, 10 June 2015.

Table 3. Demographic and electoral profile of minorities of Croatia

Ethnic categories	POPULATION				VOTERS REGISTERED				MINORITY VOTES FOR PARLIAMENT				
	1991	%	2001	%	2003	2007	2011	2015	2003	2007	2011	2015	2016
<b>Croats</b>	3.736.356	78,1%	3.977.171	89,6%	3.874.321	90,4%							
<b>Serbs</b>	581.663	12,2%	201.631	4,5%	186.633	4,4%							
<b>Total</b>	175.117	3,7%	149.158	3,4%	149.663	3,5%			222.769	190.510	183.992	195.628	193.624
Italians	21.303	0,4%	19.363	0,4%	17.807	0,4%			61.110	58.389	66.138	103.898	104.439
Hungarians	22.355	0,5%	16.595	0,4%	14.048	0,3%			12.520	11.230	10.005	18.018	17.985
Czechs	13.086	0,3%	10.510	0,2%	9.641	0,2%			10.366	9.619	9.731	12.218	12.328
Slovaks	5.606	0,1%	4.712	0,1%	4.753	0,1%			7.386	6.266	6.927	10.865	10.827
Bosniaks	43.469	0,9%	20.755	0,5%	31.479	0,7%			21.930	21.380	26.312	44.242	44.550
Muslims	19.677	0,4%	17.558	0,2%	7.558	0,2%							
Albanians	12.032	0,3%	15.082	0,3%	17.513	0,4%							
Slovenes	22.376	0,5%	13.173	0,3%	10.517	0,2%							
Montene- grins	9.724	0,2%	4.926	0,1%	4.517	0,1%							
Macedo- nians	6.280	0,1%	4.270	0,1%	4.138	0,1%							
<b>Other ethnic minorities (clustered according to electoral units)</b>	6.695	0,1%	9.465	0,2%	16.975	0,4%							
Roma	2.635	0,1%	2.902	0,1%	2.965	0,1%							
Germans	3.253	0,1%	2.337	0,1%	1.936	0,0%							
Ruthenians	2.494	0,1%	1.977	0,0%	1.878	0,0%							
Ukrainians	706	0,0%	906	0,0%	1.279	0,0%							
Russians	679	0,0%	567	0,0%	672	0,0%							
Poles	600	0,0%	576	0,0%	509	0,0%							
Jews	810	0,0%	475	0,0%	435	0,0%							
Romanians	458	0,0%	331	0,0%	350	0,0%							
Bulgarians	320	0,0%	300	0,0%	367	0,0%							
Turks	214	0,0%	247	0,0%	297	0,0%							
Austrians	22	0,0%	12	0,0%	29	0,0%							
Vlachs	291.129	6,1%	109.500	2,5%	74.208	1,7%			8.908	9.894	13.163	18.555	18.749
<b>Total</b>	106.041	2,2%	176	0,0%	331	0,0%							
Non-ethnic identities	45.693	1,0%	9.302	0,2%	27.225	0,6%							
Others	139.595	2,9%	100.022	2,3%	46.652	1,1%							

Source: Official census data and election data provided by the Central Election Commission

be close to the local HDZ, and some of them also served in the Croatian army during the war. After the recent breakup of the local HDZ, it remains to be seen who the Bosniaks will align with.<sup>13</sup>

## **Intergroup Differences in Political Participation**

We have noted significant differences in the levels of single groups' mobilisation in municipal elections. Three groups should be noted separately here: the Hungarians because they exhibited a virtually full level of ethno-political mobilisation; the Roma because of their most rapid ethno-political mobilisation; and the Bosniaks due to the significant fluctuations in their mobilisation levels. If anything, these dynamics point to a gradual normalisation of political competition at national level. Overall, however, group-specific settlement and participation patterns help us identify the different political participation strategies at the group level. For example, the Roma living in clusters tend to field more 'ethnic' candidates, whilst with the Bosniaks, the group most dispersed across Croatia and well integrated into the political environment, 'it is difficult [...] to mobilise politically on an ethnic basis alone.'<sup>14</sup> Bosniaks and Albanians are present in urban settings throughout Croatia, but their numbers are not perceived to be sufficient enough to impact municipal political dynamics. Croatia's Bosniaks, for example, are perceived to be 'too integrated', as demonstrated by their political representative in an interview:

"There is a thin line between integration and assimilation, which is a serious threat for Croatian Bosniaks.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with a Local Elected Bosniak Representative, Topusko, 9 June 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Advisor to the Minority Deputy in Croatian Parliament, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

First, the language is lost, then national identity, and finally the religion too. Bosniaks will start to attend a church instead of a mosque and they will become ethnic Croats.<sup>15</sup>

This on-going process of ethno-political consolidation is also clearly visible from the demographic data for the period of 2001-2011: while 'old' minorities experience demographic decline, there is a clear upward trend in 'new' minorities (Table 3). These census figures are also reflected in numbers of minority voters registering on ethnic rolls for parliamentary elections since 2003, showing a clear rise for all non-dominant minorities, yet much more rapidly in electoral units that include 'new' minorities.

The significantly higher levels of ethno-political mobilisation are confirmed for the Hungarian minority at the level of single municipal communities across all types of elections. On the contrary, we see significant discrepancies between the level of mobilisation of Czechs for municipal (73%), state-level (45%) and minority (17%) elections. A similar trend was recorded for Ruthenians, who show virtually full ethnic mobilisation (94%) when voting for their representatives to the municipal administration yet only limited interest in ethnic voting in minority (42%) and parliamentary elections (39%). The cases of these two groups fielding the majority in their electoral districts clearly suggests that the level of ethno-political mobilisation is determined not by the overall group-level mobilisation but by the opportunity to vote-in a co-ethnic in municipal elections as anticipated.

Generally, the level of ethno-political mobilisation and the difference between

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Member of the Bosniak SDAH Party Presidency, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

'old' and 'new' minorities is not so much determined by the group level mobilisation, but by the potential impact of political representation of ethnic minorities at the level of municipal administrations. 'Old' minorities generally show more stable and higher levels of mobilisation, which indicates their consolidated ethno-political identity in the context of prevalent intergroup competition between the Serbs and the Croats (especially in Eastern and Western Slavonia). On the contrary, 'new' minorities show fluctuating yet rising levels of ethno-political mobilisation, which suggests potential competition between different minorities in municipal electoral districts or an on-going process of their ethno-political consolidation alongside the dominant Croats.

We observe that despite incentives to foreground ethnic identity for purposes of political representation, ethnic differences are being 'crowded out' by civic considerations and this is additionally complicated if the putative 'ethnic homeland' is in close proximity: 'Bosniaks living close to the border see Bosnia as their "other" homeland: ... Bosnia is close enough, yet it is different for Bosniaks living dispersed [or] in Zagreb.'<sup>16</sup>

It is widely believed that representation of the Bosniak community is due to a lack of intra-ethnic cohesion rather than political competition within the group: only the '(ethno-)national minority' of Bosniaks is represented, while the (ethno-)religious category 'Muslim' is neither recognized as minority, nor guaranteed political representation. Whilst,

'the division between Bosniaks and Muslims is not based on any real difference in identity ... (implying that) only Bosniaks are legally recognized as minority, while Muslims

are subsumed to be a part of "others". This distinction emerged during the war: those who were on Abdić's side (i.e. neutral and later pro-Serb during the conflict), tend to self-declare as Muslims, while those who supported the Bosnian army identify as Bosniaks.'<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, as the religious, political and cultural status of ethnic communities loses salience at the municipal level, voters express their primary concern with social and economic issues, which can be better communicated in municipal level elections. Alongside other minorities,

'Bosniaks are missing any economic perspective. It is not in the interest of the state to have Bosniaks living in the Kordun region, so the state does not offer them support and, at times, discriminates against them. If they were to receive (financial) support, there would be more Bosniaks coming to the area and they would reshape the (ethnic make-up of the) area (devastated and depopulated by war).'<sup>18</sup>

'It was all right for the (Croat) state and even in the interest of some parties when the Serbs, the Hungarians and the Roma were fleeing after the re-integration (of Eastern Slavonia). They only realized today, when all are gone, that it devastated the whole region. General depopulation of the area eventually improved the economic position of minorities. While a Croat rejects a job offer, a Serb, a Hungarian or a Roma accepts it even for a lower wage'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Interview with a Bosniak Religious Representative, Cetingrad, 10 June 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with an Elected Municipal Representative of the Bosniak Community, Cetingrad, 10 June 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with an Elected Minority Municipal Representative, Darda, 24 April 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a Bosniak Religious Representative, Cetingrad, 10 June 2015.

"The problem for Bosniak minority political representatives is that the former parliamentary deputy (Šemso Tanković, standing for SDAH, in office 2003-2011) did nothing for the community during his two mandates: he did not care about the average Bosniak and his everyday problems. It was similar then with his successor, Nedžad Hodžić, from the rival BDS party. This resulted in a situation where the Bosniaks do not have a deputy while the Albanians, with half of the electorate, have succeeded in electing their candidate."<sup>20</sup>

The diversity of interests of Croatia's non-dominant communities poses a challenge to their political representation. Although Romani representatives applaud the majority for extending equal rights to minorities: 'Inter-ethnic relations in Croatia have been resolved, as it is clear who the majority is, and who the minority. No group poses a risk to another community... Here, in Croatia, the majority granted the rights to minorities,<sup>21</sup> there persist some noteworthy group-specific phenomena in ethno-political identification for the Roma, a community with the most pronounced rise of participation in all election types.

In 2007, the winning Roma candidate, Nazif Memedi, secured only a slight majority of 37 votes ahead of Nada Bajić, the second Roma candidate, and about 100 votes more than a German candidate who landed in the third place. It is noteworthy that as a result of such a wide dispersion of votes, only 351 votes were sufficient for the Romani candidate to be elected in 2007. In later elections, the Romani community fielded more can-

didates, yet Veljko Kajtazi dominated the electoral race in 2011 and came first ahead of the second Romani candidate, albeit with only 24 votes. Kajtazi consolidated his lead in the 2015 elections by winning 41% of the vote over 17% of the second-running Romani candidate, and again in 2016 by 53% compared to 30% of the second-running candidate from the German community. Veljko Kajtazi has developed a clear political profile for this heterogeneous group around the issues of their weak socio-economic status and racialised representation in public by reaching out to Romani organizations of all (sub-)groups and representing all of Croatia's regions. Ensuring this broad appeal to the entire Romani community, Kajtazi was able to repeatedly win the elections, over the years becoming 'a dominant figure in the Romani politics'.<sup>22</sup> As one of our interviewees comments,

(Today), it is easy to exploit the Roma communities politically since they vote homogeneously. Their local communities are internally cohesive, if one votes for a single party, everyone will vote for it. As they live compactly, they are easily mobilised. [And, as the] Roma generally do not have political preferences, their socio-economic situation determines their political behaviour.<sup>23</sup>

A similar spill-over effect was witnessed with the Hungarian minority, which shows the highest level of ethno-political identification both across all elections and over time, with significantly higher values in parliamentary elections, where it has a reserved single seat of its own.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with a Member of the Bosniak SDAH Party Presidency, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with an Advisor to the Minority Deputy in Croatian Parliament, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with an Advisor to the Minority Deputy in Croatian Parliament, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with an Advisor to the Minority Deputy in Croatian Parliament, Zagreb, 27 June 2018.

## Discussion

We have explored the varying dynamics in electoral behaviour of non-dominant ethnic communities to ascertain the effects of ethno-political mobilisation by the dominant groups in the post-conflict regions of Croatia. First, we focused on their levels of identification versus mobilisation in the electoral process; second, we discussed how levels of their ethno-political mobilisation vary according to the type of election; and finally, we were able to establish the difference between the various non-dominant groups' levels of mobilisation that result from their opportunity to access and avail themselves of political opportunity structures in municipal level elections. While the levels of mobilisation are clearly the highest in municipal elections and relatively high for state-level elections, values for minority elections are rather low, indicating only weak interest in this type of ethnic representation. We can thus establish that, despite institutional incentives to foreground ethnic identity to access reserved seats in the national elections as well as during the election of minority councils, politicking is best viewed through an ethnic prism only in municipal elections, i.e. where non-dominant minorities are *de facto* pluralities in their electoral districts.

While the paper offers an early stage exploration of the impact of institutional incentives for the ethnicised political representation on the mobilisation of non-dominant groups, we believe that there are several further avenues for investigation to be tested here. First and foremost, reserved seats for political representatives of non-dominant groups' should encourage the formation of closed intra-ethnic lists for groups with access to a single ethnic reserved seat. Theoretically, this would result in cross-ethnic electoral coalitions between groups guaranteed reserved seats to share with

other minorities in the national parliament, as well as with those who can cross the necessary threshold. As we have discussed in the latter part of the paper, there is some evidence that this happens in Croatia in relation to non-dominant groups that can present a clear front as a distinct, recognised ethnic community with guaranteed seats. However, where ethnic consolidation of the group is incomplete, as with the Bosniaks, there is ample space for politicking on the issue basis *within* the group.

At the same time, we have found second-hand evidence of political clientelism among the non-dominant groups in Croatia: the high levels of symbolic and practical value of political representation from the numerically negligible communities encourage ethnic voting 'closer to home', i.e. in regional or municipal elections. Participation in small scale political decision-making ushers in different electoral dynamics in these elections as compared to *Sabor* elections, as we clearly see in the case of the Roma. On the other side, we have seen that all those groups that are too numerically small to cut the threshold are likely to cast a 'civic' vote, pushing down the ratio of ethnic votes in comparison to the overall share of the ethnic population in the constituency. The lack of visible representation of Czechs and Slovaks showcases this point.

Given the negligible number of reserved seats for minority representatives and the absence of minority veto clauses, the joint running of Ukrainian and Ruthenian candidates (together with another 10 minorities) corroborates the counterfactual effects of institutionalised ethnic voting. These constituents systematically cast 'civic' ballots rather than 'ethnic' ones. Casting a ballot for a candidate standing in for the group but not being the group's representative, or being from outside one's own group is

akin to political competition where voters assess political content rather than politicised identities. Greater attention to political participation in electoral districts returning candidates whose declared ethnicity does not correspond to that of the majority of those electing them points to the gradual normalisation of political competition. Critically, this happens in spite of institutional incentives to ethnically identify for purposes of political representation. Thus, further research is needed to assess the impact of ethnic competition between the dominant groups in national, mu-

nicipal as well as minority council elections on non-dominant communities' preference to use their 'ethnic' over their 'civic' vote when institutional incentives are in place to vote over identity rather than over policy issues.

Overall, however, we have laid the groundwork for understanding how non-dominant minorities respond politically to delicate situations of post conflict ethnicisation of political processes by the dominant groups, as well as by their apparent ethnic competitors negotiating the Croat majority's nation-state building agenda.

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### **Deskriptivno predstavništvo i politička participacija: sudjelovanje nedominantnih manjina u izborima u Hrvatskoj**

**Sažetak** Niz etničkih sukoba na Zapadnom Balkanu devedesetih godina primarno je uključivao konstitutivne narode federativne jugoslavenske države: Srbe, Hrvate, Bošnjake te, kasnije, Albance i Makedonce. Etničko nasilje zahvatilo je i brojčano male skupine na zemljopisnim područjima koja su bila pogođena sukobom dominantnih etničkih skupina koje su de facto bile utemeljitelji država. Rad istražuje važnost etničkog identiteta za političku participaciju nedominantnih skupina koje su bile pogođene etnopolitičkom dinamikom dominantnih skupina u postkonfliktnoj Hrvatskoj. Analiza političke mobilizacije nedominantnih skupina u regijama koje su prethodno bile pogođene sukobom pokazuje da njihova etničko-politička mobilizacija odražava trajnu važnost politike identiteta u kontekstu vrlo etniciziranih političkih institucija koje jamče političko predstavljanje na nacionalnoj i lokalnoj razini.

**Ključne riječi** politička participacija, nedominantne manjine, lokalni izbori, postkonfliktno društvo, Hrvatska