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ETHNIC MINORITIES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POST-YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Understanding patterns of political participation of ethnic minorities is crucial for their integration within postcommunist European countries most of which are ethnically complex and with histories of conflicts. Past research on the relationship between political participation and ethnicity in the democracies has given mixed results and there seems to be a research gap in the literature regarding the patterns of political participation of minorities in postcommunist states. The present study examined differences on two measures of political participation in a representative sample of post-Yugoslav citizens. Employed data source was the South-East European Social Survey Project (SEESSP), fielded in 2003 and 2004. The SEESSP covered six former Yugoslav entities (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia). Results indicated that ethnic minorities had lower levels of electoral participation in four out of six analysed political entities, and had lower levels of party membership in three countries. In addition, a significant voter turnout gap existed among different minorities within individual countries. Finally, no major differences in motives behind political participation were found when comparing the association between authoritarian attitudes and political participation within majority and minority groups. Implications of the results are discussed.

Key words: political participation, ethnic minorities, Post-Yugoslav societies, democratization, cross-national studies.

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Introduction

Understanding patterns of political participation of ethnic minorities is crucial for their integration within postcommunist European countries most of which are ethnically complex and with histories of conflicts. Among the latter, the post-Yugoslav states have been affected by a particularly turbulent dissolution of the former state with ethnic strife and armed conflicts taking place not that long ago (Fowkes, 2002). Many areas of public attitudes of post-Yugoslav citizens have previously been studied. For instance, increases in traditionalism, authoritarianism, and related non-democratic political-cultural orientations are well documented in the first post-dissolution phase (see, for example, Flere and Molnar, 1994; Galić, 2000). These “subject” political orientations (Almond and Verba, 1963) are one of the main obstacles of democratic consolidation (Inglehart, 1997; Welzel, 2007). In addition, for democracy to live up to its name and to be truly “effective”, equality in political participation is one of its key preconditions (see Verba et al., 1995) – especially in countries with a history of recent ethnic conflicts. Despite the extensive participation literature, less is known about the ethnic gap in participation in postcommunist countries, especially in post-Yugoslav countries. The present study therefore examined differences on two measures of political participation on a representative sample of post-Yugoslav citizens. Employed data source was the South-East European Social Survey Project (SEESSP), fielded in 2003 and 2004. The SEESSP covered former Yugoslav entities (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia), with the exception of Slovenia. Our analysis of SEESSP is based on those ethnic group that yielded large enough sample sizes for statistical analyses to be carried out.

In this paper we shall deal with a general problem of minority – majority relations as to democratic political participation on the basis of data collected in 2003. The sample is very sizeable, enabling the study of individual minority populations. However, the reader should bear in mind:

- The political situation since 2003 has changed in some environments fundamentally (states have appeared and disappeared: Serbia and Montenegro have separated, Kosovo declared independence, etc.), as well as other both organic and critical developments. Some political parties have appeared, while others disappeared from the political scene. In this respect, our data are not fully up to date, but enable insight of a general nature.
- We will be dealing with numerical majorities and minorities in the individual states. This does not mean that we have entered into the

political status of the two types of groups. Their constitutional and de facto political status may differ radically: in Bosnia and Herzegovina one cannot speak of political life being based on ethnic majorities and minorities, as for the three nationalities represent 'constitutive nations', regardless of their size. The same may hold for other entities, whereas the status of Kosovo at the time was of a transitional nature.

- We have also not entered the electoral systems in the various countries, which are of special importance, although, at the time, all the observed entities had direct elections at the 'national' level, as the wording of the questionnaire went. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina one chamber was directly elected, Kosovo also had a parliament established; however Serbia and Montenegro also had a joint parliament. The collection of data coincided with the establishment of the State Union, which would transitorily have a parliament composed of delegates of the two republic member parliaments). All these details can be considered as niceties, as we are interested in the general pattern of numerical majority –minority relations in establishing democratic government.

Bearing this points in mind, bellow we first present a short description of the significance of participation within democracies, and then turn to a review of the past participation research and recent participation trends.

Recent trends in political participation

Aristotle, Rousseau, de Tocqueville, J. S. Mill and others have emphasized the importance of citizen participation, and many contemporary authors as well (Lipset, 1959; Almond and Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1971; Dalton, 1996; Barnes, 2004). Participatory democrats (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984) and democratic realists (Schumpeter, 1952; Sartori, 1987) agree that citizen participation is a central condition of democracy (Parry and Moyser, 1994: 46; also Almond and Verba, 1963; Easton, 1975; Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002). As Verba aptly put it: citizen participation is "at the heart of democracy" (Verba et al., 1995: 1). Longitudinal research regarding the participation trends has shown that changes in patterns and levels of participation have been taking place in Western and post-communist Europe in recent decades. Specifically, many studies point to a decrease in levels of voter turnout (e.g., Abramson and Aldrich, 1982; Wattenberg 1998; Gray and Caul, 2000; Macedo et al., 2005; Blais, 2007), party membership and strength of party attachment (Katz et al., 1992; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995; Dalton, 2005; Scarrow, 2007), protest activities (Bernhagen and Marsh, 2007), social participation, e.g., decrease in membership in voluntary organizations (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Putnam, 1995; 2000),

trust in politicians (Holmberg, 1999) and political/state institutions (Crozier et al., 1975; Listhaug and Wiberg, 1995; Dalton, 2004). These trends have led many authors to ask questions regarding the future of democracy (see, for instance, Kaase and Newton, 1995: ch. 7.; Macedo et al., 2005).

Previous studies on the relationship between ethnicity and political participation

Past research on the relationship between political participation and ethnicity in the western democracies has given mixed results. Specifically, some studies show that belonging to an ethnic minority is one of the key determinants of lower levels of political participation (Grigoriadis, 2006; Kam et al., 2008). In Britain, for instance, participation deficits are found among most minority groups (Sagar, 2007: 506), though interestingly, data on national elections in Britain shows that Indians report higher voter turnout than the whites (ibid.: 507). Similar results are also reported by Marsh and Kaase (1979: 119) and Bevelander and Spang (2008).

Other research, on the other hand, indicates that the ethnic minority status is not a significant predictor of political participation (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2009). Analysing political behaviour of ethnic minorities European societies, Sandovici and Listhaug (2010) used a broad index of participation and compared participation rates of ethnic and linguistic minorities with those of the ethnic majorities, employing 2002-03 European Social Survey data. Their study of 21 European countries indicated that differences between minority and majority groups »were virtually zero« on non-electoral political participation, although voting in national elections did display a gap between both groups. Similarly, Quintelier (2009) studied political participation of immigrant youth in Belgium and did not find “any significant differences between the political participation of young Belgians and that of young immigrants when controlling for other factors. He concludes that “immigrants in Belgium are relatively well integrated with respect to political participation” (2009: 933, also see Maxwell, 2010).

The studies by Sandovici and Listhaug, and other researchers indicate that different participation measures might produce different results. Indeed, participatory deficit among ethnic minorities is usually only found on the conventional political participation measures, while other, non-conventional participation acts (e.g., protest potential) are performed at the same or even at higher frequency among minority groups (see Marsh and Kaase, 1979: 119). In the present study, we opted to analyse two central indicators of conventional political participation measures

(voter turnout and party membership). While on the decline, this kind of participation is still of greatest importance for the realization of representative democracies.

In sum, building on the view that inequalities in citizen engagement undermine the representativeness of a democracy (McFarland and Thomas, 2006: 401), our goal was to investigate the participation levels in former Yugoslav republics and territories, with a special focus on ethnicity.

Study rationale and hypotheses

There is a research gap in the literature regarding the inclusion of minorities and their political voice in post-Yugoslav societies. Indeed, the majority of research still comes from western democracies, and less is known about the ethnic differences on participation measures in postcommunist countries. Among the new democracies, post-Yugoslav countries were affected by particularly turbulent dissolution of the former state from the end of 1980s onwards, with increases in traditionalism, authoritarianism, and related non-democratic political-cultural orientations (Flere and Molnar, 1992; Galić, 2000). While these kinds of political-cultural orientations have a negative impact on the democratic process and the effectiveness of democratic institutions (Welzel, 2007), inequalities in political participation by the lines of ethnic status might additionally impede the process of democratic consolidation in post-Yugoslav countries.

Based on the previous literature, we anticipated that ethnic minorities will show lower levels of conventional political participation. Specifically, we predicted (H1) that those of minority status will have lower levels of electoral participation, as well as (H2) lower party membership rates. Finally, we were interested in cultural motivation behind political participation. Specifically, we investigated the association between authoritarian value orientations and both types of political participation, though we have not specified any explicit hypothesis regarding the nature of this link.

Plan of analysis

First, sampling characteristics are presented. Then the cross-country ethnic participation differences are analysed and discussed. Finally, we conclude with an overview of the core findings, and the contributions made to understanding political participation in West Balkan countries.

Sample

The employed data for our analyses is the South-East European Social Survey Project (SEESSP), which is one of the few survey datasets that

covers all former Yugoslav republic and territories.⁴ As Simkus (2007) rightfully notes, there is a relative lack of cross-national social survey data in Europe, which geographically stems from Croatia to Albania. The main SEESSP project surveys were fielded from November 2003 to March 2004. Surveys were relatively complex, involving nationally representative samples, including a total of over 23,000 respondents, face-to-face interviews, which lasted an average of approximately 75 minutes. The whole SEESSP dataset is comprised of approximately 1,000 variables, and of 32 separate subsamples (for more information regarding the sampling method, see Simkus, 2007). SEESSP study is especially appropriate for analysis of ethnic minorities since Simkus and colleagues were particularly concerned to sample sufficient numbers of members of the larger ethnic minorities to allow good estimates of within-country ethnic group differences (Simkus, 2007: 7).

Consequently, sample sizes in present analysis are not accurate reflections of ethnic structure of the national populations. The reader should also note that only the samples for those minorities were analysed where the number of cases for each individual minority in the dataset was above $N = 80$. In the present paper sample sizes for analysed post-Yugoslav countries were as follows (aggregate $N = 18,847$): Bosnia and Herzegovina ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,786$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 3,893$), Montenegro ($N_{\text{majority}} = 558$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 1,052$), Croatia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,263$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 95$), Kosovo ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,967$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 494$), FYR Macedonia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,478$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 993$), Serbia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,456$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 812$).

Measures

The *electoral participation* was tapped by the following question: "A lot of people don't vote these days for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last national election?" (1 = Yes, 2 = No, 3 = Not eligible to vote; 4 = Don't know/No answer). Data analysis below shows the percentage of those who voted in the last national elections. Note again the possibility that respondents in certain environments were thinking of different 'national elections' than supposed by the SEESSP survey authors. In particular, respondents in Republika Srpska of the BiH may have thought of RS elections, responding Serbs in Kosovo may have thought of Serbian elections and in Serbia and Montenegro they may have thought of federal and not of republic elections. Though this is important to be clarified, it is nevertheless not absolutely relevant for us, as we

⁴ Slovenia is the only country missing in the SEESSP, but it is covered in the *European Social Survey*, which contains some items that are identical in both dataset. Slovenia was omitted from the present analysis because of its high degree of ethnic homogeneity and therefore insufficient number of cases of respondents of ethnic minority status within the ESS data.

were interested in democratic participation in general and it being related to numerical majority – minority ethnic belonging.

Party membership was tapped by the following question: “Are you an official member of a political party now?” (1 = Yes, 2 = No, 3 = Don’t know/No answer). Data analysis below shows the percentage of those who answered they are members of political parties.

Composite *authoritarianism* scale consisted of the following four Likert-type items (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree): »Homosexuals are no better than criminals and should be punished in the extreme«, »Total freedom of speech today leads to total disorganisation of society«, »There are two kinds of people in the world, the weak and the strong«, and »The most important thing for children to learn is to obey their parents«. Exploratory factor analysis indicated a one-dimensional structure of the scale, with Cronbach’s Alpha (.59) indicating sufficient scale reliability.

Results

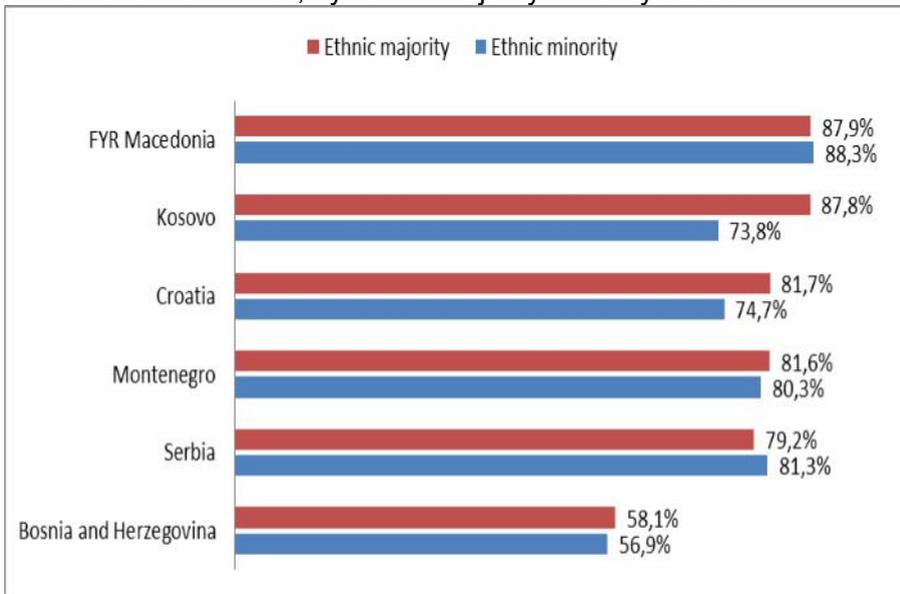
Results indicated that ethnic minorities had lower levels of electoral participation in four out of six analysed countries (Graph 1), with differences being most pronounced in Kosovo and Croatia. In both cases, we may discern a relative dissatisfaction with the position of the minorities (in both cases primarily Serbs). But the more general finding is that the participation is very high, in comparison to European findings (Sagar, 2007; Bevelander and Spang, 2008). This possibly has to do with the entities being new, ‘young’, bringing about enthusiasm, particularly on the part of the respective majorities. The lower general finding in Bosnia and Herzegovina is also understandable, as all groups are relatively dissatisfied, although from different points of view.

Smaller participation differences were found in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, in FYR Macedonia and Serbia the minorities have slightly higher turnout rates, although the difference is only marginal. In addition, results indicated that significant electoral participation differences also existed among different minorities within individual countries. Figure 2 shows the turnout rates in individual countries by majority and minority (note that only the data for those minorities is shown where the number of cases for each individual minority in the dataset was above 80).⁵ The pattern of participation gap is quite diverse in several cases. For instance, Montenegro majority has

⁵ The smallest number of cases in individual subsamples was that of Serbian minority in Croatian sample, which consisted of 95 cases. All others (non-analysed) subsamples fell well below 80 and were not analysed for methodological reasons.

higher turnout rates than Serbian minority, but smaller than Bosnian and Albanian minority (see Figure 2).

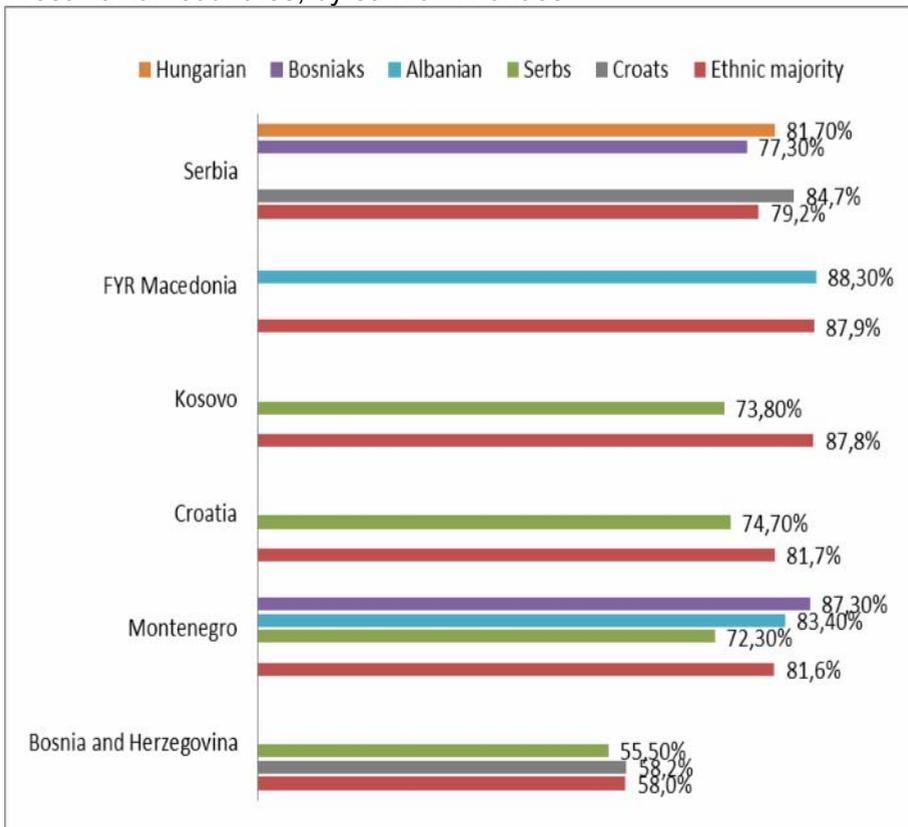
Figure 1: Share of those who "voted in the last national elections" in West Balkan countries, by ethnic majority-minority status



Data: SEESSP, 2003-2004.

Note: Sample sizes and differences in present analysis do not represent accurate reflections of ethnic structure of the populations. Only the samples for those minorities were analysed where the number of cases for each individual minority in the dataset was above was $N \geq 80$. Sample sizes for analysed post-Yugoslav countries were as follows (aggregate $N = 18,847$): Bosnia and Herzegovina ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,786$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 3,893$), Montenegro ($N_{\text{majority}} = 558$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 1,052$), Croatia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,263$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 95$), Kosovo ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,967$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 494$), FYR Macedonia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,478$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 993$), Serbia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,456$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 812$).

Figure 2: Share of those who "voted in the last national elections" in West Balkan countries, by ethnic minorities



Data: SEESSP, 2003-2004.

Note: Sample sizes and differences in present analysis do not represent accurate reflections of ethnic structure of the populations. Only the samples for those minorities were analysed where the number of cases for each individual minority in the dataset was above was $N \geq 80$. In the present paper sample sizes for analysed post-Yugoslav countries were as follows: Bosnia and Herzegovina ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,786$; $N_{\text{CRO minority}} = 1,846$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 2,047$), Montenegro ($N_{\text{majority}} = 558$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 406$; $N_{\text{ALB minority}} = 350$; $N_{\text{BOS minority}} = 296$), Croatia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,263$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 95$), Kosovo ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,967$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 494$), FYR Macedonia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,478$; $N_{\text{ALB minority}} = 993$), Serbia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,456$; $N_{\text{CRO minority}} = 270$; $N_{\text{BOS minority}} = 243$; $N_{\text{HUN minority}} = 299$).

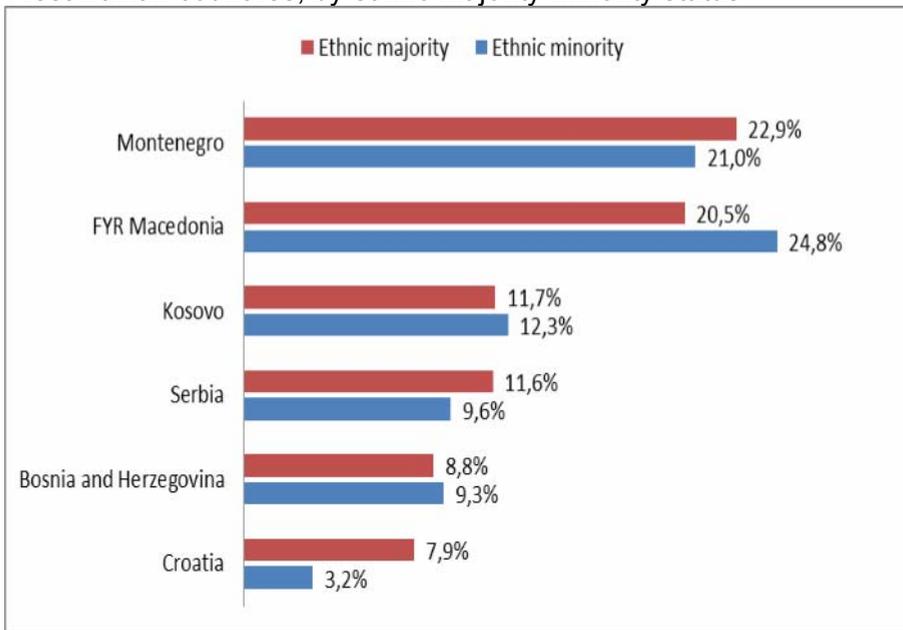
We now turn to the analysis of our second indicator of political participation – membership in a political party. The results showed a somewhat different picture regarding the minority-majority participation differences. Specifically, ethnic majorities had the highest membership rates compared to minorities only in Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia,

while in Bosnia, Kosovo and FYR Macedonia the opposite pattern can be observed (Figure 3). One could comment that participation rates of minorities were higher in those environments with lower intensity of conflict, though Croatia can be included only conditionally. In addition, the results again indicated that a significant party membership differences also existed among different minorities within individual countries (Figure 4).

The general high rates of membership in FYR Macedonia possibly had to do with the ethnic conflict, which was still present at the time of the field survey, whereas in Montenegro it has to do not only with the tradition of politicisation of Montenegrin society, but also with the forthcoming independence referendum, which necessitated a mobilisation, particularly in view of the relatively small majority in favour of the independence (which was subsequently achieved in 2006).

The party membership rates have probably more to do with the party system (whether they hold technical membership relevant, or depend on other mechanisms of drive and mobilisation). Further, the number and fragmentation of parties needs to be mentioned and contextual analysis is needed in the future research.

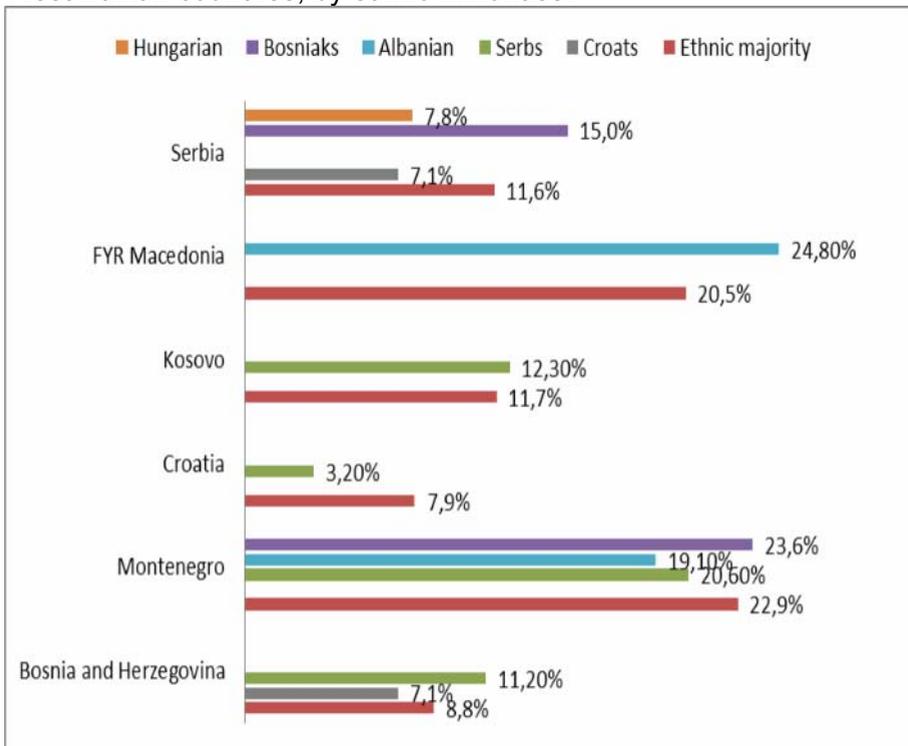
Figure 3: Share of those who are "official members of a political party" in West Balkan countries, by ethnic majority-minority status



Data: SEESSP, 2003-2004.

Note: Sample sizes and differences in present analysis do not represent accurate reflections of ethnic structure of the populations. Only the samples for those minorities were analysed where the number of cases for each individual minority in the dataset was above $N = 80$. Sample sizes for analysed post-Yugoslav countries were as follows (aggregate $N = 18,847$): Bosnia and Herzegovina ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,786$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 3,893$), Montenegro ($N_{\text{majority}} = 558$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 1,052$), Croatia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,263$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 95$), Kosovo ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,967$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 494$), FYR Macedonia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,478$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 993$), Serbia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,456$; $N_{\text{minority}} = 812$).

Figure 4: Share of those who are "official members of a political party" in West Balkan countries, by ethnic minorities.



Data: SEESSP, 2003-2004.

Note: Sample sizes and differences in present analysis do not represent accurate reflections of ethnic structure of the populations. Only the samples for those minorities were analysed where the number of cases for each individual minority in the dataset was $N \geq 80$. In the present paper sample sizes for analysed post-Yugoslav countries were as follows: Bosnia and Herzegovina ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,786$; $N_{\text{CRO minority}} = 1,846$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 2,047$), Montenegro ($N_{\text{majority}} = 558$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 406$; $N_{\text{ALB minority}} = 350$; $N_{\text{BOS minority}} = 296$), Croatia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,263$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 95$), Kosovo ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,967$; $N_{\text{SER minority}} = 494$), FYR Macedonia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 1,478$; $N_{\text{ALB minority}} = 993$), Serbia ($N_{\text{majority}} = 2,456$; $N_{\text{CRO minority}} = 270$; $N_{\text{BOS minority}} = 243$; $N_{\text{HUN minority}} = 299$).

Finally, although no major differences in motives behind political participation were found when comparing the association between authoritarian attitudes and political participation within majority and minority groups, there were some significant, although small associations. Specifically, a composite measure of authoritarianism did not correlate significantly with either of the two participation measures in majority most the subsamples, although it did for the Serbian minority

sample in Bosnia and Herzegovina (voting; $r = 0.05$; $p < 0.05$), among the Kosovo majority (party membership; $r = - 0.06$; $p < 0.01$), among Albanian minority in FYR Macedonia (party membership; $r = 0.07$; $p < 0.05$), and among Serbian majority in Serbia (party membership; $r = - 0.06$; $p < 0.01$).

Discussion and conclusion

The present study has examined the nature and extent of the ethnic differences in political participation in West Balkan countries. Based on the results of our data, hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed since uniform participation differences have not been detected (compare with Marsh and Kaase, 1979; Sagar, 2007; Bevelander and Spang, 2008; Kam et al., 2008; Maxwell, 2010). Specifically, minorities had lower levels of electoral participation in four out of six analysed samples. As already noted, participatory differences were largest in Kosovo and Croatia. Similarly, ethnic minorities had the highest membership rates comparing majorities to minorities in Bosnia, Kosovo and FYR Macedonia, which is a pattern opposite to our hypothesis 2. Again, one possible reason might be found in the nature of political parties (e.g., ethnic or even nationalist parties) that might have mobilized the citizens of ethnic minorities to join them. It is interesting that these parties were obviously not as successful at mobilizing their base at the national elections.

The finding that political participation was not found significantly associated with authoritarian value orientations indicated good future prospects for the process of democratization in West Balkan countries. In other words, if authoritarian public was the most politically involved, this could raise new kind of (old) issues and potential nationalistic and demagogic political elites might use this kind of electoral base in their advantage. Since there seems to be no such association, the future of democratic consolidation seems brighter in this sense than is frequently assumed.

Our study results have several implications for the democratization and consolidation of democracies in the Western Balkan states. It seems that minorities are not as underrepresented in political participation (excluding political “representation” in its proper sense) as in some other contexts, particularly in Western Europe and the U.S. It must be noted that our findings may be due to the recent history of ethnic conflicts, which might mobilize ethnic minorities to be especially active within conventional political participation.

Our study has several caveats, which must be mentioned. First, we have not dealt with institutional arrangements within different countries,

although it is clear that constitutional and legal provisions might play an important role in terms of political participation of minorities (see, for instance, Moser, 2004; Rechel, 2007). Neither have we dealt with the link between the presence of ethnic parties in the political system and the level of political participation of the ethnic minority (Spirova, 2004).⁶ In addition, since our analyses of SEESSP is based on those ethnic groups that yielded large enough sample sizes for statistical analyses to be carried out, we have not been able to study other ethnic minorities that are smaller in size, and their patterns of political participation might differ from the patterns found in our study. Finally, our study results might not be generalized past the observed environments, though it is evident that results may have implications for wider geopolitical region.

Despite of these shortcomings, our results nevertheless indicate that some differences in political participation exist in relation to ethnic majority-minority status, though these differences are relatively small, and not always in the expected direction. We agree with Sandovici (2006) who notes that "...in the long run it is likely that the viability of the European Union will depend on its ability to integrate not only all nation states, but all ethnic groups in one polity. This would imply that the social, economic, and political exclusion of ethnic minority groups is reduced or eliminated."

Authors of the present papers also believe that more focus should be given to creation of public policy provisions facilitating participation of excluded groups at the national levels and at the EU level with the aim of reducing participatory inequalities, for both ethnic minorities and other sociodemographic groups (e.g., women, youth, rural dwellers, population segments with low socioeconomic status, etc.).

⁶ In post-conflict societies, »voter support for parties willing to engage in cross-ethnic cooperation is particularly crucial for the success of democratisation, the prevention of communal violence, and regional stability« (Pickering, 2009: 565-566).

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