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Cleavages Under Communism: Voters and Elections in Bosnia & Hercegovina, 1978–1990

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Abstract

Scholarship on political divisions under communism remains limited. We used the data from Bosnia & Hercegovina's last three non-democratic and the first democratic elections in the period 1978–1990 to expose the sources of support for the communist regime. Our analysis demonstrates that the pattern of communists' local power had little to do with the economy, but was instead determined by ethnicity, education and exposure to World War II violence. This is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the social foundations of communist regimes, the enduring political impact of war violence and the collapse of Yugoslavia into interethnic conflict.

THE LITERATURE ON LIFE UNDER COMMUNISM IS VAST and still expanding in virtually all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Despite the understandable decline of interest in the years after the end of the Cold War, the desire to explain the interaction between individuals, their communities and the one-party state is likely to remain strong. At this point, we understand that societies under communism were not monolithic. After all, we know that there were dissidents. We know that communist states put millions into prisons and gulags, often without cause, but often also because of views, held by individuals or groups, that were seen as a threat to the system (Applebaum 2012). We know that millions were surveilled because of perceived threats to the system (Pucci 2020). We also have the various official statistics on the social stratification of

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membership of the various communist parties.[1] However, we lack systematic analyses of the social foundations of divisions or cleavages within the communist systems. Who supported and who opposed the communist regime, and where? What were the determinants of the strength of communist parties in local communities? Can our understanding of the relationship between voters and political office holders in democracies be applied to communist polities?

These questions still lack systematic answers backed by solid data analysis. The reason for this partly lies in theory and the highly influential school of thought that saw communist societies as being simultaneously atomised and homogenised due to the influence of the state, which had destroyed the institutions of civil society (Evans 2006). This view also permeated the studies of early political competition in postcommunist Eastern Europe, where interests and political preferences were seen as amorphous and poorly articulated, and the voters were perceived as disoriented (or rather, more oriented towards the state, as opposed to the structures of civil society or political parties) largely due to the communist regimes' efforts to erase social structures and identities (Bernhard 1993; Lewis 1993; Ost 1993). These questions also remain open for practical reasons: the lack of reliable data on the social foundations of support for and strength of communist parties beyond the various official aggregate-level statistics, as well as the lack of opportunities for the citizens of communist countries to meaningfully express their views about the system they were living under. In other words, our understanding of cleavages under communism is limited because citizens had few opportunities to make those cleavages apparent.

Obviously, the citizens lacked such opportunities because of the nature of elections under communism and the lack of any organised political opposition that could present an alternative. Elections in communist countries have been rightfully perceived as a sham, whose purpose was a form of social control where voters were forced to legitimise the system by partaking in a clearly fraudulent process with no real choice (Zaslavsky & Brym 1978; Karklins 1986). While we agree with this assessment, we believe that some data related to the elections under communism can offer valuable insights into the nature of this system of government, the social sources of its strength and weakness, and the character of the relationship between the ruling party and the citizenry.

Other scholars have in the past looked at turnout figures in the communist countries—as flawed and as artificially inflated as they were—as useful datapoints (Shi 1999). We take a different approach. We use the data on the presence of members of the League of Communists of Bosnia & Hercegovina (*Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine*—SKBiH) among individuals elected to municipal representative bodies in three elections (1978, 1982 and 1986) on the level of more than a hundred municipalities of former Yugoslavia's central republic. We complement those data with the data on the results of Bosnia & Hercegovina's first democratic (and last pre-war) elections of 1990, and we pair them with a wealth of economic and sociodemographic data, including data on the geographic pattern of the severe violence Bosnia & Hercegovina experienced during World War II.

[1]For example, Rigby (1968) and Vušković (1984).

Our analysis convincingly shows that the pattern of strength of and support for the SKBiH during the period of late and ultimately collapsing socialism had little to do with any economic factors, even though the geographic distribution of Yugoslavia's economic crisis was highly unequal. Instead, it was critically determined by the population's ethnic makeup and distribution, education, and—crucially—the level and nature of exposure to World War II violence. Our article makes a valuable contribution to the literature in three important ways. First, it exposes the social foundations of the communist regimes and sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the ruling parties and the people. Second, it contributes to our understanding of the deeply pervasive and long-lasting political legacies of war violence even in single-party regimes. Finally, it improves our understanding of late socialism in former Yugoslavia and the country's descent into interethnic violence.

Political divisions and sources of regime support in communism

The recent spread of hybrid regimes and electoral authoritarianism has sparked new interest in various forms of competition in non-democratic politics. While this literature has convincingly shown us that the institutions we generally consider essential to democracies —such as representative bodies, political parties and elections—also play important roles in (semi-) authoritarian regimes (Brancati 2014), our understanding of the social, economic and political foundations of deep popular divisions under such regimes is still rather limited. This is not only the case with the studies of the more recent hybrid regimes, but also with the vast literature on the domestic politics in the communist countries of the second half of the twentieth century.

Some may say that any talk of political cleavages in such systems of government is misplaced. After all, if we consider cleavages to be 'strongly structured and persistent lines of salient social and ideological division among politically important actors' (Whitefield 2002, p. 181), and we know that for long periods of time, many communist countries had virtually no 'politically important actors' beyond the organisations of the ruling system, can we even speak of cleavages in the classical sense? We believe that we can and should. Political life under communist regimes was defined by the question of who the supporters and the opponents of the ruling party were. The opposition was often not organised due to the repressive apparatus of the ruling regime. For our discussion of political cleavages under communism, however, the fact that the level of support for and opposition to the ruling party among the general population was not uniformly distributed is far more important than the (lack of) existence of an organised opposition.

In some ways, this view goes against one prominent school of thought about political life under communism: the so-called 'mass society' interpretation of social and political relations in communist countries (Kornhauser 1959). According to this view, the destruction of various organisations of civil society by communist regimes atomised societies, erasing social identities and collectivising individuals into an amorphous mass with direct relations to the state, which had been hijacked by the ruling party. Any articulation of interests on the level of individual communities or different social strata was deemed as either ephemeral or simply pointless (Evans 2006). This 'totalitarian model' of domestic politics under communism (Przeworski 1999, p. 2) did not see true

conflict in communist societies as even possible because the system was based on repression and dogmatic allegiance to the ruling party. Unsurprisingly, this view (of course, without the focus on regime dogma and repression) was also popular with many social scientists loyal to the regime. As one of them put it, 'aside from working people there is no one else in a socialist society' (Volkov 1973, p. 51).

In contrast to this view of political life under communism, many scholars saw the societies behind the Iron Curtain undergoing transformations similar to those experienced by Western societies. Economic and educational modernisation and urbanisation were seen as giving rise to the new communist middle class, with its own goals and demands, that did not necessarily sit well with the traditional focus of Marxist parties on the proletariat. Buoyed by the results of new research by local social scientists who were allowed to seek answers to many (though not all) questions related to social stratification during the period of destalinisation (Lipset 1973), as well as by the figures of the communist parties themselves on party membership among different occupational and ethnic groups (Rigby 1968), these scholars created a picture of communist polities marked by class differences resembling those in democratic societies. What mattered was, obviously, access to political power, which was, increasingly, available only to those who satisfied certain occupational and educational criteria. This was a much broader extension of what the famous Yugoslav communist revolutionary and later dissident Milovan Đilas (1957) termed as 'the new class' of communist functionaries, managers, administrators and ideologues. Basically, in contrast to those who saw life under communism dominated by the 'mass society' of working people, modernisation theorists saw it structured around social groups defined in economic, occupational and educational terms.

The gist of the problem in establishing the nature of political cleavages in communist societies lies in the fact that the people simply did not have avenues to express their views freely. Elections under communism were commonly and rightfully considered a sham. Most Western scholars of the period simply ignored them or considered them meaningless (Dinka & Skidmore 1973). At face value, how could they not? Communist elections were either plebiscitary (that is, the number of candidates was equal to the number of seats) or limited choice (the number of candidates, all chosen by the party, was slightly higher than the number of seats), and they featured extreme social and institutional pressures on the citizens to vote (Pravda 1978).

These elections did, however, serve important purposes in the functioning of the communist system of government. They helped the regime mobilise the population, partly through a wave of propaganda and indoctrination, and partly through minor bargaining between office holders and the electorate (Zaslavsky & Brym 1978). They also helped the regime identify and recruit new cadres and provided a regimented institutional avenue for the replenishment of personnel. The highest communist functionaries were obviously not elected by the people, but the economic policy cycles in communist countries of Eastern Europe demonstrated that these functionaries understood their need to placate the general population and their different constituencies (Bunce 1980). The elections were a tool in that process.

However, even if previous scholars understood the importance of and the role played by the electoral process under communism, the problem of the lack of reliable data remained. Some researchers chose to focus on the figures for turnout in different regions as signifiers of

the potential for dissent. To which extent one could draw any conclusions from 'the missing one percent' on such a high level of aggregation is questionable (Gilison 1968). Others tried to decipher larger trends related to voting in communist elections from surveys of Soviet emigrants, but the obvious bias of such samples made the empirical reach of any conclusions very limited (Karklins 1986). These understandable problems with data availability, together with the nature of communist elections and the lack of avenues for the free expression of views, as well as the theoretical approaches to the study of communist politics that saw either no possibility for true social divisions or identified stratification largely based on economic/workforce criteria, all resulted in an incomplete view of domestic politics and social cleavages under communism.

Unsurprisingly, this line of thinking about politics and social structures under communism was hugely influential on the early theorising about postcommunist cleavages and electoral competition. Scholars of the so-called 'tabula rasa' school of thought saw the interests and political preferences of voters in early transition as easily malleable and poorly articulated, and the political parties as weakly institutionalised, ideologically inconsistent and inadequately embedded in social structures, all largely on account of communist regimes' supposedly successful campaigns against popular identities (Bernhard 1993; Lewis 1993; Ost 1993). Relatedly, other scholars believed that the early experiences of transition to capitalism—that is, who 'won' and who 'lost' from the process of social and economic transformation from socialism—would dominate at least the initial period of postcommunist politics (Kitschelt 1992). As the region experienced wave after wave of elections, however, it soon became clear that postcommunist voters were not an amorphous body and that the slate of social and political identities had not been wiped clean by more than four decades of communism. Public identification with parties was proven to be relatively strongly structured (Miller *et al*. 1998) and voters demonstrated a reasonably high level of not only political identity but also economic rationality in their choice (Pacek 1994).

This resulted in more complex views of early postcommunist cleavages that first included ethnic identities and questions of statehood (Evans & Whitefield 1993), and then expanded to reflect the social, political and economic legacies of three distinct periods in the evolution of East European societies: the interwar period of flawed democracies; the long period of communist rule; and the most recent experiences of transition to democracy (Whitefield 2002). In a particularly influential study that typified this line of research, Kitschelt *et al*. (1999) proposed that postcommunist politics were determined by the historical legacies of both pre-World War II and post-World War II regimes, with the decisive factors being the differing levels of clientelism/corruption of the interwar state apparatuses and the strategies of the communist regimes to maintain rule either through co-optation or repression.

Interestingly, and curiously, none of the models of postcommunist cleavages accounted for anything related to the actual experiences of World War II violence or the patterns of resistance and collaboration. Of course, this is not unique to the studies of political cleavages in postcommunist Eastern Europe but can also be observed in the studies focused on Western Europe, where the narratives of political competition, party development and cleavage structures often simply skip over the most violent period in the history of the continent. This is unfortunate as new research shows the long-lasting

political legacies of violence from this period in both Eastern and Western Europe. Costalli and Ruggeri (2019), for example, show the positive impact of the strength of communist resistance during World War II in Italy on the communists' postwar electoral fortunes, while Rozenas *et al*. (2017) show the long-lasting impact of the legacy of Stalinist violence on postcommunist electoral loyalties in western Ukraine. All of this suggests that our understanding of political divisions during communism (as well as during transition and beyond) are at best incomplete.

Politics in Bosnia & Hercegovina during late Yugoslav socialism

In many ways, Bosnia & Hercegovina represented the heart of socialist Yugoslavia. It was a multicultural, multiconfessional, multiethnic republic in the centre of a similarly multicultural, multiconfessional and multiethnic federation. It was also the site of virtually all the major World War II battles that the communist partisan resistance movement survived and, ultimately, won. Bosnia & Hercegovina was the essential element of the Yugoslav myth that the communist revolution was rooted in the brotherhood and unity of its peoples. Deconstructing this myth, however, reveals some very important and necessary qualifications. First, prior to World War II, communists were a nearly non-existent force in Bosnia & Hercegovina, with members and sympathisers counting at most in the hundreds (Banac 1984). Second, the biggest battles of the partisan movement may have taken place on the territory of Bosnia & Hercegovina, but most of the partisans who were fighting in these battles came from other lands of the South Slav kingdom destroyed by the Axis. And third, the distribution of support for the communists during World War II was not uniform. All three of the largest ethnic communities—Serbs, Muslims and Croats—were internally split among those who supported the partisans, those who supported one of the collaborationist outfits, and those who simply wished to stay on the sidelines. However, the level of support for the partisans was much higher among the Serbs, who were targeted by the extreme violence of the Croatian collaborationist Ustaša regime. Bosnia & Hercegovina during World War II was not just one theatre of a global conflict, but also the site of a particularly bloody civil war fought among the members of the three largest ethnic groups.[2]

After the war, Bosnia & Hercegovina quickly became the most disciplined republic in the new communist regime, though not for lack of popular opposition. The communist party leadership and membership were disproportionately Serb, and the party apparatus struggled mightily to gain any support in the many Muslim and particularly Croat communities that had supported the other side during the war (Shoup 1968, p. 121). For the first two postwar decades, Bosnia & Hercegovina was run by the generation of revolutionary leaders who derived legitimacy from their war records. The most obvious consequences of this were the vast ethnic disparities in access to power and elite status in all aspects of the republic's political life (Cohen 1989, p. 304). As Titoism took a

[2]Yugoslavia conducted a census of World War II victims in 1964. Only 18% of the victims from Bosnia & Hercegovina identified in that census died as resistance fighters; 82% died as civilians. Most tellingly, in only 5.6% of cases were the perpetrators identified as external occupying forces (Germans and Italians); 39.1% of the victims died at the hands of local—Croat, Serb or Muslim—forces (Savezni zavod za statistiku 1966).

moderate turn after Yugoslavia's break with Stalin in 1948, Bosnia & Hercegovina became the hard version of this soft totalitarianism (Andjelic 2003, p. 49) with the strongest growth in party membership in all of Yugoslavia, especially among the youngest generations. Ethnic disparities in political power were alleviated over time, though not as much in party membership as in the party leadership, which became more reflective of the republic's ethnic makeup.[3]

Elections under Yugoslav socialism—despite idiosyncrasies such as its greater openness or the system of workers' self-management—played a very similar role to those in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. In the evolution of elections under the Yugoslav ruling regime after World War II, we can identify three distinct periods: elections overtly directed by the party between 1948 and 1963; experimentation with semi-pluralism between 1963 and the promulgation of the 1974 constitution, which substantially decentralised the country; and the so-called delegate system from 1974 until the final collapse of socialism in 1990 (Seroka & Smiljković 1986). The delegate system under scrutiny in this article was instituted after a decade-long attempt by the regime to make the elections partially competitive, but with the candidates obviously still loyal to the ruling party. This experiment, however, failed embarrassingly as many local electoral competitions—particularly in Serbia—turned towards both nationalism and neo-Stalinist dogmatism, prompting the chief ideologue of the Yugoslav political system, Edvard Kardelj, to call for 'guided' nominating procedures, lest things devolved into 'anarchy' (Carter 1982, pp. 137–50).

The system that was developed to prevent this 'anarchy' could best be understood as a multilayered system of indirect political representation. Voters could ostensibly influence the electoral process at two stages, both at the local/municipal level. First, they were supposed to participate in nominating councils in their workplaces and precincts. These councils served as a form of primaries and determined the lists of candidates for municipal assemblies (*Skupštine općina*—SO), the local delegations of the various sociopolitical communities of the socialist system (*Društvenopolitičke zajednice*—DPZ) and the workers' delegations of the different sectors of the self-management economy (*Samoupravne interesne zajednice*—SIZ). The second form of voter influence was at the local level of elections where, every four years, they could vote for or against these lists of candidates.

In practice, however, the nominating councils were to varying degrees dominated by the local branches of the ruling party. Crucially, though, that domination was not uniformly distributed throughout the republic. In the three elections we examine in this article (1978, 1982, 1986), the municipal SIZ delegations had on average 44.9% of its delegates from the SKBiH, with the minimum figure being 21.4% and the maximum 75.9%. For the municipal DPZ delegations, the average was 53.2%, the minimum 28.5% and the maximum 86.6%. These figures were the highest for the municipal assemblies: 75.7% was the average, 38.8% the minimum and 95.4% the maximum (Republički zavod za statistiku 1979, 1983, 1987a).

[3]In 1981, the ratio of proportion in the SKBiH membership over proportion in the republic's population was still only 0.66 for Croats, 0.96 for Muslims and 1.29 for Serbs (Vušković 1984, p. 130).

Once the local assemblies and delegations were elected, their representatives then 'delegated' from within their ranks the deputies (almost uniformly members of the ruling party) to the assemblies of the republics, who then subsequently 'delegated' from within their ranks the deputies to the federal assembly (Seroka & Smiljković 1986, p. 194). This complicated system was designed to protect the privileged position of the party within the system, while at the same time providing legitimacy by involving as much of the society as possible in a semi-permanent form of political activism where every working person was supposed to serve as a delegate at some point.[4]

The ruling party initially put great faith in the delegate system. In the run-up to the 1978 elections, Yugoslavia's leader Josip Broz Tito said there were those who thought the parliamentary system was better but that this 'scepticism needed to be crushed'.[5] Tito's death in 1980, however, marked the onset of a deep socioeconomic crisis, with the communist elites of the federation's six republics and two autonomous provinces quarrelling over seemingly every major political issue: from the conditions in the province of Kosovo, through the hotly debated constitutional reforms, to the various attempts at reining in rampant inflation and fixing the country's deep economic problems (Burg 1986).

The notoriously inefficient Yugoslav enterprises crumbled under the pressures of the continental economic malaise of the early 1980s (Palairet 1997). Crucially, however, the crisis did not affect all parts of Yugoslavia equally, with the less developed regions —including large parts of Bosnia & Hercegovina—being particularly hard hit and their populations less able to cope with the dramatic decline in the standard of living (Kukić 2020). The response of the Bosnian communist elites to the economic downturn and the real and imagined challenges of the post-Tito era was characteristically firm. Although unemployment rose strongly in the republic—particularly among younger generations (Woodward 1995)—and the large industrial enterprises struggled to stave off insolvency, party organisers kept the workers at bay for the better part of the decade. Unlike in the rest of the federation, strikes in Bosnia & Hercegovina took off only in 1987 (Vladisavljević 2008, p. 112) and the system made it clear how it would deal with dissidents in a string of show trials in 1983 and 1984 (Andjelic 2003, p. 45).

By the 1986 elections, however, the shortcomings and outright failures of both the Yugoslav economy and the delegate system were patently obvious. Many municipal organisations failed to even report on the conduct of the nominating councils (Šarac 1986) and those that did report suggested that the level of public engagement ranged from low to non-existent.[6] People simply realised that the delegate system did not lead to any real policy impact (Musić 2021). Despite massive mobilising efforts by the ruling party, turnout figures in 1986 for the first time dipped below 90%, even though the electoral rules were changed so that now there were more candidates than seats, and voters could vote for individual candidates rather than whole lists.

[4]'Todo Kurtović: Svaki čovjek mora da se "obrće" u izboru', *Oslobođenje*, 18 March 1982.
[5]'Komunisti moraju biti motorna snaga u Socijalističkom Savezu', *Oslobođenje*, 2 February 1978.
[6]'Kako stići do baze', *Oslobođenje*, 22 February 1986.

After the 1986 elections, Yugoslavia plunged into an even deeper crisis. The federation was split between two camps with diametrically opposite views of what reforms were needed. On the one end was Serbia under Slobodan Milošević, with his platform for the recentralisation of Serbia and Yugoslavia, as well as a firmer commitment to a more streamlined socialist economy. On the other end was Slovenia, with its calls for the decentralisation of the federation and economic openness to the West. The Bosnian communist elite found itself stuck between a rock and a hard place. Milošević's campaign of marrying Serb nationalism and socialism was hugely popular among the SKBiH's Serb rank and file but alienated other ethnic groups and threatened the hard-earned equality of Bosnia & Hercegovina with its neighbours. More important, it undermined the very foundations of interethnic harmony in the republic because Serbia's intellectual elites and media, which were in Milošević's pocket, actively worked to transform the dominant narrative of multinational resistance during World War II and instead focused on the suffering of Serbs at the hands of other ethnic groups (Dragović-Soso 2002; Vujačić 2015; Glaurdić & Mochtak 2022).

Bosnia & Hercegovina's communist leadership, newly installed after the massive Agrokomerc scandal took down many (almost uniformly Muslim) functionaries in the SKBiH in 1987, tried to keep the middle ground for the better part of the late 1980s. Ultimately, however, it veered too close to Milošević's camp and thus alienated many centrists and liberals in its ranks (Muharemović 2024). This happened even though the SKBiH leadership offered strong support to the liberalising economic reforms of the federal Prime Minister Ante Marković (himself of Bosnian Croat origin), which did lead to some promising results in the spring and summer of 1990. In the first democratic elections held in the autumn of 1990, the League of Communists suffered a catastrophic loss to the three nationalist parties representing the three largest ethnic groups—the Muslim Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije*—SDA), the Serb Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka*—SDS) and the Croat Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*—HDZ). What made the loss even more complete was the split on the left end of the spectrum, where many SKBiH liberals defected to the Alliance of Reformist Forces (*Savez reformskih snaga Jugoslavije*—SRSJ), the newly formed party of Marković (Glaurdić *et al*. 2024). After the elections, the three nationalist parties formed a tenuous coalition that soon collapsed, in tandem with the breakdown of the Yugoslav federation and the country's descent into war, which was particularly brutal in Bosnia & Hercegovina.

Empirical expectations in the Bosnian context

Considering this historical context and our understanding of the theoretical literature on politics under communism, we set out three sets of empirical expectations. First, much has been made of the significance of inequalities in the levels of economic development and performance in former Yugoslavia (Kukić 2020), particularly when it comes to unemployment (Woodward 1995). These inequalities went beyond short-term performance and were, in fact, firmly embedded in the structure of the local economy. While we recognised the importance of the overall economic crisis for the evolution of political conflict in Yugoslavia and the ultimate outbreak of violence, we were sceptical

of the importance of economic factors in the pattern of support for the League of Communists, as we could see legitimate arguments being made for the communists being stronger in both economically propulsive and depressed areas. Moreover, past research has shown economic factors to be poor predictors of the level of support for the SRSJ in the 1990 elections throughout the four republics where it fielded candidates (Glaurdić *et al*. 2024). We thus remained agnostic about the importance of differences in economic development and performance; however, we were keen to establish their relevance as it directly answers an important and influential literature on late socialism in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe in general.

Similarly, our second set of empirical expectations concerned the structures of the local economies. Data on party membership in Yugoslavia and in countries behind the Iron Curtain clearly suggested significant differences in the penetration of the ruling party into various strata of the workforce with particular weakness in agriculture rooted in the historically conflictual relationship the communists had with farmers virtually everywhere (Rigby 1968; Malenica *et al*. 1984). Workforce composition was also found to be an important determinant of the geographic pattern of party support in other early postcommunist elections, as in East Germany (Kopstein & Richter 1992). Moreover, political and economic life in late Yugoslav socialism revolved around the conflict between 'productive' (industry) and 'non-productive' (administration) sectors of the economy (Musić 2021), and the populist campaign of Slobodan Milošević himself was unofficially known as the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' (Vladisavljević 2008; Grdešić 2019). Our expectations were that Bosnian communists were stronger in areas with larger segments of government administrative workforce and weaker in areas with a larger proportion of agricultural workers.

Finally, our third set of empirical expectations concerned the sociodemographic makeup of local communities. Here our focus was on three sets of variables. First, past research has found Yugoslav identity to be closely related to both communist party membership and the level of support for Yugoslavia's socialist system. It was also closely related to respondents' urban status and higher level of education, since urban environments served as points of interethnic contact and the better educated found the supranational character of Yugoslavism more appealing (Sekulić *et al*. 1994; Kukić 2023). We wished to establish the extent to which the pattern of support for the communists was also related to these criteria. Our expectation was that the communists would be stronger and perform better in areas with more urban and better educated populations.

Second, as already noted, the League of Communists' own data show disparities in the levels of party membership among the different ethnic groups. We wished to expose the extent to which these trends manifested themselves in the geographic pattern of support for the party. Here we primarily believed that the level of communists' strength would be negatively related to the proportion of Croats and positively related to the proportion of Serbs in the local population, since the proportion of Muslims with SKBiH membership during this period closely corresponded to their proportion in the general population. We expected that the effect for Serbs was unlikely to be valid in the 1990 elections, considering the dramatic rise of the nationalist Serb Democratic Party that year and the split within the Bosnian Serb community between those who remained loyal to the ruling party and those who fully shifted to the openly nationalist platform.

Furthermore, we were interested not only in the impact of ethnic identity but also that of ethnic distribution and balance. Past research on the 1990 elections in the Yugoslav republics found the votes for leftwing candidates to be positively related to ethnic fractionalisation (as a measure of ethnic diversity) and negatively related to ethnic polarisation (as a measure of interethnic competition) (Kapidžić 2014; Glaurdić *et al*. 2024). Moreover, historically speaking, communists were known to do better in ethnically diverse communities (Kopstein & Wittenberg 2003). We wished to test these propositions in the context of Bosnia & Hercegovina's non-democratic and first democratic elections as well. We expected that support for the communists would be positively related to ethnic fractionalisation and negatively related to ethnic polarisation.

Lastly, we sought to establish the relationship between the communities' exposure to World War II violence and the level of support for the communists. As noted above, World War II in Bosnia & Hercegovina was a complicated mixture of global conflict and civil war among the three ethnic communities. The dominant narrative of the communist regime was that the war was both a revolution and the triumph of a multiethnic partisan force against the occupiers and their local nationalist collaborators. This narrative, however, was transformed in the late 1980s by the Serbian intellectual elite and media into one of conflict where the Serbs were the primary victims whose suffering for the revolution and victory was not properly rewarded. As the chief ideologue of Serbian nationalism during this period, the writer Dobrica Ćosić, put it, the Serbs had been courageous in war but humiliated in peace (Dragović-Soso 2002, p. 92). Considering this context, and the salience of the pattern of communist resistance in post-World War II elections in places such as Italy (Costalli & Ruggeri 2019), we expected the level of support for the communists to be proportional to the local strength of partisan resistance. We were also keen to establish the relationship between the level of intercommunal war violence directed at the civilian populations and the level of support for the communists. Here our expectation was primarily that this aspect of Bosnia & Hercegovina's World War II experience had become salient in the 1990 elections, in tandem with the campaign to change the dominant narrative of the communist regime. To be specific, we expected that the legacy of interethnic violence would have begun to have a negative effect on support for leftwing candidates following the explosion of nationalism at the turn of the decade and in the run-up to the breakdown of the Yugoslav federation and war, conditions in which competition among the three ethnic communities became more relevant.

Data and methods

Our analysis relies on a comprehensive set of political, economic and sociodemographic data for Bosnia & Hercegovina's 109 municipalities in the period 1975–1990. Due to the fundamental differences between the non-democratic elections in 1978, 1982 and 1986 on the one side, and the first democratic elections in 1990 on the other, we separated our analysis into two parts. In the first part, dealing with the non-democratic elections, our dependent variable was the proportion of the three sets of municipal bodies—municipal assemblies (SO), delegations of the self-management communities (SIZ) and the delegations of the sociopolitical communities of the ruling system (DPZ)—that was filled

by the members of the League of Communists. Although voters under communism did not have avenues to freely express their views, it was possible for candidates from outside the ruling party to be elected to these three sets of municipal bodies, and we exploited this variation to gauge the level of support for the League of Communists.

As noted above, the composition of these various local bodies was *de facto* determined in the nominating procedures for the 1978 and 1982 elections, with things changing slightly in the 1986 elections when the nominating procedures could finally generate more candidates than the seats they were running for. Nonetheless, even in those elections there were still only 13,973 official candidates for the 10,369 seats in the municipal assemblies (Republički zavod za statistiku 1987b, p. 60). While the proportion of these municipal bodies filled by the SKBiH members should be seen primarily as a sign of the strength of the local party organisations, they can also be considered as signs of local popular support for the League of Communists or the system in general.

In the second part of our analysis, which dealt with the first democratic elections in 1990, the dependent variable is the proportion of the vote won by the leftwing lists of the League of Communists of Bosnia & Hercegovina and its allies,[7] as well as Marković's SRSJ in the elections for the republic's Chamber of Citizens that were conducted under proportional representation rules. We made that methodological choice for two reasons. First, we believed the elections for this Chamber were the closest approximation of the actual level of popular support for any party due to their PR rules. Second, we pooled the votes for all leftwing lists because the SRSJ, in many respects, represented the liberal splinter wing of the ruling party in Bosnia & Hercegovina (Glaurdić *et al*. 2024). As a robustness check, we performed the same analyses using just the votes for the SKBiH and its direct allies. Figure 1 shows our dependent variables mapped out across Bosnia & Hercegovina's 109 municipalities.

In both parts of our analysis, we used the same sets of explanatory variables. They can be split into three groups, following our three sets of empirical expectations. The first group was composed of ten sociodemographic variables. The variables 'Activity', 'Average age', 'Urban' and 'Education' represent the proportion of the municipal population in the electoral year that was economically active, the average age of the municipal population, the proportion of the municipal population living in urban dwellings, and the average years of education of the municipal population older than 15 years of age, all calculated using the 1981 and the 1991 census figures.

Capturing the impact of ethnicity in the context of Bosnia & Hercegovina was not easy, primarily due to the strong political determination of ethnic identification as Yugoslav during this period; that is, ethnic identification as 'Yugoslav' was a reasonable proxy for supporters of the ruling system or even members of the League of Communists (Sekulić *et al*. 1994; Kukić 2023). This trend was arguably amplified in the 1991 census, as it was conducted after the 1990 elections, so Yugoslav identification was a political statement of an even

[7]In the 1990 elections, the organisations of the socialist system, in addition to the SKBiH, also ran candidates under the banner of the Democratic Alliance of Socialists (*Demokratski savez socijalista*—DSS) and the Alliance of Socialist Youth (*Savez socijalističke omladine*—SSO) (Glaurdić & Muharemović 2023).

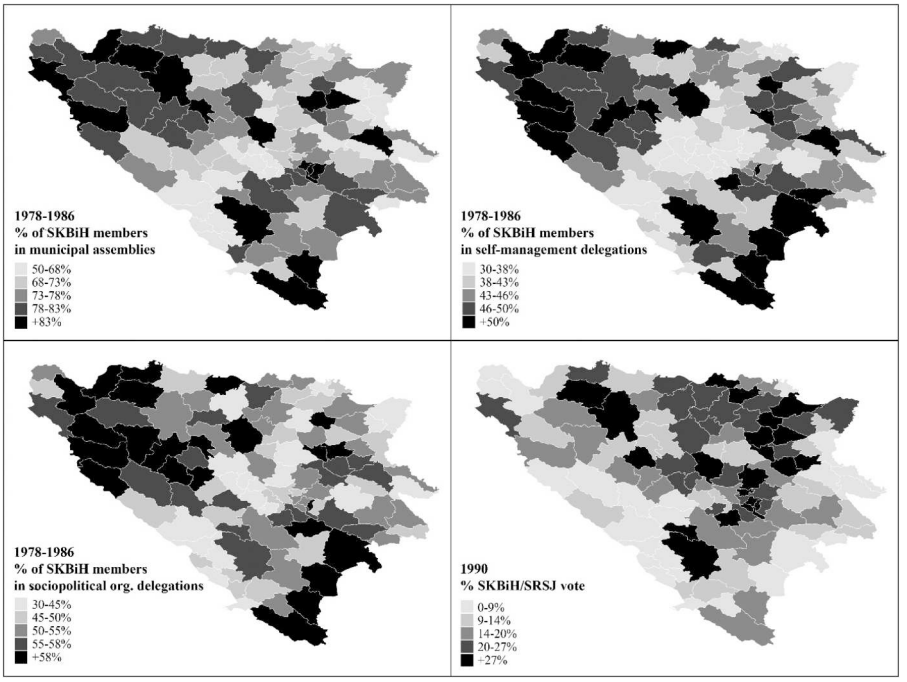

FIGURE 1. SKBiH MEMBERS IN REPRESENTATIVE BODIES 1978–1986 AND VOTE FOR THE LEFT IN 1990

greater magnitude. We therefore captured the possible impact of ethnic identification on the pattern of SKBiH representation and support with four variables derived from the 1981 census: 'Croats', 'Serbs', 'EFI' and 'EPI'. The first two variables captured the proportions of municipal populations identifying themselves as Croats and Serbs: two ethnic communities disproportionally underrepresented (in the case of Croats) and overrepresented (in the case of Serbs) in the ranks of SKBiH membership.[8] We also included the indices of ethnic fractionalisation (EFI) and ethnic polarisation (EPI) guided by the literatures on ethnic conflict and elections (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol 2005; Esteban & Ray 2011; Esteban *et al*. 2012; Kapidžić 2014). EFI can be considered a measure of ethnic diversity, and EPI a measure of ethnic competition.

Lastly, we modelled the heritage of World War II with two variables: 'World War II dead partisans' and 'World War II dead civilians'. Both variables were derived from the census of war victims Yugoslavia conducted in 1964 (Savezni zavod za statistiku 1966) and represent the natural log-transformed number of resistance fighters or civilians who died in World

[8]Including any configuration of individual ethnic groups into models is laden with issues because it implies that the excluded ethnic groups act as reference groups. We found this configuration with Croats and Serbs to be the least problematic as they were both under- and overrepresented in SKBiH membership, unlike the Muslims. Nevertheless, we also performed all analyses with different ethnic group configurations as robustness checks, and we report the results below.

War II per 1,000 municipal inhabitants. We believe these two figures capture two separate, though obviously related, legacies of World War II violence. The variable 'World War II dead partisans' captured the legacy of communities' resistance and commitment to the partisan movement led during World War II by the Communist Party and its charismatic leader, Josip Broz Tito. The variable 'World War II dead civilians' captured the legacy of violence and suffering perpetrated against the civilians most often by the members of the other local ethnic groups in the gruesome civil war that took place at the same time as the global conflict played out in the region. Figure 2 presents these two variables mapped onto Bosnia & Hercegovina's municipalities.

In addition to the variables capturing the sociodemographic characteristics of municipalities, we also tested for possible effects of the health and structure of the local economy on our dependent variables of interest. We captured the state of the municipal economy with five variables: 'Private sector', representing the proportion of the workforce employed in the private sector in the electoral year; 'Unemployment'; and 'Personal income', 'Investments' and 'Social spending', representing the average monthly *per capita* values for salaries, public sector investments and public spending on education, health and social services during the preceding electoral term (1975–1977, 1979–1981, 1983–1985 and 1987–1989), all deflated to 1980 levels and natural log-transformed. Finally, following studies on the effects of workforce structure on the patterns of electoral support during this period (for example, Kopstein & Richter 1992; Glaurdić *et al*. 2024) and the fact that there were serious discrepancies in the levels of SKBiH membership in different sectors of the economy (Malenica *et al*. 1984), we captured the composition of municipal workforce using the data tallied by the Federal Bureau of Statistics in each electoral year and used 'Industry' as the reference category in our models.

To test our empirical propositions in the analysis of the non-democratic elections, we created a panel including the three electoral cycles and relied on a generalised estimating equations (GEE) modelling approach. This modelling strategy is appropriate to analyse panel data when the number of cases is relatively large, and the frequency of examinations or measurements over time are relatively sparse, as was the case here (Hardin & Hilbe 2013). We specified the model with a logistic link as the dependent data are given as a proportion, bounded by 0 and 1 (Diggle *et al*. 2013, pp. 146–47). In addition to the logistic link, our model incorporated an autoregressive correlation structure. Specifically, we modelled the correlation between two adjacent temporal observations in the panel data. Furthermore, we utilised robust standard errors to account for potential heteroskedasticity, ensuring the robustness and reliability of our statistical inferences. The models were generated using Stata's Xtgee and Qic commands (Cui 2007). Because the GEE method is grounded in quasi-likelihood theory, while the GLM method relies on the maximum likelihood theory, Akaike's information criterion, a commonly employed approach for model selection in GLM, cannot be directly applied to GEE. Instead, we used the quasi-likelihood information criterion (QIC) developed by Pan (2001).

In our analysis of the first democratic elections, we used the fractional logit model—a generalised linear model with a Bernoulli quasi-likelihood specification (Papke & Wooldridge 1996)—in a process of stepwise building towards the full model using the

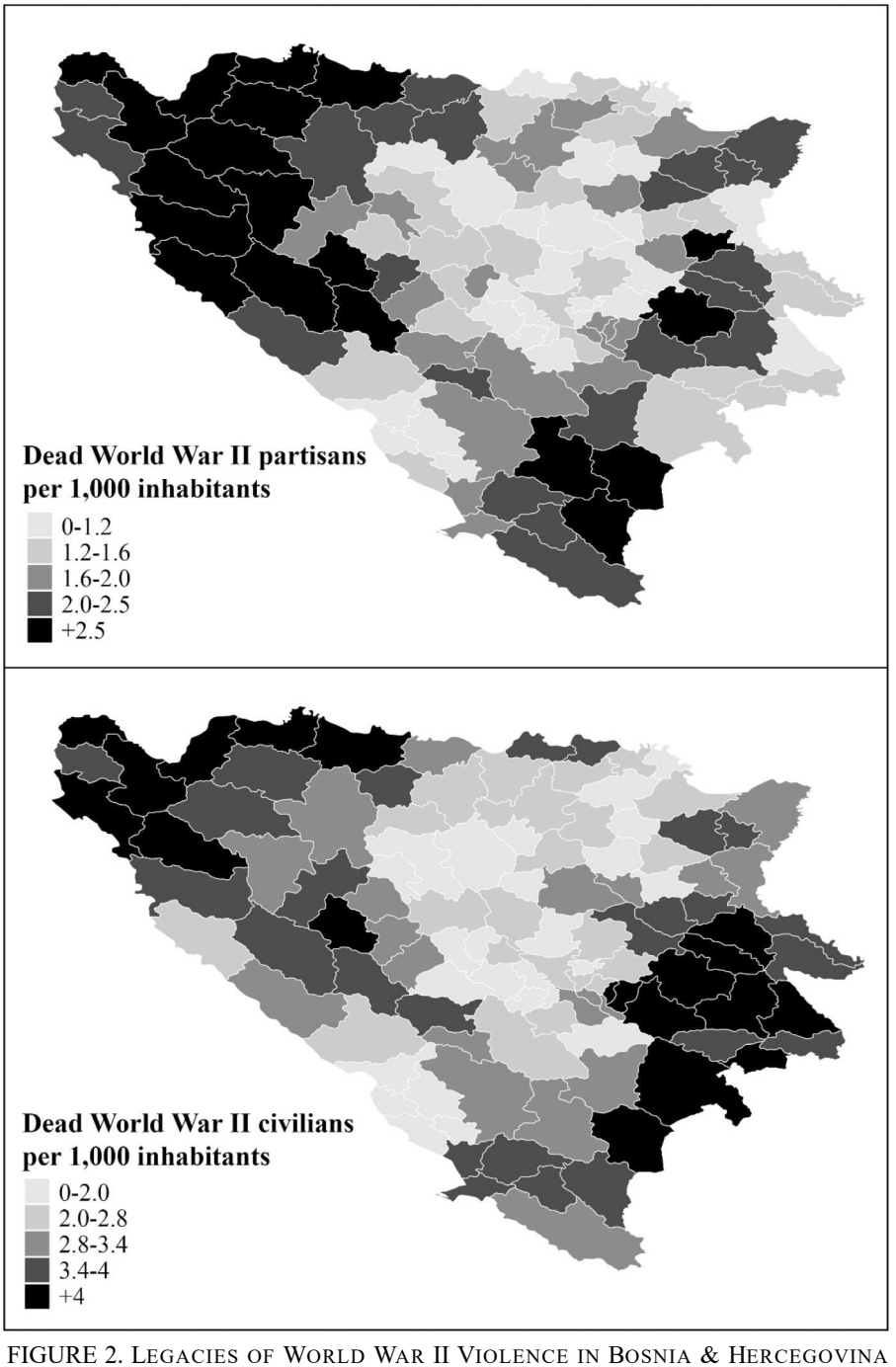

FIGURE 2. LEGACIES OF WORLD WAR II VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA & HERCEGOVINA
Note: The numbers shown in the figure are natural log-transformed.

aforementioned three groups of variables (demographic, economic and workforce). We employed the quasi-likelihood approach because it fitted our model well, owing to the distribution of our dependent variable, and because it required no transformations of data at the extreme values of zero or one.

Results

As noted in the previous section, we split our analysis into two parts due to the fundamentally different nature of the non-democratic elections in 1978, 1982 and 1986, on the one hand, and the first democratic elections of 1990 on the other. We present the findings of the first part of our analysis in Table 1 where each of the three models represents a test of the impact of our explanatory variables of interest on the level of presence of SKBiH members in the three forms of representative bodies on the municipal level: municipal assemblies; delegations of the self-management interest communities; and delegations of sociopolitical communities. We pooled the data from the three electoral cycles. We also conducted the same analyses using the fractional logit model in each of the three elections separately as a robustness check, which are presented in the online appendix Tables A1–A3.

TABLE 1
DETERMINANTS OF PROPORTION OF SKBIH MEMBERS IN REPRESENTATIVE BODIES AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL, 1978–1986

	Municipal assemblies			*Self-management delegations*			*Sociopolitical organisation delegations*		
	Coef.	*S.E.*	*Sig.*	*Coef.*	*S.E.*	*Sig.*	*Coef.*	*S.E.*	*Sig.*
Unemployment	0.424	0.948		0.634	0.800		−2.178	0.789	**
Private sector	−2.945	1.431	*	−1.232	1.332		1.171	1.040	
Personal income	−0.213	0.158		−0.030	0.139		−0.042	0.165	
Investments	−0.027	0.043		0.034	0.031		0.097	0.041	*
Social spending	0.038	0.091		−0.094	0.068		−0.060	0.080	
Industry (ref. cat.)									
Agriculture	−0.942	0.381	*	−0.548	0.308		−0.127	0.351	
Construction	0.605	0.435		0.260	0.315		0.176	0.342	
Trade	−0.116	0.417		−0.336	0.355		−0.424	0.344	
Social services	0.674	0.672		0.517	0.504		0.492	0.700	
Government	−0.312	2.147		1.422	1.664		1.409	1.768	
Activity	−0.335	0.846		−0.002	0.860		−2.005	0.913	*
Average age	0.003	0.019		0.009	0.013		−0.004	0.011	
Urban	0.128	0.238		−0.165	0.152		−0.133	0.156	
Education	0.142	0.056	*	0.098	0.040	*	0.115	0.038	**
Croats	−0.544	0.196	**	−0.564	0.169	***	−0.414	0.158	**
Serbs	0.101	0.230		0.159	0.166		0.341	0.166	*
EFI	0.600	0.464		0.230	0.450		−0.044	0.421	
EPI	−0.676	0.343	*	−0.257	0.333		0.014	0.343	
World War II dead partisans	0.166	0.045	***	0.089	0.040	*	0.122	0.044	**
World War II dead civilians	−0.007	0.044		−0.021	0.034		−0.047	0.039	
Constant	2.588	1.689		−0.357	1.632		0.333	1.864	
Obs/*n*	327/109			327/109			327/109		
QIC	356.9			447.1			450.2		

Notes: Generalised estimating equations (GEE) modelling throughout; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Several things are immediately apparent from Table 1. First, the impact of the variables capturing the distribution of the workforce exhibit virtually no statistical significance. Guided by the differences in the penetration of the League of Communists in the different segments of the workforce—particularly its historically determined low level of representation among agricultural workers (Palairet n.d.)—and the unequal distribution of challenges Yugoslavia's economic crisis presented to different sectors of the economy, we hypothesised that this set of variables could help us understand the economic foundations of social cleavages. Apart from 'Agriculture' being significant at the 5% level and in the expected negative direction for the municipal assemblies, however, there was little to suggest that the geographic support for the League of Communists in Bosnia & Hercegovina was decisively influenced by the structure of the local workforce. Interestingly, this story is confirmed even in stripped-down models including only the structure of the local workforce, which we performed as robustness checks and present in the online appendix Table A5.

Our conclusions are only slightly different if we look at the set of variables capturing the performance of the local economy: 'Unemployment', 'Private sector', 'Personal income', 'Investments' and 'Social spending'. None of these variables exhibits any consistent influence of the level of SKBiH representation across the three forms of municipal political bodies, with only 'Unemployment' reaching the 1% level of significance in the model for the DPZ delegations. Unlike the workforce variables, however, the economic variables do exhibit some interesting trends in the pared-down models in the online appendix Table A4.[9] These variables, however, do not hold up with any consistency in the full models presented in Table 1, making it difficult to conclude that the dominant cleavages during communism in Bosnia & Hercegovina had anything to do with the economy. The level of SKBiH presence in the three representative municipal bodies largely and consistently seemed to depend on three factors: the level of education; the proportion of Croats in the local population; and the community's legacy of participation in the World War II communist-led partisan resistance movement.

Throughout the whole period of late socialism, lagging representation among the working class and the increasing reliance on the new managerial and professional class was a constant preoccupation of the party's leadership (Vušković 1984; Cohen 1989). Education—as the perfect measure of the true class differences in late socialism (Pavlović *et al*. 2019)—proved to be the consistent predictor of the strength of communist representation in Bosnia & Hercegovina.

The proportion of Croats in the local population was an even stronger predictor of the level of SKBiH presence in municipal assemblies and the delegations of the sociopolitical

[9]Those models suggest a negative relationship between the level of SKBiH representation and the size of the private sector as well as workers' personal incomes. This suggests the League of Communists was less present in the representative bodies in municipalities with more propulsive enterprises that were less reliant on the socially owned sector. The models also suggest a positive relationship between the level of SKBiH representation and the level of public sector investments. A different research design would be needed to determine the direction of the arrow of causation in this case, that is, whether members of the League of Communists were being rewarded by the voters locally for the higher levels of investments or the levels of investments flowed disproportionally to municipalities with the higher density of communist control and influence.

communities and self-management interest communities. That much was already apparent in Figure 1, with the areas of the lowest SKBiH representation neatly corresponding to the majority Croat regions in western Hercegovina and central Bosnia. Croats were the most underrepresented ethnic group in Bosnia & Hercegovina's League of Communists, partly stemming from the BiH Croats' support for the Independent State of Croatia during World War II and partly from the contentious relationship between the communist regime and the Catholic Church after the war (Perica 2002; Banac 2013).[10]

Lastly, the level of SKBiH presence in municipal assemblies and the delegations of the sociopolitical communities and self-management interest communities was strongly positively related to the level of the local communities' participation in the World War II communist-led resistance movement. This finding is basically confirmed in our fractional logit models conducted on each electoral cycle separately and presented as a robustness check in Tables A1–A3 in the online appendix—'World War II dead partisans' is, for example, statistically significant in all three cycles of elections for municipal assemblies. Costalli and Ruggeri (2019) found that the pattern of communist guerilla activity in Italy during World War II had a positive influence on the level of popular support for the communists in the early years of Italian post-World War II democracy. We have shown that a similar legacy of World War II violence also had a profound impact on the level of the communists' local strength and support in a non-democratic polity—Bosnia & Hercegovina—three to four decades after the war ended.

Estimating the actual size of the effects of these three variables is challenging. The coefficients presented in Table 1 indicate the change in the log odds of the outcome variable in response to a one-unit increase in the independent variable. However, interpreting the substantive effect sizes of the independent variables solely based on these coefficients is not straightforward. This is because of the nonlinear relationship between odds and probabilities, where a change in odds does not correspond to a consistent change in probability. A more effective method for assessing effect sizes involves examining the impact on the dependent variable resulting from a one standard deviation shift in the independent variable, starting from its mean value. Our analysis reveals that a one standard deviation increase in 'Education' enhanced the proportion of SKBiH members in municipal bodies by between 2.43 and 2.86 percentage points. Conversely, the proportion of ethnic Croats showed a consistently negative influence: a one standard deviation rise in 'Croats' reduced the proportion of SKBiH members in municipal bodies by 2.77–3.74 percentage points. Lastly, a one standard deviation increase in 'World War II dead partisans' elevated the proportion of SKBiH in municipal bodies by 1.77–2.43 percentage points. Crucially, it would be difficult to claim any omitted variable bias because the level of communists' support and organisational capacity prior to World War II in Bosnia & Hercegovina was essentially negligible (Shoup 1968; Banac 1984). We present the impact of this form of exposure to World War II violence on the level of SKBiH representation in graphic form in Figure 3.

[10]We ran our models with other configurations of ethnic groups included and found little variation in results. Notably, the proportion of Muslims in the local population did not have a significant relationship with any of the dependent variables for the pre-democratic period.

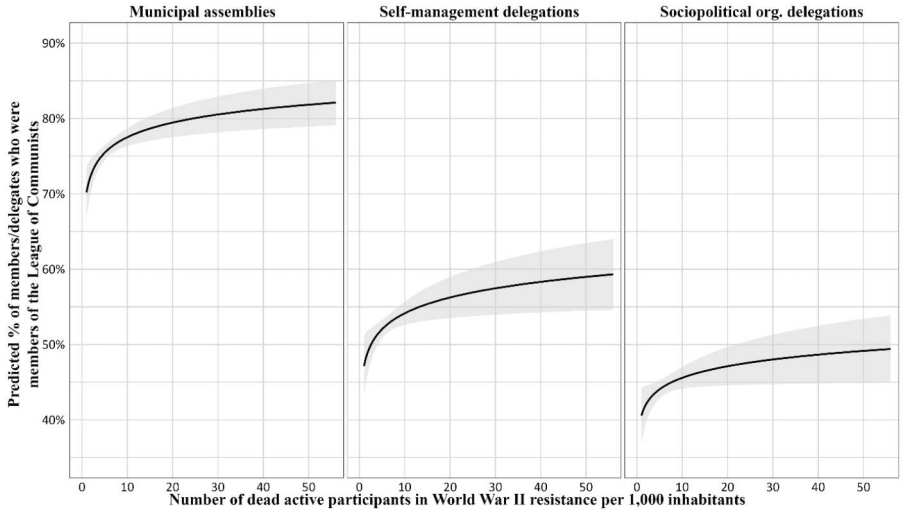

FIGURE 3. IMPACT OF PATTERN OF WORLD WAR II RESISTANCE ON SKBiH REPRESENTATION, 1978–1986

As could have been surmised from the maps in Figure 1, things changed significantly in the 1990 elections. Obviously, these were the inaugural democratic elections where the communists and their allies faced real—mostly nationalist—opposition for the first time. Some change in the geographic pattern of support for the SKBiH, therefore, could have been expected. Table 2 presents the results of our analysis of the 1990 vote for the parties of the left, with stepwise building of the full fractional logit model whose variable selection corresponds exactly to the one in the models presented in Table 1 for the non-democratic period. Here we should note that, as a robustness check, we conducted the same analysis using just the vote for the SKBiH as the dependent variable (online appendix Table A7), and we got substantively the same results. As can be seen from Table 2, what remained identical to the non-democratic period was the near-complete irrelevance of economic and workforce composition variables, as well as the significance of 'Education' and 'Croats' for the level of support for the left. Models 1 and 2, capturing in turn the impact of the economic and workforce variables, exhibit low explanatory power with only 'Social spending' and 'Personal income' exhibiting statistical significance in Model 1, implying that the parties of the ruling regime did better in areas with higher levels of public spending and higher worker salaries. This would suggest a dose of economic rationality among the voters in Bosnia & Hercegovina. However, none of these variables survived the inclusion of the sociodemographic variables in the full Model 4. This further confirms past research that found economic factors to be poor predictors of the level of support for the Alliance of Reformist Forces of the federal Prime Minister Ante Marković (Glaurdić *et al*. 2024). In spite of the depth of the economic crisis and the initially promising results of his reforms, Marković and his party failed thoroughly in the 1990 elections. Just as in the period 1978–1986, what really made a difference were the proportion of 'Croats' in the local population and the level of

TABLE 2
DETERMINANTS OF VOTE FOR THE LEFT (SKBiH AND SRSJ) IN THE 1990 ELECTIONS

	Model 1: Economy			*Model 2: Workforce*			*Model 3: Demographics*			*Model 4: Total*		
	dy/dx	*S.E.*	*Sig.*	*dy/dx*	*S.E.*	*Sig.*	*dy/dx*	*S.E.*	*Sig.*	*dy/dx*	*S.E.*	*Sig.*
Unemployment	0.073	0.230								−0.008	0.247	
Private sector	−0.732	0.438								0.353	0.422	
Personal income	0.174	0.073	*							−0.084	0.073	
Investments	−0.017	0.014								0.014	0.012	
Social spending	0.074	0.019	***							−0.002	0.034	
Industry (ref. cat.)												
Agriculture				−0.296	0.172					−0.136	0.155	
Construction				0.234	0.139					−0.068	0.108	
Trade				0.325	0.191					0.140	0.132	
Social services				0.597	0.363					−0.152	0.395	
Government				−2.201	1.267					0.524	0.639	
Activity							−0.177	0.223		−0.350	0.336	
Average age							0.004	0.003		0.004	0.004	
Urban							−0.093	0.054		−0.087	0.067	
Education							0.033	0.011	**	0.030	0.012	*
Croats							−0.253	0.046	***	−0.279	0.048	***
Serbs							−0.069	0.051		−0.048	0.049	
EFI							0.600	0.120	***	0.672	0.112	***
EPI							−0.313	0.106	**	−0.319	0.104	**
World War II dead partisans							0.014	0.013		0.011	0.015	
World War II dead civilians							−0.030	0.010	**	−0.030	0.010	**
n		109			109			109			109	
Log-pseudolikelihood	−37.2				−37.4			−35.7			−35.6	
R^2		0.28			0.24			0.61			0.62	

Notes: Fractional logit used throughout; average marginal effects reported; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

'Education' of the municipality's adult population. A one standard deviation increase in the average years of 'Education' (0.93) implied a 2.8 percentage points higher level of support for the communists and their allies, and a one standard deviation increase in the proportion of 'Croats' in the municipal population (0.27) implied a 7.6 percentage points lower level of support. One notable wrinkle in the story of ethnicity here is that in the models we ran with different ethnic groups as robustness checks, the proportion of 'Muslims' in the municipal population did generally lead to higher level of support for communists and their allies. This represents a shift compared to the pre-democratic period where the proportion of Muslims had no effect on SKBiH representation, suggesting that in the 1990 elections there was a partial transformation in the sources of ethnic group support for the leftwing parties from the Serbs in the pre-democratic period to the Muslims in the first democratic elections.[11]

Where things really changed, however, was in the importance of the distribution of ethnic groups—captured by EFI and EPI—and in the legacy of the pattern of World War II violence. As noted in the previous section, the Ethnic Fractionalisation Index is a good proxy of ethnic diversity of the local community. The Ethnic Polarisation Index, on the other hand, is a good proxy of ethnic competition between two ethnic groups. Historically speaking, communists have been known to do better in ethnically diverse communities (Kopstein & Wittenberg 2003). The tendency of voters to be more supportive of leftist candidates in communities that were more ethnically diverse, but less so in communities with higher levels of competition between two ethnic groups, was also noted in Bosnia & Hercegovina and the other Yugoslav republics in the first democratic elections (Kapidžić 2014; Glaurdić *et al*. 2024). We made similar predictions guided by those findings and the more general literature on elections in ethnically complex societies, which suggested that interethnic contact could foster support for cross-ethnic platforms, but not in communities riven by competition between two closely balanced ethnic groups. These predictions did not materialise for the non-democratic period but did for the first democratic elections when access to political power was truly at stake. In the context of competing nationalisms of a collapsing Yugoslav federation, voters in Bosnia & Hercegovina voted strategically for those who championed their ethnic group at the expense of cross-ethnic collaboration promoted by the communists and their allies.

What is equally important, the results of the 1990 elections perfectly capture the changed relevance of the legacy of World War II violence. As discussed in the previous section, we modelled the legacy of World War II violence with two variables—'World War II dead partisans' and 'World War II dead civilians'—capturing two different aspects of the communities' war experience. As noted by many authors writing on the 1980s in Yugoslavia,[12] the late 1980s saw the transformation of the narrative of interethnic conflict and cooperation during the war. The dominant narrative of the ruling regime was one of a multinational partisan resistance movement defeating the occupying forces and the traitorous nationalist collaborators. This narrative was steadily chipped away at by revisionist accounts—many of them completely detached from historical facts—that

[11]We present the findings from this model in Table A8 in the online appendix.
[12]For example, Dragović-Soso (2002) and Vujačić (2015).

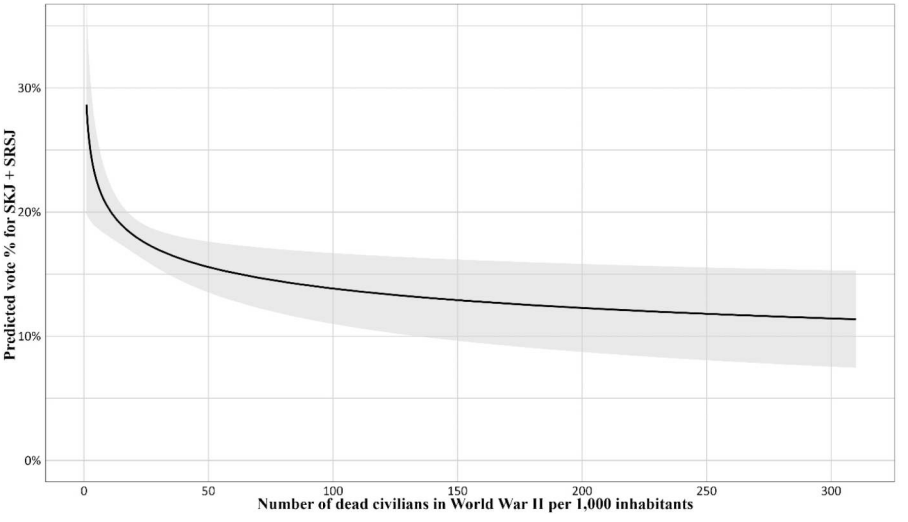

FIGURE 4. IMPACT OF PATTERN OF WORLD WAR II CIVILIAN DEATHS ON LEFTWING VOTE, 1990

highlighted what was essentially a brutal interethnic civil war fought among Bosnia & Hercegovina's three ethnic/national communities. The collapse of the saliency of common participation in the partisan resistance in favour of increasing relevance of violent acts committed by the members of other ethnic groups was especially strong among the Serbs who found the new narratives emanating out of the intellectual, political and media circles in Belgrade resonant (Grdešić 2019; Glaurdić & Mochtak 2022). Their abandonment of the League of Communists in favour of the newly formed Serb Democratic Party (SDS) led by Radovan Karadžić in areas like the Bosnian Krajina and eastern Hercegovina was particularly notable. This transformation in the relevance of the legacy of World War II violence is clearly displayed, with the loss of statistical significance for the variable 'World War II dead partisans' in comparison to the models for the period 1978–1986 and the accompanying new statistical significance of the variable 'World War II dead civilians' and its negative effect on the vote for the leftwing parties. In the non-democratic period, the pattern of strength and support for the communists was positively related to the pattern of World War II resistance. Conversely, in the first democratic elections, the pattern of strength and support for the communists was negatively related to the pattern of World War II violence—mostly perpetrated by the members of the three ethnic communities—against civilians. We show the substantive size of this effect in Figure 4.

Conclusions

Communist regimes destroyed many institutions of civil society, but they did not erase identities. The ruling parties may have introduced the concurrent processes of social atomisation and homogenisation, but the structures, divisions and cleavages among the populations of communist polities not only remained, but in some cases were even more

deeply entrenched by the regimes' policies and the origins of their ascent to power. Our article presents a rare attempt at providing a data-driven explanation of the sources of support for communist regimes at a crucial time of their existence.

The results of our analysis unequivocally show that the pattern of strength of the communist regime in Bosnia & Hercegovina had little to do with economic performance or the sectoral composition of the workforce. We are cognisant of the disparities in the diffusion of the League of Communists into different segments of the economy. We are also in agreement with those who argue that the economic crisis in Yugoslavia primed the country for a violent dissolution (Grdešić 2019; Musić 2021). It would be difficult to imagine the nationalist rhetoric of the various political entrepreneurs resonating with the population to such an extent, had the Yugoslav socialism of the 1980s been economically prosperous. Nevertheless, the fact remains that support for the regime had little to do with the economy, even in the 1990 elections when the voters were presented with a platform of economic reforms by the federal Prime Minister Ante Marković.

In some ways, this should not be surprising. The essence of communism always was political control and its Achilles heel, at least in Yugoslavia, was the national question. As the Cold War ended, some hypothesised that the postcommunist societies would 'return' to ethnic divisions of the precommunist period and that these kinds of cleavages would dominate the political landscape (Evans 2006). Our analysis shows that this was no 'return'. The patterns of ethnic identity, interethnic balance, and interethnic violence and cooperation during World War II had a decisive impact on the pattern of communist strength.

Here we draw attention to the importance of World War II violence to the whole story. Virtually all interpretations of political cleavages in the early postcommunist period focused on three historical stages of development: the interwar period, communist rule and the early postcommunist transition (Whitefield 2002). The extraordinary violence of World War II, as well as the different patterns of collaboration and resistance, have been routinely skipped over, as if they were somehow epiphenomenal. This has been an unfortunate shortcoming of the literature on political cleavages, and not only in postcommunist Eastern Europe. In Bosnia & Hercegovina, the bulk of the violence may have been perpetrated by the three largest ethnic communities against one another, but the context and the means for that perpetration were external, as were the origins of the communist-led resistance movement whose revolution and ultimate ascent to power were determined on the battlefields of Bosnia & Hercegovina. To neglect the relevance of such momentous events for the development of political cleavages in many European societies—and particularly those in postcommunist Eastern Europe—strikes us as deeply problematic.

Obviously, some of our arguments are idiosyncratic to Yugoslavia's central republic and may not be portable across the communist and postcommunist polities of Eastern Europe. Their interethnic relations and balances were different, as were their communist revolutions and the patterns of collaboration and resistance. However, the larger lesson of our article is that this line of research is necessary and should be pursued. Elections under communism were clearly an exercise in social control, but we believe there are still data that could be valuable in helping us better understand the nature of communist rule and the underlying social divisions. Moreover, they could help us better understand the

interaction between individuals, their communities and the one-party state, as well as the causes of the communist system's ultimate collapse.

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