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DO WISHES MATTER? NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE LIMITS OF NORMATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINE REGIME FORMATION

Milan VARDA¹, Uroš POPADIĆ²

ABSTRACT

Normative entrepreneurs, i.e., those political actors who attempt to promulgate a norm into wide acceptance, can influence the formation of international regimes once the norm they promote becomes widely accepted by most of the world's countries. However, normative entrepreneurship has limits since not all states accept the proposed norms. This paper will try to answer the question of why that is the case. According to the article, some nations refuse to adopt standards that they believe could jeopardise their national security. Other states can accept the norm even with their national security interests affected due to humanitarian and diplomatic reasons. As a result, a regime could exist and be formed by normative entrepreneurs. However, some powers, potentially the major ones, might not accept it, limiting the regime's efficacy. The article will present how this security-centric framework functions using the case of the anti-landmine norm and the Ottawa Convention. This approach can explain the membership limits that the regimes produced by normative entrepreneurs such as the Ottawa Convention face. Furthermore, the article will outline how this framework can be used to adjust the anti-personnel landmine norm to a less demanding form, i.e., in such a manner as not to compromise national security and make the spread of the regime-forming norm possible again.

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Introduction

“A mine-free world does not need to be a dream – together, we can make it a reality”. With these words, Heather Mills describes a wishful dream. Thanks to the work of normative entrepreneurs who worked on promoting the banning of landmines, the dream has nearly become a reality that we live in. Unfortunately, these wishes have not been fulfilled. Why, one could ask? This paper will review the limits of normative entrepreneurship in international regime formation through the case of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa Treaty.³ The treaty was justified as an attempt to put an end to needless suffering caused by APLs, as the casualties are often defenceless civilians and because the effects of placing APLs continue after conflicts end. The ban is meant to increase international confidence and address humanitarian concerns in line with UN norms and international public opinion related to the rules of warfare. The treaty’s language disregards national security concerns. It stresses the humanitarian aspect of the desired ban on APLs, giving provisions for a gradual removal of these weapons because of their dangerous nature, especially after conflicts have ended (United Nations 1997). As for the negative effects of landmines, it is estimated that there are 110 million landmines in the ground right now, and more than 4,200 people, of whom 42% are children, have been falling victim to them yearly. Civilians made up 85% of all recorded casualties in 2022, with many countries like Egypt, Angola, Iran, Bosnia, and Afghanistan having millions of mines remaining (Minesweepers n.d.).

This regime has been selected because it is often regarded as a great example of civil society’s role in regime formation. Civil society actors, most commonly civil society organisations, are major actors who create norms and are also called normative entrepreneurs (Puschkarsky 2009, 6). This issue is very significant since great powers often partake in conflicts, and the fact that they use anti-personnel landmines (APLs) limits the regime’s effectiveness. The norm itself is meant to promote human security without prejudice, putting the safety of individuals above national security concerns. It stresses the role of public conscience in furthering the principles of humanity. It is based on the principles of international humanitarian law, being directly connected to the overall

³ The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention is an instrument of international law that prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, and use of anti-personnel mines (Casey-Maslen 2010). The Convention entered into force on 1 March 2009. It was the result of the “Ottawa Process”, a freestanding process of treaty negotiation outside a United Nations-facilitated forum to outlaw anti-personnel mines. The process was named like that because it was launched in Ottawa by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada in October 1996.

normative goals of disarmament. This article seeks to answer why some countries do not join regimes created from widely accepted international norms. It will also try to answer why great powers like the US, Russia, and China have refused to join the Ottawa Treaty. This article hypothesises that national security is the key reason some states decline to participate in regimes formed by normative entrepreneurs. As such, the article's thesis is that while national security is a limiter to norm entrepreneurship, there are differences in how far individual states can go in accepting certain norms. We suggest that while most powerful states will prioritise national security gained through physical power, and while less powerful states can accept the anti-APL norm, even the great powers could accept the widely promulgated norm in a weaker and adjusted form. The article will propose a new solution that could incorporate great powers and some of the other non-signatories into the Ottawa Treaty, using the banning of "dumb APLs", which would contribute to the purpose of the norm while allowing these states to retain military power.

This article has four different parts. The first part will provide a literature review by presenting how normative entrepreneurs form regimes, followed by the examination of various issues with regime formation via norm entrepreneurship that has thus far been proposed and offer limitations of such explanations. The second part will provide a theoretical framework, showing how the need to protect the states' national security can explain why some actors may not join the regime formed by normative entrepreneurs. The third part is the empirical section. First, the section will examine the formation of the Ottawa Treaty. Then, it shall present how the existing theoretical frameworks are unsuitable for dealing with this issue. Afterwards, it will empirically present how states have chosen national security over norms while deciding not to join the treaty. The fourth and final part will propose a solution to go beyond the limitations of national security to come closer to fulfilling our wishes.

Literature Review

How Civil Society Actors Form Regimes

Civil society actors form various norms which prescribe behaviour. According to the norm life cycle model (NLCM), these norms can even form international regimes (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). They can also take on a norm originating from a state, such as in the case of the Ottawa Treaty. An example is the Scandinavian norm entrepreneurship related to environmental issues, which helped those states exercise "social power" and influence (Ingebritsen 2002), which was then adopted by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). There is an increased interplay between CSOs and states on the international stage,

especially in shaping and promoting norms and affecting global governance, where the two can cooperate on promoting individual norms (Wolf 2008).

Normative entrepreneurs form norms by giving special attention to some existing issues or even creating new issues in the discourse, and these actions are known as framing (Iommi 2019, 79-82). These frames are then disseminated among people and compete with other unaccepted frames and already accepted norms for acceptance of the audience. For example, frames of sustainable development that prescribe economic growth should not damage the planet and should become accepted norms by challenging established norms of purely growth-based development (Lafferty 1996, 190-193). Norms create standards of appropriateness, meaning that they prescribe what proper behaviour should be and that actors should act according to those norms (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 897). For norms to be accepted, normative entrepreneurs must persuade others to accept them (Payne 2001, 40-43). Ultimately, based on the NLCM, the acceptance of new norms will depend on their formulation, their substance, and the reputation of the entrepreneur (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 906-907). No matter the circumstances, the great powers' reluctance to accept certain norms demonstrates the limits of norm diffusion. If accepted by others, the new norm will form a new logic of appropriateness (Sending 2002, 445-450). Norms created by civil society will, therefore, become accepted in that society and shape the actions of various actors in accordance with the norm's logic of appropriateness (Sending 2002, 445-450). Having established how norms are established and disseminated, we shall now examine how they are promoted internationally and how they can form regimes.

CSOs and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) usually have a wide agenda regarding norms and their promotion, with extensive overlap. Yet their actions can focus on specific ones and require partnerships and cooperation to do so effectively (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 899-900). For norms to be widely accepted, CSOs and IGOs need the support of states because only they can codify and enforce norms and help coerce weaker states to accept them (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 900). Leverage in negotiations that IGOs hold over weaker states can be used to coerce them (Dobbin, Simmons and Garret 2007, 454-456). However, this capacity cannot work on more powerful states, and they need to be persuaded (Dobbin, Simmons and Garret 2007, 454-456). Persuasion is done with the help of the domestic civil society of the state, which constantly pushes for the norm's acceptance (Boesenecker and Vinjamuri 2011, 347). A tipping point is reached when a significant number of states accept the norm. Then, a "norm cascade" occurs (Iommi 2019, 106-107). At this point, states become more prone to the influences of international society than domestic society, and the result is usually the rapid acceptance of the norm

(Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 901). For example, in the Landmine Convention, once the tipping point of 60 states had been reached, a norm cascade occurred, and 64 more states adopted the norm (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 901). In addition to the number of states, the acceptance of the norm by states that are significant stakeholders in the issue area, also known as critical states, is very important (Price 1998, 624). In the anti-landmine norm example, those were France and the UK, big producers and historical users of landmines that have accepted the norm (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 901). CSOs can enter into unofficial coalitions with governments or IGOs with the same norm-related interests and act against norm-violating states, as typically happens in relation to human rights norms. As such, they contribute significantly to a norm being accepted internationally. (Wolf 2008, 230-235) After the norm cascade is complete, many states will abide by the norm. Therefore, a new regime will be formed. However, even if the norm has great substance and formulation and if the entrepreneur is highly respected and has even promoted it well, it might still not be accepted by some states even after the cascade, thus harming the regime's strength, as the landmine convention shows.

Limits of Norm Entrepreneurship in the Literature

Provided the norm life cycle theory's internal logic has been satisfied, one should expect the wide acceptance of international norms and states joining the regime. Properly created norms, promoted by well-respected entrepreneurs and accepted by numerous civil societies, ought to form regimes. However, some states may opt not to join despite possible shaming or coercion. Now, the above-outlined theory offers another possible explanation. It requires the existence of a civil society for the acceptance of the norm (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 902). As such, states that lack civil society should be less affected by norm entrepreneurship since they would be impacted only by the global civil society. Indeed, these states not joining would fully be in line with the theory's causal logic. Simply, the theory itself can explain why some states would not join the regime despite other major conditions being fulfilled. The theory, however, lacks an explanation of why a state with a vibrant civil society would not join the regime with all other conditions being fulfilled. Numerous potential explanations can be found or inferred from the literature.

The constructivist tradition offers an interesting take on the norm acceptance of states, which could explain the reluctance of some states to adopt norms using the category of identity. Nations have different identities or senses of self, and, as such, they react differently to norm diffusion (Gurowitz 2006, 309). Simply put, nations will be more or less likely to accept the international norm based on their different identities (Gurowitz 2006, 310). A fine example

is Cuba, which has constructed its identity as the Other of the West-dominated capitalism and, as such, typically refuses to accept any Western international norms (Adler-Nissen 2014, 465-469). Its identity itself is, therefore, incompatible with the diffusing norms. This approach is quite fruitful for explaining the limits of norm entrepreneurship but is limited in some cases where the identity is compatible with norms. Aside from social construction, some material factors can prevent states from joining regimes.

Economic interests are one such material factor that could potentially prevent states from joining regimes. Two clusters of approaches, based on economic interests, can be found in regard to the reluctance to join the regime. The first is a state-centric approach, which largely, but not exclusively, belongs to the liberal institutionalist tradition. According to it, states will form regimes and accept international norms in line with their economic interests (Goertz and Diehl 1992, 637-638). Norms will be respected, and regimes will function since states will not want to act in dissonance with the norm because that would simultaneously damage their self-interest (Goertz and Diehl 1992, 644). However, if norms reflect economic self-interests, states would have no incentives to respect the norms and thus would not join the regime (Goertz and Diehl 1992, 637-638). This liberal explanation is useful for illustrating the dynamics of various trade and financial regimes. However, it is not as good when exploring regimes that do not significantly affect economic interests.

The second economic explanation relates to the interests of special interest groups formed by economic elites. According to the neo-Gramscian theory of regime formation, such groups use their influence on states to form international regimes that will protect their narrow interests (Robinson 2005, 562-566). As such, the elites are capable of exercising their will internationally to accumulate more wealth (Robinson 2005, 562-566). For example, special interest groups try to protect their privileged position by forming or changing the rules of international financial regimes (Gale 1998, 274). For example, big oil companies lobby against further international measures to limit climate change because limiting the use of fossil fuels would limit their profits (McGrath 2021). Likewise, lobbies would try to persuade certain states not to join the regime formed by norm entrepreneurs if it is not in their direct economic interest. As oil companies cannot compete with the moral norms imposed by environmentalist organisations, they resort to raw power and use political influence and corruption to protect their interests (Green 2018, 106-110). This approach opens plenty of new insights and even has liminal significance in this paper's empirical scenario. However, just like the previous approach, it is inadequate for explaining cases where economic interest is limited.

Finally, the structure of the international system, although very fruitful in regime formation, is far less specific when it comes to the reluctance of states

to join regimes. Structural realism tends to focus on how great powers form regimes to protect their privileged position or to counterbalance (Mearsheimer 1994, 9-13). Alternatively, the hegemonic stability theory focuses on how a single power forms the regime (Krasner and Webb 1989, 184). Lesser powers have to join to avoid potential sanctions of greater powers (Mearsheimer 1994, 9-13). Likewise, it can be inferred that structural realism claims regimes will fail once they are not protecting the interests of great powers. Simply put, great powers will use their influence to either disband or change current regimes or form completely new regimes to protect their interests. While some theories assume that regimes can be intervening variables and not instantly reflect the balance of power, they do not offer more specific conditions for states refusing to join, and their existence will ultimately depend on the support of major powers (Krasner 1982, 499). Although the structural realist explanation is highly helpful in many situations, it is inconsistent with the regime established by normative entrepreneurs rather than great powers, in which the latter do not participate but instead focus on behaviour balancing. According to realists, norms only form as a result of material interests and power balance (Mearsheimer 1994, 37-47). Meanwhile, normative entrepreneurs form these regimes largely by bypassing material interests and even great powers, as will be shown. Current realist frameworks cannot fully explain the issue.

Frameworks focusing on issues with norms and civil society, identity limiters, national and particular economic interests, and great power balance have been introduced. All of them have significant explanatory potential in various cases. We find that, while the neorealist theory suggests that great powers will not accept this norm due to military power concerns, it does not explain why a different and weaker form of the norm would be refused as well, especially as the norm has found such wide acceptance even among certain powerful states. The paper will now attempt to present a solution for this problem by focusing on a more fundamental concept of national security.

National Security as the Limiter

National security is concerned with the protection of the state or its interests from threats, and it will not allow any norms to undermine it. That effectively makes it a limiter when it comes to states joining regimes formed by normative entrepreneurs. States have a primary goal of securing themselves and their citizens, therefore prioritising national security above other interests. (Walt 2010, 2). We consider that the states that have joined the Ottawa Treaty maintain their national security interests. Yet they see an advantage in joining such a widely accepted treaty due to the signalling of their humanitarian concerns and the prioritisation of international normative cooperation over strict military power.

While national security is a broad term, it is a fundamental concept of realist theories. Many concepts are deduced from it, which makes it high axiomatic, at least within the realist paradigm. It should not be reduced to military security, even though this is how it was originally conceptualised (Ejdus 2017, 107-108). Military security is still the main concern of the national security of most states (Trump 2017; Biden 2022, 20) because it protects the physical security and independence of the state (French Republic Presidency 2017, 3), which is of fundamental importance and above any norms. That does not mean that norms do not have any significance to states. In reality, a variety of norms are compatible with the fulfilment of national security needs (Diehl and Goertz 1994, 102). Interestingly, the anti-mine norm and its proliferation helped establish the concept of human security, focusing on the security of individuals instead of states (Kjellman 2003, 955-956). Norms may even affect and perhaps even change the national interest of a state (Cardenas 2004, 216-217). However, those norms will be either rejected or sidelined if they stand in the way of national security (Diehl and Goertz 1994, 106). Even if norms have been constructing politics, as constructivists claim, those norms could still not come before national security requirements, as they cannot be enforced by a state if the state ceases to exist. There are many examples of norms being sidelined for national security reasons, the most notable being the state of exception, which has been used many times in the recent past by numerous states, mainly to protect national security (Agamben 2004, 3). During the state of exception, states ignore some or even all norms codified as laws that can limit their abilities to pursue national security. They do so until the crisis ends, after which the regular order is restored (Agamben 2004, 3). While the state of exception is not an everyday practice of states, it does prove that norms can shape politics only if they do not stand in the way of national security. While norms can be the drivers of regime formation, they can become sidelined when national security is threatened. That means some states will not join regimes formed by normative entrepreneurs if they consider that their national security is directly affected by the norm, especially if it challenges their perceptions of security through power. Now is the time to see how everything fits empirically in the case of the Ottawa Treaty.

Limiters against the Norms in Action

The Formation of the Ottawa Treaty

Numerous CSOs acting as normative entrepreneurs have successfully spread the anti-landmine norm and created a new nonproliferation and disarmament regime based on shared universal values. After the end of the Cold War, governments and civil societies shifted their attention from a potential

superpower conflict to smaller ongoing conflicts where anti-personnel landmines were being used (Price 1998, 619). APLs are indiscriminate, as they could potentially harm not only soldiers but also civilians, and they cause unnecessary suffering (Maslen and Herby 1998, 696). Every week, as many as 300 people, mostly civilians, were killed or injured by landmines (Hansen 2004, 365). That can be seen from the example of Cambodia, where 1 in 236 people is an amputee, nearly 100 times more than in the US, which is primarily the result of APLs (Price 1998, 619). Because of that statistic, Cambodia has become a poster country referenced by norm entrepreneurs for persuasive purposes (Price 1998, 619). Universally accepted norms against the usage of indiscriminate weapons and weapons that lead to unnecessary suffering have already existed, and those norms have created a taboo against the usage of those categories of weapons, such as chemical and biological weapons (Maslen and Herby 1998, 696). The norm to ban landmines fits into this universal norm, meaning that it was substantively persuasive and states that have accepted previous universal norms should have accepted this one as well (Price 1998, 629). In addition, the norm was well-formulated because it was focused on one issue and connected its goal to a widely accepted humanitarian issue (Price 1998, 629). As such, the substance of the norm was fulfilling widely accepted universal values, as the theory required (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 906-907). Overall, it is obvious that the norm had an appealing substance, a strong moral backing, and a wide coalition of promoting actors.

The process was led by many prominent CSOs, which together formed an umbrella organisation: the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (Price 1998, 620-621). Most notable among those CSOs is the International Committee of the Red Cross because the ICRC has been upholding humanitarian law in armed conflict and providing humanitarian support for a century (International Committee of the Red Cross 2009, 3-11). Later, about 600 organisations joined ICBL (Price 1998, 621)⁴. Some of these organisations were among the most influential CSOs in the world, meaning that the quality of norm entrepreneurs was very high, as both people and states respected them (Price 1998, 620-621). This means entrepreneurs themselves were also reputable, just like is required by the theory (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 906-907). The signing of the treaty itself was an unprecedented success of norm entrepreneurship, where CSOs and governments worked together through a unique partnership (Kjellman 2003, 956-958).

⁴ Some of those organisations are extremely reputable. Members were world-renowned organisations like Oxfam, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Doctors Without Borders (ICBL 2022).

ICBL campaigns were very successful. The campaigns not only focused on citizens of various countries but also on political structures and many politicians who agreed with the campaign (Price 1998, 620-621). In addition, CSOs have targeted international organisations like the UN and have even secured the support of Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (Price 1998, 620), which has led to the UN helping ICBL with persuading states through organising various plenilateral events (Price 1998, 623-627). The APL norm was substantively acceptable and a well-formulated norm promoted by highly respected NGOs, meaning that the norms were very likely to be accepted by states (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 906-907). CSOs and IGOs were conducting their campaigns mostly through persuasion, and they have managed to convince many states that banning landmines is an action that should be taken for humanitarian reasons (Price 1998, 624-625). In addition to persuasion, they also used coercion by shaming states which do not accept the AP landmine norm derived from universal values (Short 1999, 491). For example, the US was shamed, albeit without compellence, for not being the leader in the protection of human rights and accepting the treaty (Wexler 2003, 566-567). After some time, the UK and France, as former President Mitterand personally supported the cause (Price 1998, 620), have supported the norm (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 901). The UK and France were critical states because of their international status and long history of AP landmine production and usage, and after their acceptance, spreading the norm has become easier (Price 1998, 901). After reaching 60 signatories in Oslo, including the critical states, the tipping point was reached (Price 1998, 901). Then, a norm cascade occurred, and in less than three months, a total of 124 governments signed the petition in Ottawa (Price 1998, 901). Currently, there are 164 signatories to the treaty (Schmitt 2018). The role of normative entrepreneurs in the making of this regime is undeniable, as they were both drivers and facilitators of the Ottawa Treaty. However, the anti-personnel landmine norm is still not universally accepted, causing the topic to be problematised and APLs to be used.

Many states, including great powers, have not joined the Ottawa Treaty. The US, China, and Russia are just some of around thirty states that do not participate in this regime (Branigin 2014). These states are great powers and the backbone of the emerging multipolar international order (Zakaria 2008). However, a much bigger problem is the fact that these countries are users and producers of landmines, meaning that their intentions to use them will likely not change (Schmitt 2018). Great powers have a greater capacity to act and protect their interests (Walt 2017). Therefore, they will be more likely to engage in conflicts to protect those interests and use the mines they produce to protect them. Since great powers are more commonly the parties in conflict because of their various interests and importance in the balance of power, the anti-

landmine norm will not affect many of the world's conflicts, and the usage of AP landmines will continue (Yeisley 2011). As such, the efficiency of the regime is somewhat limited. It is very good that many states have decided to join the treaty, but if great powers, users of APLs, have a higher chance of engaging in conflicts, then the problem is far from solved. Now, we have to consider why states would not want to join the Ottawa Treaty and abide by the widely accepted norm and how they could be persuaded to do so.

Great Powers – Why Would They Not Accept the Norms?

The norm life cycle theory may offer a partial explanation for only some of the states. The substance of the anti-landmine norm was appealing and tied to universal values, while its norm entrepreneurs were very reputable. However, if a state lacks a civil society, it would make sense that it is less affected by norm entrepreneurs. One could argue that China refused to join the treaty simply because it lacks a civil society in the Western sense of the world (Chamberlain 1993). While it would be impacted by the international civil society, without the push from within, the pressure would not be great enough for norms to be internalised. One would have more difficulty applying this argument in the case of Russia (Domrin 2003). However, its civil society is minimal and repressed, with the government keeping CSOs on a very tight leash (Robertson 2009, 540-543). On the other hand, it is impossible to use this argument to support the thesis that countries like the US have refused to join the regime due to the lack of civil society. After all, the US is widely regarded as a standard-setter and exporter of the value of having a civil society (Vogel 2006). That makes the NLCM's approach inadequate for understanding why some states would not join the regime.

Here, we should consider the most relevant critiques of the limitations of the NLCM. Krook and True note that norm diffusion should be seen as a dynamic process, with norms being processes rather than fixed ideas. In their view, norm contestation over meanings is a form of internal dynamism essential to norm formation, which needs to be taken into account in the norm cascade model. Norm diffusion is contested rather than progressive in their view (Krook and True 2012). Iommi agrees that contestation is crucial when it comes to the norm life cycle. She examines the stage of norm internalisation, suggesting that automatic internalisation cannot be expected. Instead, she considers that even when norms are socially recognised as valid, they still remain contested, and their internalisation is dynamic, as norms remain contested throughout their lifecycle. In her model, norms can also go through regression as a stage. However, she offers the view that dialogue and contestation can strengthen norms even beyond internalisation, as it is crucial for their ongoing legitimacy

(Iommi 2019). We would suggest that the anti-APL norm did not have sufficient contestation and dynamism to produce a form that great powers could potentially accept despite their national security concerns.

While identity could prevent a state from accepting certain norms, landmines are not important elements to the identity of a state. Since landmines have not been historically important in political discourses, they cannot be a part of states' identities (Price 1998, 631-632). Simply, no country bases its identity on its stance towards landmines or on the usage of landmines. Even the stretching of the identity argument cannot work. The anti-landmine norm is based on universal values of preventing unnecessary and excessive suffering, not just Western or other more particular values. As such, there would be no need to oppose the norm from an identity standpoint.

The state-centric economic approach is not a good enough explanation either. States are producing and selling landmines, thereby making a profit and thus making absolute gains. The military industry is indeed a significant part of the economy of some states. Furthermore, this is especially true for the US, Russia, and China. Not accepting norms to keep their economies booming would make sense. However, if most states have agreed to prohibit APLs, and they have, the export market for them is very limited. Furthermore, landmines are not consumer goods, meaning there is a limit to how much profit can be generated because they can be sold only to other non-participating states or armed non-state groups. With the cost of mines ranging from 3 to 30 dollars, there is not much profit to be generated even in the first place, let alone with most countries prohibiting the APLs (Minesweepers n.d.). That shows there are no measurable absolute gains to be secured by not accepting the norm. Even more importantly, France and the UK are big producers of anti-personnel landmines, and they have ratified the treaty despite that. That means the liberal approach is not good enough to explain why some states would not accept the norm.

Special interest groups may have some incentive towards producing landmines, but it is not that great. As we have already established, the economic gain from landmines is limited. However, special interests have smaller requirements than the state's entire economy. That means that even smaller profits can be satisfactory. A strong enough lobby could affect the willingness of a state to join the regime. There are two problems with this. The first problem is that this approach is limited only to countries with public-private partnerships in the military-industrial complex, like the US. That cannot explain the incentives that nations with state-owned military enterprises, such as China and Russia, would have to avoid joining the regime. This alone makes it unsuitable for a complete answer. Furthermore, even in countries like the US, the companies that produce military hardware tend to be very large and manufacture a variety of hardware. For example, Lockheed Martin is the chief contractor for the

trillion-dollar F-35 procurement. What incentive would such a company have to use its resources to lobby against the US joining the Ottawa Treaty? Producing and selling landmines is not very profitable and is not likely to reap adequate benefits to cover the lobbying costs, especially compared to other military hardware sales. Furthermore, the UK has large private military companies, like BAE Systems, and it chose to prohibit landmines (Corporate Watch 2015). Overall, special interest groups can be used as a potential minor factor in explaining the unwillingness of some states to join. However, they are not useful in the case of Russia and China.

We suggest that the structural realist approach has an explanatory gap when it comes to the formation of the Ottawa Treaty, as not only was it not formed by great powers protecting their privileged interests, but they were and still are absent from the regime. It was formed primarily by norm entrepreneurs. During the 1990s, the world order was unipolar, and the US chose not to join the treaty. In the current multipolar order, the great powers do not participate in the treaty. It is essentially an apolar regime formed without great powers. Thereby, the great powers have nothing to balance against directly (Mearsheimer 1994, 9-13) except each other through reciprocity. Yet, this does not explain why the norm was directly and categorically ignored. We consider there is enough reason, even for the great powers, to make small steps towards this norm by accepting its weaker form within or without the treaty.

National Security – the Limiter in Action

National security is the main reason why some states have not joined the Ottawa Treaty. States have to protect their national security. That is something they cannot accomplish if they cannot protect their military security. Landmines could be crucial for deterrence and the survival of states because they are primarily defensive weapons (Rosendahl 2018). Even so, the states that have joined the treaty have found greater security in humanitarian solidarity, through which they signal their peaceful intentions. Weaker states, especially those in safe environments or military alliances, do not need to balance against other powers. Unlike most other weapons, landmines are almost exclusively defensive weapons and used primarily for defensive purposes. Therefore, they can be used to assist in the protection of national security from various military threats (Rosendahl 2018). At the same time, states do not appear as a threat by stockpiling them. In fact, countries are very open about their need to protect their security. Various states openly state that security is the chief reason they choose not to join the treaty (Monitor 2019a). Yet, even so, most states have joined the treaty and do not prioritise military power in their defensive strategies. In other words, while APL can be justified for security, most states find them

unacceptable. The UK and France, for example, are different. They do not require landmines to protect their national security because they are EU members with a very low chance of war (Mahbubani 2008). Many other signatories do not need landmines either. Insular countries, countries that are protected by the security umbrella of a superior power (like many NATO states), and countries that do not have any superior or near-peer adversaries near their territory might not benefit much from landmines in terms of enhancing national security. That makes them more likely to comply with norms and enhance their reputation. However, for countries in conflict, like Syria, landmines could be crucial for deterrence and survival because they are primarily defensive weapons (Rosendahl 2018). There is a strong connection between protecting national security and having the capability to field anti-personnel landmines for that purpose. That is also true for great powers that are of main interest in this article.

Russia considers landmines vital for its national security. Landmines are needed for Russian contemporary conventional deterrence. Russian relative military power is significantly lesser than that of the Soviet Union *vis-à-vis* NATO (Kofman et al. 2021). As such, it needs a different conventional approach to threats and requires great focus on active and phased defence (Kofman et al. 2021, 78-81). Landmines are very useful weapons for such a defence since they can even deter an adversary from offensive actions due to prospective losses to attrition. Indeed, Russian officials have openly spoken about the importance of landmines for national security (Monitor 2019b). Aside from the potential great power conflict, Russia considers landmines very useful even in smaller conflicts and a means of protecting borders from terrorist incursions (Monitor 2019b). When Russia was at its weakest in the 1990s, it had to use anti-personnel landmines in Chechnya to secure its territorial integrity. Overall, it is clear that Russia is quite dependent on landmines for its national security, both *vis-à-vis* NATO and for other security needs, and thus does not want to join the Ottawa Treaty.

China also needs landmines to protect its national security. That need is not as great as in the Russian case since the main strategic direction in which China faces its main adversary is eastward, across the ocean, even though it is the dominant land power in the region. However, China has openly stated that it considers possessing the ability to use landmines necessary for self-defence. At least until alternative means of self-defence are found (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China 2004). That means China regards landmines as a necessity for its national security. China has also found employing landmines very useful during the Sino-Vietnamese war (Jing 2018). Nowadays, the threat from that direction is gone, and China continues with the demining of the Sino-Vietnamese border (Jing 2018). Regardless, China finds protecting its national security interests vital and is still willing to use landmines to protect it (The

Irrawaddy 2022). Energy imports are crucial for China's national security due to the lack of domestically available fossil fuels (Wu 2014). For example, it protects vital oil pipelines in Myanmar using landmines (The Irrawaddy 2022), thus protecting its security interests with landmines. However, it should be noted that China has become more powerful, and its need for landmines will diminish with the growth of its conventional military power. Likewise, the trends towards using fewer landmines and towards demining are noticeable. That is fully in line with theoretical implications since the lack of the need for mines to protect national security will lead to landmines slowly being replaced by different means of protection. This section shows that national security is the reason China uses landmines and refuses to join the regime.

Even the US needs landmines to protect its national security. That may seem odd, after all, because the US probably possesses the greatest conventional military power in the world. Even more importantly, it is an insular power bordering only Canada and Mexico. So why would it need landmines? The US, which is an insular superpower with many alliances, has tied its national security to that of its allies (Oh 2008), and landmines are needed to protect some of them (Weddle 1999). For example, the US has tied its security to that of South Korea (National Catholic Reporter 2014). Over a million North Korean soldiers would overrun the joint forces on the peninsula without the APLs to halt the invasion until the AirLand Battle took effect (Weddle 1999, 22-24). The US needs anti-personnel landmines to protect an ally in case of a conflict on the Korean Peninsula, meaning that APLs protect US national security as well (National Catholic Reporter 2014). Former President Obama was clear about America relying on landmines in South Korea (Alexander 2014). The Trump administration was no different, going as far as to allow commanders to use smart landmines (that are discriminatory and reusable) without the approval of the president or the defence secretary (Marcus 2020). The Biden administration seems to adhere to the same principles (Holst 2021). In general, the US tends to abide by the convention despite not being party to the treaty (Holst 2021). However, when it comes to protecting the national security of an important ally, the Republic of Korea, the US has to maintain landmines. In general, the US is not opposing the norm, except in instances where it is important to protect the state's national security by using APLs. That means the US follows the same trend as Russia and China.

This section shows that national security is a major concern of great powers and a chief reason for them not to join the Ottawa Treaty. That is in accordance with the theoretical expectation that national security is expected to have primacy over the willingness of states to abide by the normative regime formed by norm entrepreneurs. Even so, the vast majority of states have still acceded to the treaty, especially those with a strong effect on public opinion and a large

role in civil society. The norm entrepreneurs have certainly formed the regime, but national security has acted as the limiter to the regime's membership. Indeed, the US, China, and Russia have openly stated that they are unwilling to join the regime due to defence concerns, and we can consider that they would not make the first step or join individually due to power balancing.

Discussion: Going Beyond the Limiter

Based on the findings in this paper, the requirements of national security have superseded the need to abide by the international norm related to the ban on APLs, formed by normative entrepreneurs, and thus to abide by their wishes to ban APLs. As we have shown, no state can protect the norms and values it wants if it cannot protect its security. The theoretical section confirmed that. The examples of the US, Russia, and China are empirical proofs of that. However, states have chosen not to abide by the norm only in cases where landmines have significant importance for their military and defence strategies. The majority of countries have accepted the norm even though their security would have been helped by having APLs, as the constructivist norm life cycle model suggests. Furthermore, even users of APLs are reluctant to actually utilise them, as seen in the cases of China and the US, which choose to use them only when there are no better options. So what does this mean? The norm is functioning to a large extent. But is there a way to limit the indiscriminate suffering even further? How can the wishes of the norm entrepreneurs break the limits of national security if the need to protect national security supersedes the norms?

Focusing on banning those anti-personnel landmines that are simple and outdated is the way to fulfil our wishes. By this, we mean so-called "dumb" landmines that have a simple and unchanging mechanism which cannot be easily disarmed or distinguished between targets. The norm to ban landmines is derived from universal principles of not causing indiscriminate and unnecessary suffering. The universal principles could still be respected if mines were discriminatory. Those are the exact conditions that smart mines fulfil.⁵ In the recent years, many of the world's APL users have switched to smart mines (Rosendahl 2018). While it is not compliant with the Ottawa Treaty, switching to "smart" mines does comply with the above-mentioned principles because they are discriminatory. It should be noted that "smart" mines are not 100%

⁵ Smart mines are landmines that can be redeployed or easily deactivated after conflict, thereby making them more discriminatory and focused on ground troops during the time of military operations (Rosendahl 2018). Some of them may even have more complex conditions required for their activation, and the activation might depend on operators as well.

reliable and thus not absolutely compliant with those principles, but they are nevertheless far closer to them than “dumb” mines. Furthermore, smart mines can be reused, making them much more versatile for protecting national security and thus more useful for such a cause (South 2021). It should be noted that they are more expensive while being more effective, which is always normal with new generations of weapons. Therefore, there are no measurable national security concerns when it comes to switching from normal mines to smart mines. In addition, the smart mines mostly comply with the above-described principles. “Smart” mines can protect national security without causing adverse and unnecessary suffering since they can be used only during a conflict and turned off or redeployed afterwards.

While not directly banning landmines, states that adopt smart mines mostly comply with the principles upon which the APL norm is based while still protecting their security. That is in line with the spirit of the norm, rather than the letter of the treaty, and would allow the anti-APL norm entrepreneurs to be satisfied while at the same time allowing great powers to retain some military leverage. At the same time, if the great powers accede to banning “dumb” APLs, it would signal that they could all eventually accept a full APL ban while maintaining military balance. Indeed, about thirty states have not joined the treaty, but they only use landmines where it is truly necessary, as can be seen from the US and China’s reluctance to utilise them unless truly needed. Furthermore, some APL users switch to smart mines on their own. If they agree to use only “smart” mines instead of “dumb” ones, the initial goals of ICBL will be much closer to being satisfied, even if the original treaty would not solve the issue. Here, we should note the idea of norm clusters provided by Winston, which suggests that similar norms can coexist and diffuse together. That is in line with the norm diffusion stage of the NLCM but expanded to allow for different interpretations of a norm. She considers that the standard diffusion process in the model is oversimplified because norms do not always need to be adopted in the same way, as they are flexible and evolve across contexts (Winston 2017). In this way, the norm against the use of “dumb” mines could coexist with and complement the norm against all APLs.

We suggest that framing a new norm in the direction of using only smart anti-personnel landmines could effectively expand the global governance of anti-personnel landmines to at least some of the other 30 states, although perhaps not under the Ottawa Treaty. We consider that it would be within the realm of possibility to either adjust the treaty or create an additional treaty for non-signatories. In this way, the norm promoted is “anti-dumb” APLs, rather than simply anti-APLs, which we consider can be done within the current framework and in line with the goals of the normative entrepreneurs, perhaps at least as a middle step. With norm entrepreneurs switching attention to the

dumb landmine ban, which does not compromise national security, some of those thirty states might join the Ottawa Treaty as second-tier countries. However, such a scenario could potentially lead to original signatories switching from the original treaty to the optional protocol, thus damaging the normative order and the regime.

As such, this option is not very desirable. Instead, an additional regime, in the form of a treaty, could be created, focused on smart mines. In fact, a similar treaty exists; more precisely, the Protocol on Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). While this protocol does not ban anti-personnel landmines, nor “dumb” landmines, it does limit the conditions for usage of “dumb” landmines to make them more discriminatory and, in some cases, requires landmines to have self-deactivating or self-destruct mechanisms after a certain period (International Committee of the Red Cross 2022). So, this protocol is already somewhat focused on limiting dumb landmine usage and opening room for smart mines. The protocol was amended once in 1996, and it could be amended again to lead to a total ban of “dumb” anti-personnel landmines, as in its current form, it is far from sufficient according to the norm entrepreneurs who desire a clearer and wider ban.

This protocol is a great starting point for furthering the desires of the norm entrepreneurs. It has already been signed by China, Russia, and the US (International Committee of the Red Cross 2022). Since it is focused on numerous other landmine applications, other than the anti-personnel landmines, many Ottawa signatories are parties to the treaty (International Committee of the Red Cross 2022). As such, norm entrepreneurs should focus on persuasion and coercion towards adding an additional protocol to this treaty or even creating a complementary treaty to ban “dumb” anti-personnel landmines fully. Ottawa signatories can easily be persuaded to make such amendments and to persuade non-signatories to further protocol amendments since they have already banned APLs and would thus be unaffected by the changes. Meanwhile, shaming by norm entrepreneurs and Ottawa signatories can act as coercion towards Ottawa non-signatories to accept the protocol. Since the protocol also governs the usage of non-APL mines (like anti-armour mines) and booby traps, the Ottawa signatories joining the protocol would not impact the overall normative system of the Ottawa Treaty. Meanwhile, non-signatories of the Ottawa Treaty would be banning dumb landmines. In sum, if norm entrepreneurs were to switch attention from banning APLs indiscriminately to banning “dumb” APLs under the Protocol of the CCW, they would have a great chance of incorporating more countries into fulfilling original principles. Indeed, there would be no true anti-personnel landmine ban but a dumb landmine ban. That is still quite a significant step towards fulfilling our

wishes of not causing indiscriminate and unnecessary suffering, all while assuring states that they can still protect their national security.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the benefits that widely available and unsophisticated APLs provide to national security are the main reason why some states, most notably great powers, choose not to join the Ottawa Treaty that has been formed by norm entrepreneurs. The norm itself could have been more clearly defined, and its promotion could have been more gradual in order to be less threatening to states prioritising security. Norm entrepreneurs have created transnational norms and successfully brought about the signing of the Ottawa Treaty, forming an international regime around it. However, some states, most notably the great powers, have not joined the treaty. Existing theories offered unfitting and incomplete explanations of why some states would not abide by the APL norm. The paper has shown how, in certain cases, national security supersedes the need to abide by it and how Russia, China, and the US require anti-personnel landmines to protect their national security while balancing physical power against each other. As such, the paper has given theoretical and empirical reasoning for such an assessment. The paper has also given a policy proposal for normative entrepreneurs: If they choose to promote the anti-dumb mine norm, they could further limit indiscriminate suffering since there would be no national security concerns from those states.

This paper also brings up some new questions and further avenues of research. Theoretically, an interesting new avenue of research is to see if the notion of apolarity can be integrated into realist theoretical approaches towards global governance. Such an approach could possibly merge norm entrepreneurship and national security under the same theoretical framework within the realist paradigm. Empirically, focusing on national security as the limiter of norm entrepreneurship can be used to review where the limits of some other existing or prospective weapon control regimes are. This study also brings new questions about the US and China. Both countries use APLs far less than before due to new means of protecting national security. Focusing on whether or how the Chinese increase in conventional power could lead to the complete ban of anti-personnel landmines is a grave topic. Likewise, trying to find alternatives to APL usage in South Korea would be very beneficial for the peninsula and could prospectively lead to the ban of APLs by the US.

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DA LI SU ŽELJE BITNE?

NACIONALNA BEZBEDNOST I NORMATIVNO PREDUZETNIŠTVO U FORMIRANJU REŽIMA ZABRANE UPOTREBE NAGAZNIH MINA

Apstrakt: Normativni preduzetnici mogu formirati međunarodne režime onda kada norma koju oni promovišu postane široko prihvaćena u civilnim društvima većine zemalja sveta. Međutim, normativno preduzetništvo ima svoje granice, jer ne prihvataju sve države promovisane norme. Ovaj rad će pokušati da odgovori zašto je to tako. U članku se tvrdi da nacionalna bezbednost država sprečava određene zemlje da prihvate norme za koje smatraju da bi ih mogle ugroziti. Kao rezultat toga, režim bi mogao da postoji da ga formiraju normativni preduzetnici, ali neke sile, potencijalno od velikog značaja, to ne bi prihvatile, ograničavajući time efikasnost režima. Članak će predstaviti kako ovaj bezbednosno-centrični okvir funkcioniše koristeći slučaj norme protiv mina i Konvencije iz Otave. Ovaj pristup može objasniti ograničenja članstva sa kojima se suočavaju režimi koje stvaraju normativni preduzetnici, poput Konvencije iz Otave. Dalje, u članku će biti prikazano kako se ovaj okvir može iskoristiti za pronalaženje načina da se promeni norma protiv pešadijskih mina na način da se ne kompromituje nacionalna bezbednost, čime se ponovo omogućava širenje norme koja formira režim.

Ključne reči: nagazne mine; globalno upravljanje; difuzija međunarodnih normi; kontestacija međunarodnih normi; međunarodni režimi; nacionalna bezbednost.

CONTESTING CLIMATE POLICY IN THE EU: RESISTANCE, REPRESSION, AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Roberto LOUVIN¹, Marko NOVAKOVIĆ², Ezio BENEDETTI³

ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the growing tension between climate activism and state repression in the European Union, focusing on the legal and political implications of criminalising civil disobedience in environmental movements. It starts from the hypothesis that the legal frameworks of the EU member states and the EU itself insufficiently protect the rights of climate activists, leading to democratic backsliding and the erosion of fundamental freedoms. Grounded in John Rawls' theory of civil disobedience as a public, non-violent, and conscientious act aimed at changing unjust laws or policies, the article explores whether climate resistance should be considered a legitimate form of political expression rather than a threat to public order. Using a multidisciplinary and comparative legal method, the analysis draws on European and international human rights instruments—including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Aarhus Convention—EU climate policy frameworks such as the European Green Deal, and recent jurisprudence from national and European courts. It finds that while legal systems nominally protect freedom of expression and assembly, in practice, they often allow for disproportionate sanctions, police violence, and the misuse of anti-terror laws against environmental activists. The article concludes that EU climate governance lacks a consistent human rights-based approach (HRBA), particularly in policy implementation and allocating EU funds. It calls for integrating fundamental rights into all aspects of climate governance, including litigation, policy design, and public participation, to ensure a just, democratic, and socially equitable green transition.

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Climate Change – Much More Than a Simple Generational Concern

The climate crisis is causing growing alarm, particularly among younger generations, and is increasingly mobilising millions worldwide. This widespread mobilisation, however, is not limited to the youth. As demonstrated by the 2024 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz et al. v. Switzerland*, the Grand Chamber upheld the right to health of the Swiss association KlimaSeniorinnen, or “Climate Seniors”, and found that Switzerland had violated the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to adopt sufficient measures to address climate change (ECHR Judgement 2024). This case illustrates that concern and activism over the climate crisis span all age groups. It is clear that, especially for younger generations, the continued unwillingness of countries such as the US and its policymakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—and the broader failure of governments to prioritise the fight against climate change—is no longer acceptable. This inaction is already leading to devastating consequences with potentially deadly implications for future generations. Responsibility for this crisis, whether through action, omission, or *culpa in vigilando*, lies not only with states but also with private entities, including some of the world’s largest multinational corporations, given their substantial contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions both directly and through their extended global value chains.

This growing frustration is understandable, as governments continue to delay the adoption of swift, consistent, and ambitious climate solutions while simultaneously aligning themselves with a noticeable resurgence in fossil fuel exploitation. This trend has become particularly evident over the past year, following the failure of the last two United Nations climate change conferences (COP28 in Dubai and COP29 in Baku) and the decisions of some national governments—most notably the United States after the election of Donald Trump—to pursue a strong revival of fossil fuel extraction and use.

The attention of legal experts on climate issues has so far focused mainly on climate litigation, highlighting some significant results achieved through legal actions brought by climate advocates (Cournil 2020).⁴ However, this article

⁴ The panorama of these disputes includes, to limit ourselves to Europe, in addition to the aforementioned *Klimaseniorinnen Schweiz et al. v. Switzerland*, important actions against States and the European Union to complain about inadequate protection, such as the exemplary *Urgenda v. Netherlands* ruling (The Hague District Court Decision 2015), the *Klimaatzaak* case in Belgium (Brussels Court of Appeal Judgement 2023), *Push Sweden, Fältbiologerna et. al v. Sweden* (Stockholm District Court Judgement 2017), *Commune de Grande-Synthe and Damien Carême v. France* (ECHR Decision 2024), *Organic farmer families and Greenpeace v. Germany* (Berlin Administrative Court Judgement 2019), *Armando Ferrão Carvalho et al. v. European Parliament and Council* (CJEU Order T-330/18), *Notre affaire à tous et al. v. France* (Administrative Court of Paris Decision 2021).

revolves around a different topic and approach, namely the conditions of active and non-violent resistance of the groups of climate and environmental activists that have sprung up almost everywhere demanding a serious and immediate commitment by states and international organisations to limit the damage caused to climate and biodiversity by human activities. In many countries, these actions have been criminalised the same way as any other criminal offence and sometimes even worse, as they are considered a serious disturbance of public order. In this regard, our analysis focuses on one basic question: instead of operating in the direction of penal repression, would it not be more just and appropriate to promote appropriate conditions for the growth of civil attention and the will to dialogue on these topics, increasing collective democratic sensitivity to respond in a more tolerant and constructive manner to the drive provoked by these social movements?

The ability of our legal systems to express new forms of political participation, going beyond the classic mechanisms typical of liberal democracies, may depend on how we answer this question. That would allow us to establish the conditions for better civil coexistence and overcome the feeling of generalised distrust towards traditional political institutions that is, unfortunately, taking root in present times (Lemons and Brown 2011). This path can also be illuminated by the in-depth reflections made by Hannah Arendt (1972), who was able to analyse with clarity the strategies of the opposition movements of the sixties and seventies, of the Freedom Riders and those opposed to the war and segregationism, investigating without prejudice in search of the "truth" of the political discourse.

We all have a duty, as citizens and as students of politics and law, to move away from a rigidly legalistic approach and recognise the need for peaceful and productive spaces for the expression of dissent, especially since what is at stake is the possible extinction of the human species. Talks and reflections on the so-called "sixth mass extinction" began in the mid-1990s, whose possible contours today are set out in numerous studies in relation to the dizzying growth in the rates of extinction of animal and plant species (Carducci 2021, 51). The single voice raised by 11,258 scientists from 153 different countries around the world, who have solemnly declared that "scientists have a moral obligation to clearly warn humanity of any catastrophic threat" and to "tell it like it is" since "climate change is not a possibility or a probability, it is a certainty" must be listened to (Ripple, Wolf, and Newsome 2019). In addition to the voices of scientists, scholars, and civil society, a recent and increasingly visible phenomenon is the emergence of climate disobedience as an organised phenomenon. This form of protest goes beyond traditional advocacy, as individuals and groups engage in acts of civil disobedience to draw attention to the urgency of the climate crisis and the failure of institutions to act decisively.

Climate Disobedience as an Organised Phenomenon: The Spectrum of Dissent and its Repression

In recent years, climate resistance has been spearheaded by movements like Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future, both founded in 2018. Extinction Rebellion emerged in the UK as a decentralised activist network using non-violent civil disobedience and direct action to push for radical changes in society's political and economic foundations, centred around climate and social justice and without a well-defined leadership structure.⁵ Fridays for Future, initiated by Greta Thunberg's school strike in Stockholm, rapidly became a global youth-led movement challenging inadequate government climate policies. Climate dissent today takes various forms, ranging from peaceful protests and symbolic individual acts to more disruptive measures such as road and rail blockades or the occupation of infrastructure sites. Some actions combine public protest with legal strategies, as seen in cases like the cancelled expansion of the Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport in France. Artistic protests, including flash mobs⁶, also serve as powerful tools for spreading environmental messages. However, some tactics, such as those involving minor or alleged damage to cultural sites, have sparked controversy. Authorities often exaggerate the impact of these acts to justify harsher penalties and gain public support for crackdowns, particularly from wealthier segments of society.⁷ This practice exemplifies penal

⁵ Extinction Rebellion made the following official statement: "By our conscience and our reason, we declare a non-violent rebellion against our corrupt and incompetent governments and institutions that threaten all our futures. The deliberate complicity of our government has undermined the foundations of democracy, relegating the common interest to the margins in favour of short-term gain and private profit. We demand to be heard and to listen to each other, to find rational solutions to the ecological and climate crisis and to establish national and city assemblies where we can decide together, through direct and participatory democracy, the necessary measures to be implemented to face the emergency" (Extinction Rebellion 2025).

⁶ From this point of view, the initiative carried out in Switzerland on November 22, 2018, in the Lausanne branch of *Crédit Suisse* was emblematic and quickly went viral because it used the hashtag *#SiRogersavait* ("if only Roger knew", alluding to the well-known tennis player and *Crédit Suisse* advertising testimonial Roger Federer). Thirty activists comically mimed a tennis match dressed in caricatured sportswear. The refusal to leave the occupied space of the bank branch following the injunction of the branch manager to leave the premises (the demonstrators remained in the room and continued their "sport" activities) led to the intervention of the police, following which the demonstrators left the premises without further resistance: none of the demonstrators, according to all the witnesses, showed any aggressive behaviour or stance, and the atmosphere remained friendly. The ensuing trial gave rise to significant debate inside and outside the courtroom (see Bourg, Demay and Favre [2021]).

⁷ An emblematic example of this repressive approach has been recorded in Italy with the adoption of Law no. 6 of January 22, 2024, n. 6 (Sanctioning provisions regarding the destruction, dispersion, deterioration, defacement, defiling and illicit use of cultural or landscape heritage), better known in the media as the "eco-vandals law".

populism and is not limited to authoritarian systems (Novaković 2024); democratic governments increasingly exhibit similar tendencies, particularly in response to rising social unrest over issues such as climate change. In such cases, authorities resort to repressive legislation and exaggerated criminal charges to suppress dissent. In both democratic and authoritarian contexts, the law is employed more as a tool for political messaging and symbolic reassurance than as a means of ensuring fair adjudication, thereby eroding the rule of law and undermining public trust in democratic institutions.

More traditional civil disobedience, such as refusing to pay environmentally harmful taxes, is less common today. Governments have responded to this wave of climate activism with increasingly repressive measures. Activists often face heavy-handed policing, inflated charges, and disproportionate sentences. Courts have allowed extended detentions and harsh bail conditions, while protesters and sometimes journalists have reported abuse and mistreatment by police.⁸ Anti-terrorism laws and surveillance tools, originally intended for organised crime, are now being misapplied to environmental activists. The criminalisation of climate protest is especially troubling where it is equated with terrorism (Cortes and Leurquin 2023), as in the French government's controversial dissolution of the activist group *Les Soulèvements de la Terre*⁹ (later overturned by the Conseil d'État).¹⁰ This trend marks a serious and inappropriate shift, using anti-terror legislation to suppress dissent in the environmental sphere.

The Alarm Sounded by the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention

The position expressed by Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, is the first public and institutional condemnation of the excessive reactions by states in their fight against environmental protests and climate civil disobedience (Forst 2024). The Special

⁸ The brutality of the repression carried out by the police during the G8 summit in Genoa was confirmed both by the Italian judiciary and by the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on October 26, 2017, in the case of *Azzolina and others v. Italy* (ECHR Judgement 2017).

⁹ The decree to dissolve *de facto* the group "*Les Soulèvements de la Terre*" (The Uprisings of the Earth) issued by the government and signed by President Macron was based on Article L. 212-1 of the Internal Security Code aimed at suppressing associations or groups "*that provoke armed demonstrations or violent acts against persons or property*".

¹⁰ On November 9, 2023, the Council of State annulled the dissolution on the grounds that the movement's actions were not proportionate to the extreme decision of a dissolution (Council of State 2023).

Rapporteur's appeal is addressed precisely to the States, and in particular, to those that signed the 1998 Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, to immediately address the root causes of environmental mobilisation, and to counter the narratives, which, as can be clearly seen, are often fuelled by governments themselves that consistently portray environmental defenders and their movements as criminals. The danger highlighted is that the spread of climate and environmental civil disobedience will be instrumentally used as a pretext to limit the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Forst's appeal moves in two different directions: on the one hand, by demanding that states respect their international obligations regarding freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and on the other hand, by putting an end to the systematic use of purely counter-terrorist measures against environmental defenders.

Finally, it is extremely significant Forst's request that states guarantee that the courts' approach to climate and environmental protests, including the determination of imposed sanctions, does not indirectly result in a restriction of the civic space in which freedoms are exercised and democratic processes are carried out.

The Evolution of the EU Environmental and Climate Policy: The Green Deal and the Absence of a Human Rights-Based Approach

Although environmental protection was not a founding principle of European integration and received limited attention in its early years, the EU environmental and climate policy has steadily progressed since the 1980s. The European integration process was mostly based on economic needs and commercial considerations, and these origins are still somehow affecting and conditioning its current evolution (Moro 2013; Pomfret 2021). The 1987 Single European Act provided the first legal basis for a common environmental policy, aiming to protect the environment, human health, and natural resources (SEA 1987). This development accelerated with the Maastricht Treaty and key rulings of the European Court of Justice, gaining further momentum with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, which increasingly intertwined environmental protection, climate change, and fundamental rights within EU law (Thieffry 2021). Despite these efforts, a unified approach among member states has not emerged, and national policies still vary significantly, as demonstrated by Gallarati (2021), Louvin (2020), and Bolopion (2024).

The EU's approach to environmental protection and climate change is closely linked to fundamental and citizenship rights. This connection is evident

in various EU legal acts, which reflect that environmental and climate policies—such as those under the Green Deal—operate within a broader legal framework that includes the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and international human rights law. Consequently, the article argues that fundamental rights must be systematically considered in impact assessments during EU legislative processes.

Notably, the EU's attention to environmental protection and climate change has been closely linked to the fundamental principles governing human rights and citizenship. These principles, rules, and trends have been extensively analysed by scholars such as Beyerlin and Marauhn (2011), Bodansky and Brunnée (2007), Hollo, Kulovesi and Mehling (2013), among others. That has confirmed if we recall some of the “environmental elements” included in the EU's acts dedicated to these issues.¹¹

In order to put the EU on the route to a green transition, the European Green Deal was established in 2019. This crucial strategic document recalls both the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and fundamental rights, which are general principles of EU law (TEU 2012, Article 6, para. 3) and EU values (TEU 2012, Article 2). Besides, it is impossible to disregard that one of the main pillars of the European Union is the Charter of Fundamental Rights (the Charter), primary EU law, binding on all EU institutions and the member states when implementing EU law (Ward et al. 2015). In 2020, the European Commission reinforced its commitment to compliance with the Charter by adopting a new strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter in the EU (EC 2020). The EU has emphasised that the Charter of Fundamental Rights should guide institutional action and raise awareness of rights, including the right to a clean and safe environment. As such, the EU environmental and climate policies, like the Green Deal, operate within a legal framework that includes the Charter, international human rights law, and EU fundamental rights law—ensuring these policies are not implemented in isolation from fundamental rights. Climate change is already affecting all aspects of life in Europe. Its impact is especially severe on vulnerable groups such as the poor, marginalised communities, the elderly, youth, and people with disabilities, highlighting the need for a rights-based approach in the EU climate policy.¹² As a matter of fact, the 2024 study

¹¹ The “Green Deal” is the main EU strategic initiative to become a competitive, resource-efficient, and modern economy by making sure that (i) there are no more net greenhouse gas emissions generated by 2050; (ii) net greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by at least 55% by 2030; (iii) economic growth is decoupled from resource use, and (iv) no people and places are left behind. Fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the Treaty on European Union (TEU), are both values (TEU 2012, Article 2) and general principles of EU law (TEU 2012, Article 6, para. 3) (EC 2019).

¹² The 2023 Report on Roma of the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU (FRA 2023) shows that the largest minority in Europe (Roma people) faces severe and constant discrimination

on climate risk assessment by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) demonstrates how climate change can intensify already-existing risks and crises, resulting in systemic issues that impact entire societies, with vulnerable social groups being disproportionately impacted (EEA 2024).

The real issue is that, even while the EU and its member states have made large financial and programmatic commitments to meet the climate targets, it is rare for these implementing laws and actions to specifically address basic rights according to the international law currently in force (Sands and Peel 2022).

The Green Deal aims to ensure a fair, inclusive, and people-centred green transition. However, it lacks clear guidance on how the member states should comply with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and other human rights obligations during its implementation (EC 2019). While it highlights the importance of addressing energy poverty through targeted policies, renovations, and lower energy costs, the integration of fundamental rights is not systematically outlined (EP 2023a). The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has recognised climate change as one of the key megatrends affecting fundamental rights in its 2023–2028 Strategic Plan (FRA 2023). The paper examines the European Green Deal from a human rights perspective, highlighting the limited and ad hoc integration of fundamental rights in the EU climate policy. Based on preliminary desk research, it identifies key elements of the Green Deal that affect human rights and stresses the need to mainstream these rights in future climate legislation. It outlines a potential Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), discusses the EU's human rights obligations, and analyses the Green Deal components impacting social rights, such as EU funding, energy poverty measures, and the 2030 environmental programme. The paper concludes by warning of the risks of neglecting rights in implementation and offers initial recommendations for a more rights-focused green transition.

International Legal Protection

In general terms, peaceful environmental and climate protests are protected not only by the constitutional norms that recognise the rights of free expression of thought, demonstration, and association in European countries but also by

in Europe when it comes to housing or jobs, but what is worst is that Roma suffer much more from climate change and environmental degradation than any other European community or minority (e.g., every second Roma person lives in damp, dark dwellings or housing without proper sanitation facilities, and every fifth person has no access to tap water inside their houses etc.), thus demonstrating that there is a strict connection between the impact of climate change and environmental degradation, human rights and most vulnerable groups. For the complete report see: FRA 2023.

the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), which explicitly guarantees and recognises as fundamental freedoms the freedom of expression (art. 10) and the freedom of assembly and association (art. 11) (ECHR 1950). Of course, the exercise of these rights and freedoms also carries with it duties and responsibilities. It may be subject to some conditions, restrictions, or penalties, but only to the extent that they are deemed necessary for the protection of national security, territorial integrity, and public safety, and for the prevention of disorder or crime in a democratic society.

Democratic systems thrive on pluralism and the open exchange of ideas, and peaceful demonstrations serve as an essential mechanism for political and social engagement. Through protest, citizens can voice concerns about governmental policies, environmental issues, or broader societal challenges, ensuring that authorities remain accountable and responsive to public demands. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has repeatedly affirmed that the right to peaceful assembly must be safeguarded even when the views expressed challenge the interests of the state or powerful economic actors. In cases such as *Öllinger v. Austria* (ECHR Judgement 2006) and *Kudrevičius and Others v. Lithuania* (ECHR Judgement 2015), the Court has emphasised that states have a duty not only to refrain from interfering with peaceful protests but also to take positive steps to ensure they can take place without undue restrictions.

When governments resort to violence, they send a dangerous signal that state power is above the law, weakening public trust in institutions and eroding democratic legitimacy. Historical examples show that when peaceful protests are met with repression, they often escalate rather than dissipate, leading to further instability and radicalisation.

The ECHR also adds possible further limitations used instrumentally by state authorities to repress pro-climate demonstrations, such as the protection of health or morality and the “protection of the rights of others”. Balancing that with the words “rights of others” is undoubtedly the crux of the matter, as symbolic actions often focus on public or private property through occupations, inscriptions, traffic blockades, etc. Some authorities, therefore, use this clause precisely to prohibit and repress demonstrations in which there is even a minimal sacrifice of competing rights, such as private property (ECHR Protocol 1952, Article 1) or free movement (ECHR Protocol 1963, Article 2), but which only suffer limited and transitory restrictions. The argument of “minimum damage” caused to public property, for example, was invoked during the famous affair known as the “*Affaires des décrocheurs*” (2019-2020), *Ministère public contre les décrocheurs de portraits d’Emmanuel Macron* (Mougeolle and Le Dyllo 2019).

Partial protection of the right to peaceful protest can also be found in the 1998 Aarhus Convention, in the part which deals with public participation in

decision-making processes (Aarhus Convention 1998). This document, however, tends to establish rather formal participation procedures, allowing the public to present in writing and during public hearings or investigations any observation, information, analyses or opinions relevant to the proposed activity (Aarhus Convention 1998, Article 6). The authorities of individual states retain strong protection in their ability to impose conditions and procedures for these forms of participation.

If we move our analysis to constitutional principles, in the general panorama of modern European constitutions, a true “right to resist” has rarely found a home despite ancient constitutional history preserving some traces of the importance of guaranteeing the possibility of influencing “resistance” forms of activism by public opinion towards politics, legislation, and the constitutions themselves. In this regard, some scholars speak of a “dawn” of climate change law and offer a comprehensive picture of the current dynamics of climate constitutionalism (Viola 2022).

Ethical disobedience to the laws of the polis (city-state) and reflection on it is a very common topic of classical philosophical thought (we can refer to Sophocles’ *Antigone*) and modern political literature (as in the famous *Resistance to Civil Government* of H.D. Thoreau), but the subject is still widely debated today. The pantheon of civil disobedience is packed with important figures (from Gandhi to Nelson Mandela) because conflict is one of the greatest “drivers” of legal experience. Today, however, practices aimed at its “neutralisation” are increasingly widespread, as Carl Schmitt already anticipated with his brilliant insight almost a century ago.

Proclamations such as the French Constitution of 1793, which elevated resistance to the illegitimate exercise of power to the level of a true “constitutional duty”, are now consigned to history: “When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is, for the people and for every part of the people, the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties”. A statement that had its roots in the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789, for which “The aim of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression” (*Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* 1789, Article 2). A right to resist that was understood as a natural right (according to Althusius and Locke) and, therefore, as an inviolable, irrevocable and non-transferable power of the people, but which later became suspect in the eyes of twentieth-century constitutionalism.

Today, however, constitutionalism prefers to be based on the implicit assumption of the necessary obedience of citizens, considered a tacit

prerequisite for the very survival of the legal system, the refusal of which is opposed by various legal means. Legal, in fact, but not necessarily legitimate.

We, therefore, need to pay close attention to the nature and limits that characterise an act of legitimate resistance. We can base this operation on the well-known definition given by John Rawls, who defined it as “a public, non-violent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about change in the law or policies of the government” (Rawls 1971).

Therefore, we restrict our examination to acts that are public in nature. Namely, they are committed transparently, deliberately seeking to make them particularly evident and have a public impact. The actions must be openly claimed, and the consequences for the author of civil disobedience are accepted in advance by the author of the act in the name of a strong re-evaluation of human responsibility, both towards Nature and towards the community of which one is a part.

The non-violent nature of these actions has changing connotations. It must be commensurate with the scope of the claim and proportionate to the values at stake in the sacrifice of opposing interests that can be imposed in the context of the demonstration.

Clearly, it must be a conscious behaviour, that is, a voluntary transgression of a legal precept considered unjust or an act aimed at affirming a value that the public order, in its inertia or for the preferred protection of less valid interests, in fact, demonstrates to disregard.

The essential aim of the disobedient person’s ethical and political tension is to bring about a change in the law in force or in public policies.

The elasticity of these concepts and their wide interpretation suggest the difficulty of finding the necessary points of equilibrium. For this reason, the analysis and role of jurisprudence is crucial in the current context. Climate activism aims to materially hinder, albeit often only symbolically, the normal functioning of production, trade and transport activities, which, due to their negative externalities, are responsible for climate change, loss of biodiversity, and disruption of ecosystems.

The exercise of the right to resist is, therefore, an alternative and complementary form of political participation with respect to the traditional methods of liberal democracies, such as joining political organisations, participating in electoral competitions to hold public office, electing representatives sensitive to a particular cause, and appealing to elected representatives and governments to adopt specific measures. These are methods that are not rejected out of hand by these organisations. However, they are certainly not considered capable of providing adequate responses in the time imposed by the climate emergency or of bringing about a rapid change

in the face of a phenomenon that now has the characteristics of a real emergency, as declared by the same national and international institutions (Chevalier and de la Motte 2020).

First European Case Law on the Subject

In the context of climate resistance and civil disobedience, European courts have so far largely shown deference to state repression. However, some lower courts, such as those in Lyon and Strasbourg, have accepted the defence of necessity and acquitted activists involved in illegal but non-violent acts, recognising them as justified efforts to prompt more effective governmental action on climate change (Diaz 2019; Roets 2019). These rulings acknowledged the urgency of the climate crisis and considered civil disobedience appropriate under such circumstances.

Nevertheless, higher courts have generally rejected this interpretation, viewing the necessity of defence as an artificial excuse. They demand a stricter standard, particularly regarding the imminence and directness of the danger. The courts require that the threat be immediate and closely linked to the actions taken, which poses a major evidentiary hurdle for defendants.

Debates in court often focus on whether the disobedient act was non-violent, necessary, and proportionate. However, proving the necessity of such actions is especially difficult since alternative legal avenues are often deemed available. This strict interpretation frustrates activists, who see legal recognition as essential to legitimising their cause.

Finally, many judges invoke the principle of separation of powers and avoid ruling on the substantive issues of climate policy, citing their lack of competence in addressing such scientifically and politically complex matters.

Final Remarks

The essential elements of the phenomenon outlined in this analysis are at risk of becoming an explosive issue in the coming years if they are not adequately tackled and channelled towards dialogue and if a real willingness by public authorities to implement adequate measures to combat global warming does not emerge soon. It is not just a question of preparing for the worst or providing climate engineering solutions (Morozov 2013) and aiming for mere climate resilience, an objective that already seems implicitly marked by strong social inequality (Louvin 2024, 361-375).

The potentially catastrophic effects of the changes, greatly accelerated by anthropogenic factors, both in terms of production and the excessively consumerist

lifestyles of a large part of humanity, will otherwise also reflect on the stability and democratic nature of our current institutions. Nor can the problem of global warming be tackled in purely nationalistic terms, as it is an issue that, by its very nature, goes beyond the borders of individual states. An effective response can only be provided in terms of a global social alternative and adopting and accepting a deep change in current economic dynamics (Conversi 2022, 99-100).

Towards a Just and Rights-Based Green Transition in the EU: Integrating Fundamental Rights into Climate Policy, Governance, and Litigation

In order to accomplish the EU's climate targets and mitigate the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, NextGenerationEU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was created. The EU has paid particular emphasis to addressing energy poverty, and its Environment Action Programme (EAP) until 2030 aims to reduce emissions and meet the EU's climate ambitions.

Furthermore, the EU's main social policy tool, the Pillar of Social Rights, is pertinent to many facets of the green transition.

One of the main challenges the EU faces as it implements the Green Deal and moves towards a more sustainable economy is ensuring that no one is left behind (EP 2023b). Indeed, Equinet's preliminary assessment of the Green Deal's impact on equality shows that, despite the EU's policy efforts, differences persist across different EU regions and demographic groups (EQUINET 2023).

The EU and its member states must uphold, defend, and fulfil fundamental rights, which are an essential and fundamental component of EU legislation. Fundamental rights must be clearly and consistently represented in all legal and policy measures and at every level of policy creation, implementation, enforcement, monitoring, and evaluation in order for the Green Deal's implementing legislation to adequately meet them.

A thorough fundamental rights analysis of the structural and intersectional factors that endanger or pose risks to the rights of particular people and groups—which are further threatened by climate change or by policies intended to address it—is necessary for the just transition to a sustainable future for all. Therefore, in their impact assessments, EU institutions should thoroughly and methodically address fundamental rights, investigate whether policy actions implemented under the Green Deal fully and appropriately consider the potential impacts on fundamental rights, and endeavour to guarantee that all such actions adhere to the rights and principles outlined in the Charter. Comprehensive ex-ante assessments of climate policies and actions would be required to gain a thorough understanding of the difficulties faced by vulnerable

groups and how climate adaptation and mitigation policies and actions may have unforeseen negative effects that exacerbate their exclusion or jeopardise their enjoyment of fundamental rights. The explicit incorporation of pertinent fundamental rights standards into climate and environmental protection policies and legislative files, both at the national and EU levels, is necessary for the HRBA to the green transition.

According to the “Better Regulation: Guidelines and Toolbox” and the plan to strengthen the implementation of the Charter (EC 2020), an evaluation of fundamental rights compliance should be regularly and methodically carried out within the impact assessments carried out in the EU and the member states. Prior to creating climate policy measures, these fundamental rights impact assessments ought to be carried out ensuring that pertinent and applicable legal obligations pertaining to the fundamental rights emphasised in the Charter are taken into account. That will guarantee policy coherence as well as the respect, protection, and fulfilment of legally protected rights. Conflicts between various fundamental rights and the need to preserve the environment and slow down climate change should also be taken into account and addressed in such evaluations.

The HRBA to climate policy aligns with the goal of achieving more inclusive and equitable outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups. Applying the HRBA while implementing the EU Green Deal and related policies can help mainstream fundamental rights through assessments such as HRIAs. These assessments should also consider potential conflicts between different rights and between rights and environmental measures. While referencing the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in laws and strategies improves visibility, it does not guarantee full application, especially at the national level. Strategic foresight on climate policy could benefit from FRA guidelines and a fundamental rights lens. For a truly just and sustainable green transition, the EU policies under the Green Deal must fully integrate fundamental rights. However, tools like the Just Transition Mechanism and the Social Climate Fund currently lack systematic alignment with Charter commitments. Proper integration would help protect vulnerable groups and ensure consistency with the Charter principles. To meet its Charter obligations, the EU must embed human rights principles in financial governance. It is a legal and moral duty for EU institutions and the member states. The horizontal enabling conditions (Annex III) related to the Charter and CRPD are vital, but their implementation and oversight remain problematic (EU 2021).

The enabling requirements outlined in the general laws governing EU funds should apply to all funds, including the NextGeneration Fund and the SCF, to maintain policy coherence and consistency. The EU can guarantee that its climate and environmental goals are met in a manner that upholds social justice, equality, and human dignity by including basic rights in the planning, execution, and oversight of all EU funds implementing the Green Deal.

Moving the analysis to the monitoring framework, as of right now, there is no such thorough system in place to analyse how environmental conditions or policies affect fundamental rights, which might be used to gauge the just transition. To assess the impact of the green transition more clearly and address the social impacts of current climate policies on fundamental rights, including equality, the already quoted Parliament study policy instruments to tackle social inequalities related to climate change suggests additional steps in the design of pertinent policies and the use of EU funds.

Mechanisms must be put in place to methodically analyse, track, and evaluate how green policies affect human rights, such as the rights to employment, health care, and a clean environment. This entails funding and constructing pertinent capacities for monitoring organisations, indicator development, and data collection at the EU and member state levels. By making reference to SDG indicators or, more broadly, the Charter, the majority of the monitoring frameworks and indicators now in use merely make an implicit connection to specific fundamental rights. It is necessary to create a comprehensive and methodical monitoring mechanism for the just transition that clearly connects to the ingrained fundamental rights.

To evaluate how well green policies support human rights norms and facilitate evidence-based decision-making, particular human rights indicators must be created (EQUINET 2023). In order to collect qualitative data on the ground and document the lived experiences of people impacted by green transitions, it is imperative to collaborate with civil society organisations and human rights defenders (UNEP n.d.). As stated in several FRA publications, the function of equality organisations (FRA 2021) and national human rights institutions (FRA 2020a) might be enhanced in this respect, especially by allocating adequate funds and developing the required competence. FRA has already created human rights-based monitoring indicators and offered assistance in a number of sectors and EU strategies, including those pertaining to Roma people, anti-racism, disability, and children's rights (FRA 2020b; 2024), in close collaboration with the Commission and the member states.

Additionally, ensuring effective participation is another crucial element in enhancing the HRBA to environmental protection. Human rights frameworks have changed dramatically to place more emphasis on enforcement and participation, notably when it comes to environmental challenges. The significance of public involvement in climate action has been reaffirmed by the UN Human Rights Council on numerous occasions (OHCHR 2021). As evidence of the growing incorporation of rights-based methods in climate governance, the Paris Agreement and other climate frameworks now specifically acknowledge the significance of human rights and public engagement in climate action. According to these documents, to ensure the effective participation of

affected groups and individuals and that the opinions of those most affected are fully integrated, all stakeholders—including civil society organisations and marginalised communities—should be involved in decision-making processes related to climate policies. That will help uphold accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights.

Climate assemblies have the power to impact and meld the work of governments and parliaments and are increasingly being used to direct government choices about climate policy. People from many backgrounds get together to talk and deliberate on climate issues at the National Climate Assemblies (KNOCA n.d.). The purpose of these national, regional, and local assemblies is to engage the public in the fight against climate change. They give people a way to get involved in the creation of climate policies and the shift to a more sustainable future.¹³

In order to address delays and gaps in the implementation of legislation and hold governments responsible for their duties to implement a swift and equitable green transition in accordance with fundamental rights obligations, citizens and companies should have access to effective remedies (FRA 2020) and the complaint mechanisms, both individually and collectively (FRA 2024).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the central role of access to justice and adequate enforcement of judicial decisions related to environmental protection from a human rights-based perspective.

Access to justice is essential in climate and environmental matters because it ensures accountability, especially when addressing the collective impacts of climate change, and permits individuals and civil society to bring claims to enforce their fundamental rights in the context of climate change. The report from the European Parliament, “Can Nature Get It Right? A Study on the Rights of Nature in Europe”, focused on enabling civil society to guarantee the efficient application of environmental legislation and supporting wider access to justice in line with the objectives of the Green Deal (EP 2021).

It is equally important to recognise the function of strategic litigation. Climate lawsuits can support climate action, hold governments and companies accountable, and integrate the HRBA into climate mitigation and adaptation programmes by choosing cases that seek to create significant precedents and

¹³ One of the most effective and consistent National Climate Assemblies is the one created by the Republic of Ireland. The Children and Young People’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was held for the first time in October 2022. The assembly produced 58 calls to action across seven themes, such as waste reduction, habitat protection, and awareness-raising, acknowledging that biodiversity loss impacts children’s rights to a safe and healthy environment and that it is crucial for children and young people to participate in decision-making (Children and Young People’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss 2022).

protection standards and impact systemic change. Effective access to justice in climate change cases is made possible by strategic litigation, which also has the power to influence policy changes in this field.

Domestic courts have elucidated the human rights responsibilities of states associated with climate policies in significant cases within the EU, including *Neubauer v. Germany*¹⁴ and *Urgenda v. State of the Netherlands*¹⁵. In three historic rulings delivered on April 9, 2024, the ECHR confirmed for the first time that the negative effects of climate change are covered by the convention's protection of human rights. It also required states to put in place effective mitigation measures and outlined requirements that climate policies must meet to comply with states' positive obligation to protect the right to private and family life.

Thus, the use of strategic litigation as a tool to guide the creation and application of just transition policies in a way that respects fundamental rights is growing. The increasing number of environmental lawsuits filed worldwide, which increased from about 800 between 1986 and 2014 to 1,200 in the next eight years until mid-2022, is indicative of this (Macfarlanes 2023). It is anticipated that this type of litigation will increase in the future and may influence how future just transitions are implemented in the member states and elsewhere.

The need for more comprehensive and effective legal and policy measures, including national legislation, is indicated by these trends in climate litigation, which also point to a widespread failure of states to act and human rights violations resulting from states' omissions. Litigation is not a panacea and cannot take the place of policy actions, which the ECHR has ruled are subject to governments' affirmative responsibilities.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Neubauer et al. v. Germany*: The German Constitutional Court ordered the government to set more aggressive emissions reduction objectives in 2021 after ruling that the government's climate protection statute was inadequate and infringed upon the constitutional rights of youth. (Federal Constitutional Court of Germany Order 2021).

¹⁵ *Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands*: the Urgenda Foundation and 900 Dutch people filed this historic lawsuit against the Dutch government. In 2019, the Dutch Supreme Court ruled that the government had a duty of care to preserve citizens' rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and ordered the government to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25% below 1990 levels by the end of 2020. (The Hague District Court Decision 2015).

¹⁶ The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) clarified the *locus standi* of individuals and associations under Article 34 of the ECHR in *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland*, which dealt with complaints about injury or the threat of harm coming from the State's alleged failings to tackle climate change. For its part, the Court of Justice of the European Union has upheld a rigorous interpretation of the standing requirements for private parties to file direct proceedings under Article 263 of the TFEU, requiring applicants to demonstrate that an EU act directly affects them personally (ECHR Judgement 2024).

Furthermore, although it can be a useful and successful addition to legislative or policy action, strategic litigation cannot replace it. It can specifically aid in identifying areas where the green transition's protection of fundamental rights is lacking and make it easier to put particular state policies into action. Successful lawsuits are a major societal force behind decarbonisation initiatives since they have forced lawmakers worldwide to take action on climate change. Litigation can also strengthen and promote alliances between institutional entities, civil society, and other interested parties (Niehaus 2024).

In conclusion, strong legislative and regulatory measures, as well as the efficient execution of court rulings, are necessary to achieve significant change, even though strategic litigation and access to justice are crucial instruments in combating climate change.

Conclusion

The essential elements of the phenomenon outlined in this analysis are at risk of becoming an explosive issue in the coming years if they are not adequately tackled and channelled towards dialogue and if a real willingness by public authorities to implement adequate measures to combat global warming does not emerge soon. It is not just a question of preparing for the worst or providing climate engineering solutions (Morozov 2013) and aiming for mere climate resilience, an objective that already seems to be implicitly marked by strong social inequality (Louvin 2024).

Otherwise, the potentially catastrophic effects of the changes taking place, greatly accelerated by anthropogenic factors, both in terms of production and the excessively consumerist lifestyles of a large part of humanity, will also reflect on the stability and democratic nature of our current institutions.

Nor can the problem of global warming be tackled in purely nationalistic terms, as it is an issue that, by its very nature, goes beyond the borders of individual states. An effective response can only be provided in terms of a global social alternative and adopting and accepting a deep change in current economic dynamics (Conversi 2022, 99-100).

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PREISPITIVANJE KLIMATSKE POLITIKE U EVROPSKOJ UNIJI: OTPOR, REPRESIJA I OSNOVNA PRAVA

Apstrakt: Autori u ovom radu analiziraju rastuću tenziju između klimatskog aktivizma i državne represije u Evropskoj uniji, fokusirajući se na pravne i političke posledice kriminalizacije građanske neposlušnosti u okviru ekoloških pokreta. Polazi se od hipoteze da pravni okviri država članica EU, kao i sama EU, nedovoljno štite prava klimatskih aktivista, što vodi ka slabljenju demokratije i urušavanju osnovnih sloboda. Oslanjajući se na teoriju Džona Rolsa o građanskoj neposlušnosti kao javnom, nenasilnom i savesnom aktu usmerenom ka promeni nepravednih zakona ili politika, članak ispituje da li se klimatski otpor može i treba smatrati legitimnim oblikom političkog izraza, a ne pretnjom javnom redu. Primenom multidisciplinarne i uporednopravne metode, analiza obuhvata evropske i međunarodne instrumente zaštite ljudskih prava—uključujući EKLJP i Arhusku konvenciju i akte EU poput Evropskog zelenog dogovora, kao i savremenu sudsku praksu nacionalnih i evropskih sudova. Ustanovljeno je da, iako pravni sistemi nominalno štite slobodu izražavanja i okupljanja, u praksi često dolazi do nesrazmernih sankcija, policijskog nasilja i zloupotrebe antiterorističkih zakona protiv ekoloških aktivista. Zaključak je da klimatska politika EU nema dosledan pristup zasnovan na ljudskim pravima (HRBA), naročito u primeni politika i korišćenju EU fondova. Autori pozivaju na integraciju osnovnih prava u sve aspekte klimatskog upravljanja—uključujući parnice, kreiranje politika i učešće javnosti—radi obezbeđivanja pravedne, demokratske i socijalno inkluzivne zelene tranzicije.

Ključne reči: klimatske promene; građanska neposlušnost; politika zaštite životne sredine EU; represija neslaganja; pristup zasnovan na ljudskim pravima; HRBA; sloboda govora; nenasilni protesti.

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDUSTRIES IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES: A NETWORK ANALYSIS APPROACH

Waseem HOBBIE¹, Jelena VASIĆ², Filip Ž. BUGARČIĆ³

ABSTRACT

This study employs a network analysis framework to evaluate economic vulnerabilities within the Western Balkans (WB) value chains, focusing on Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. The aim is to identify industries critical to the network's structural integrity and assess potential impacts from disruptions. This approach provides new insights into the connections between the WB countries and regional industries based on input/output data for each sector. Evidence from raw bilateral trade data often misses those insights and does not provide the level of interconnectivity between industries. Our findings highlight the dominant importance of Serbia's Electricity, Gas, and Water (ELE) industry and Transport (TRA). Also, several industries from North Macedonia are important within the region. The obtained results can be used to revise and adjust industrial and trade policies in the WB countries. Identified interconnectedness is significant for improving the countries' position in international frameworks and their possibilities for more active participation in value chains.

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Introduction and Research Background

The Western Balkans (WB) countries are characterised by a high degree of economic interdependence in pursuing EU membership. Those countries share a common past and specific economic characteristics that make them an interesting area for research. In recent decades, integration into regional and international economic flows has become a key issue for their economic strengthening and progress. This paper uses a network analysis to explore the relationships and connections between different industries within the WB countries. Using this methodology, the paper offers insight into structural patterns, key sectors contributing to the region's connectivity, growth, and stability, and opportunities for improving regional cooperation and integration.

Numerous studies have analysed the economies of the Western Balkans, focusing on various topics from the economic aspect, such as European integration (Dabrowski and Myachenkova 2018), financing and sustainable development (Lukšić et al. 2022), and migration (King and Oruc 2020) to regional initiatives like the Open Balkan (Rikalović, Molnar and Josipović 2022). Research focused on trade flows (Popovic, Eric and Stanic 2020; Leka, Daku and Jusufi 2022) also tried to indicate the chances of regional cooperation through openness and trade agreements. In addition to different approaches in analyses, a gap was identified in the lack of studies showing the functioning patterns of regional cooperation through trade flows. Therefore, we aim to examine which countries and industries have the dominant participation in trade at the WB region level.

In this context, the authors choose the network analysis approach. This method allows the study of relationships between companies, industries, or economies in a broader sense. In a network, nodes represent entities (industries), while edges represent relationships between those entities, viewed through the level and intensity of trade exchange. The application of the network analysis in the study of industrial linkages, especially in regions such as the Western Balkans, allows detailed insight into linkage patterns, identification of strategic sectors, and a better understanding of the region's economic resilience. The success of applying this methodology has been identified in previous research in this area. Fagiolo, Reyes, and Schiavo (2010) came to an interesting conclusion that better-connected countries tend to trade with poorly connected ones but are also involved in highly interconnected trade clusters. The authors also found that all network properties are remarkably stable across the years and do not depend on the weighting procedure. Previous studies also suggest that utilising Gephi to carry out the network analysis will make the results of traditional analytical methods more effective and complete (Sun et al. 2020). This approach can evaluate industries as an important step in industry optimisation. Wang and Yang (2022) suggest that the government should optimise the allocation of resources and promote the transfer of resources to balance industrial development.

The paper is structured as follows: After the introduction, the authors present the position of the WB countries regarding the main economic indicators, industries, and regional links. In the third section, we explain the applied methodology, followed by results and discussion. Finally, the conclusion and implications are provided.

Economic Position of the WB Countries

Economic Outlook

According to the European Commission's Country Reports (Directorate-General for Communication 2024), all WB economies still need to reach the level of a functioning market economy capable of withstanding market forces and competitive pressure within the EU. Despite recent improvements, the region's average GDP per capita remains nearly a quarter of the 27 EU members' average and roughly 40% of the CIS EU members. Furthermore, the WB remains poorly integrated into the global and European markets despite the robust growth of exports of goods and services in previous years (30% for 2022) (Directorate-General for Communication 2024). Compared to their peers in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where the share of exports of goods and services in GDP averages around 70% (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2023), 63% in large economies such as Poland, and over 90% in Slovakia and Hungary, according to national statistics, the WB region lags significantly behind with a share of 59% in 2022. Besides, the growth of CEE exports to the EU in the pre-accession period was much faster.

According to the World Bank's report (World Bank 2024), businesses in the WB face significant challenges in business internationalisation and global value chains and have less developed support systems. Although trading mostly with tariff-free markets, the WB markets are burdened with significant non-tariff barriers. Exporters in the WB typically face bigger obstacles to doing business than those in CEE. Expanded regional cooperation represents a unique opportunity for the WB economies to scale up by making the most of intensified economic integration. Through resource-sharing networks and knowledge-sharing networks and with enhanced regional trade, they are more likely to increase their productivity and competitiveness. Strengthened economic integration will also result in greater resilience to external shocks.

With almost 70% of the region's exports directed towards the EU (World Bank 2024), all WB governments are working to adopt EU standards and harmonise technical regulations. They are prioritising SME efforts to increase export volume and to improve their complexity and sophistication. Since 2019, financial incentives for greening available to SMEs have been multiplied, albeit unevenly

across the region. Most SMEs took at least one action to become more resource-efficient, often minimising waste or saving energy or water. The unstable geopolitical situation has significant spillover effects for the WB, underlining the need to enhance energy and food security. Energy dependence, supply insecurity, and volatile prices for fossil fuels affected the availability of energy. Unique rules and standards would provide a stimulus for intra-regional trade and investment, increase the benefits of big infrastructure projects and make the WB more attractive as an investment destination.

Main Industries

According to the volume of the GDP, the total value of all products produced in 2023 in the WB amounted to EUR 146 billion (Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2024). Despite this, if we look at the EU average, the WB is significantly behind the EU economies. The Gross Value Added (GVA) of the WB economy accounted for nearly 86% of the region's total GDP. The main drivers of the WB economy by activities are manufacturing, construction, and real estate activities. In the last few years, the trend of population decline resulted in 16.9 million people in the region, with a decrease of 4.4% compared to 2019. The GDP per capita was EUR 8,596, placing the WB in the group of middle-low-level economies. The main export products of the WB were electrical machinery and equipment, machinery, mechanical appliances, iron and steel, chemical products, mineral fuels, furniture, and plastic products. On the other hand, the main import products were mineral fuels, electrical machinery and equipment, machinery and mechanical appliances, plastic products, vehicles apart from railways or tramways, and pharmaceutical products (Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2024). The WB service sector has been developing rapidly over the past few years. Although the pandemic had slowed exports in 2020, in 2023, they reached EUR 31.1 billion. However, in the last observed year, the total value of exports surpassed its pre-pandemic level. The total FDI inflow in the WB region during 2023 amounted to EUR 8.8 billion, a significant increase compared with the pandemic year (2020).

Intra-regional trade has stagnated for many years. However, in 2023, it grew significantly (EUR 8.8 billion). The share of exports within the region remains small, at around 14%, despite the proximity and other trade promotion factors. The EU remains the dominant export market for all WB economies (EUR 34 bn in 2023). For most WB economies, exports to the EU are five times bigger than to regional markets. Main trade barriers are procedural obstacles at customs, product safety requirements, including sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and technical trade barriers. There is a possibility of resolving issues related to customs procedures, further aligning with EU norms and practices for reducing SPS/TBT

barriers, and concluding mutual agreements for conformity assessment procedures and certificates. There is the highest potential for the export of machines and equipment and chemicals and plastics (Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2024).

However, there is still room for improvement in the integration of the WB SMEs in European supply chains. The cooperation exists mostly in the final stages of the international supply chains in food, beverages, and tobacco, in addition to textiles and clothing; the intermediate stages of wood and cork, paper, printing and publishing, and other non-metallic mineral products; fabricated metal products; and the first and intermediate stages of basic metals. The highest export potential in 2023 relates to machines and equipment and chemicals and plastics. The product mix within the WB economies also explains the limited integration into European supply chains. Over 50% of the region's manufactured goods are classified as "labour and resource-intensive" or "low-skill and tech-intensive", compared to about 30% in the EU. In contrast, only 18% fall into the category "high-skill and tech-intensive goods" compared to 27% in CEE.

Economic Connections and Trade within the Region

Intraregional trade within the WB region has significantly increased by the CEFTA2006 (reducing tariffs and facilitating the free movement of goods). Trade volumes among the WB economies have steadily increased because the WB economies export more to their neighbours. In 2023, intra-WB export of goods was at EUR 8.5 billion, an increase of 123% compared to EUR 3.8 billion in 2013. In the same period, total exports of those economies grew from EUR 22.8 billion to EUR 54.8 billion, an increase of 141%. In 2023, an average of 15.5% of all WB exports were made to other CEFTA markets, while 67% of all exports went to the EU. In total, 82.5% of all exports made by selected economies were exported to the EU and the CEFTA2006 (CEFTA 2024).

The Green Lanes initiative was established at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020. The initiative's primary goal was to ensure the uninterrupted flow of essential goods and medical supplies across the WB (and the CEFTA region). In the meantime, the initiative has evolved, ensuring priority passage to certain types of goods (perishable goods). The initiative was quickly set up to facilitate priority passage for trucks carrying essential goods (it was crucial in maintaining trade flows and supporting the fight against the pandemic). The initiative supported regional cooperation. It demonstrated strong commitment and coordination among all the stakeholders. It was initially focused on road transport and later extended to include rail crossings (it covers all WB crossing points (BCPs/CCPs) and some crossing points with the neighbouring EU member states). Electronic Data Exchange SEED+ has been instrumental in

facilitating information exchange between customs administrations and other agencies. As a result of the Green Lanes initiative, the CEFTA Secretariat began collecting data on waiting times from the beginning of 2022. The average waiting time at all crossings within the CEFTA in 2023 was 86 minutes, seven minutes less per truck than in 2022. Considering the total number of truck crossings throughout the CEFTA during 2023, that adds up to an impressive sum of almost 20 years saved for all carriers moving goods under the CEFTA.

Regional Initiatives

Initiated in 2014 by Germany, the Berlin Process is a diplomatic initiative aimed at fostering regional cooperation and integration among the WB. Its broader goal is to accelerate the EU accession process. Over the last ten years, the Berlin Process has focused on strengthening regional connectivity, economic cooperation, reconciliation among these economies, and tackling key political and social challenges.

Key achievements for the period 2014-2024 are within regional economic integration, as one of the major outcomes has been a significant push for regional economic cooperation. The WB agreed to enhance economic ties, starting with the Multiannual Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) endorsed in Trieste in 2017, followed by a more ambitious Common Regional Market Action Plan (CRM AP, introduced in 2020 at the Sofia Summit, to enable the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people within the region). The CEFTA, which was initially signed in 1992 and re-envisioned for the WB in 2006 as the CEFTA 2006, has played a central role in shaping the trade dynamics of the region and serves as a precursor to the CRM. With the CEFTA 2006 acting primarily as a trade framework, together with other regional actors engaged in the implementation of the CRM AP, the aim is to achieve a more comprehensive market approach similar to the EU's single market, including harmonising digital markets and professional qualifications and creating a labour market with more mobility.

Active Industrial Policies and Regional Activities

Common WB challenges to overcome and demonstrate how industrial policy should be activated following the SDGs cover continuity of policies, collaboration with stakeholders, regional coordination, and international cooperation.

Adopted industrial strategies within the WB region are defined as horizontal and relate to all economic sectors. Besides, the implementation of industrial strategies was always poor, and none of the governments managed to introduce a substantial set of policy measures that would lead to a real structural change in

their economies (Jovanović and Vujanović 2023). Smart specialisation strategies identify and select a limited number of priority areas and use industrial, educational, and innovation policies to support them, focusing on their strengths and comparative advantages. Prospective industrial sectors in the WB include agri-food, textiles, automotive, energy, IT, and tourism. The agri-food industry has a large share in most economies of the WB (in terms of GDP and employment). It varies from 25% of BDP in Albania to slightly above 10% of GDP in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The agri-food industry should aim for premium goods. The share of the textile sector in GDP varies for up to 4% of value added in North Macedonia, for around 3% in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for 2% or less in the remaining economies. The textile sector should aim for high-quality final products. The automotive sector has a relatively small share of value added in most WB. It is highest in Serbia and North Macedonia (around 1.5% of GDP) and aims for advanced technologies. The energy sector has a larger share in the WB, with value-added shares ranging between 3% and 6% of BDP in all economies. The tourism sector share in total value added is the largest in Montenegro (10% of GDP). The IT industry accounts for 3% of value added in Serbia, 2% in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, and 1% in Montenegro and Albania (Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2024).

Infrastructural connectivity across the WB covers fields such as transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure. It has supported numerous projects, including the construction of highways, railways, and energy grids (as the aim is to bring the region closer together physically, economically, and technologically). The Roaming Agreement aimed to gradually reduce mobile phone roaming charges across the WB until it would allow users to use their mobile phones abroad in the region at the same cost as at home. Integration of the WB into the SEPA is an ongoing process that will align the WB with the broader European payment framework, facilitating smoother and more efficient payments. Continued reforms in banking and payment systems will be necessary to integrate fully into the SEPA. The Green Agenda for the WB aims to support the region's transition to a greener economy by addressing key environmental challenges, enhancing climate resilience, and fostering sustainable development. Digital Agenda for the WB is an initiative launched by the EU to support its digital transformation. It aims to align the WB with EU digital policies, fostering regional cooperation, economic growth, and integration into the broader European digital market.

Methodology

Data is drawn from the Multi-Regional Input-Output (MRIO) table provided by the EORA database, with the latest (free) data from 2017. This table details intermediate consumption flows between industries across the selected

countries, allowing for a network representation where nodes signify industries and edges represent the value of traded intermediate goods.

The analysis is conducted using the software Gephi to calculate centrality measures and generate a visual representation of the network. Key metrics, including weighted in-degree, weighted out-degree, betweenness centrality, hub, and authority scores, are computed to determine each industry's role and connectivity within the network (Table 1). To focus on the most impactful economic relationships, edges are filtered by descending trade value, retaining only those that collectively account for a certain percentage of the total intermediate consumption within the network. This filtering enhances clarity by simplifying the network to its core economic connections.

Table 1: Network analysis metrics used in the initial analysis (node metrics)

Description of the metric from	Weighted In-Degree	Weighted Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Hub	Authority
Network Analysis Perspective	The number of direct incoming edges to a node, weighted by the significance of each edge.	The number of direct outgoing edges from a node, weighted by the significance of each edge.	The frequency at which a node appears on the shortest paths between other nodes.	An iterative measure reflecting a node's compound influence on network connectivity through both direct and indirect paths.	A node's importance as a primary destination, pointed to by influential hub nodes.
Economic Perspective	Represents the level of dependency on the products and services of other industries.	The industry's role in providing products and services to other industries on a 1 st level connection.	Reflects an industry's control over the flow of goods, services, or information, indicating potential bottlenecks in the value chain.	Represents an industry's role in wider economic continuity, beyond direct output to 1 st -level connections.	An industry's central role as a final processor in the production chain. Its high level of intermediate consumption drives demand for upstream industries.

Source: Authors.

A disruption analysis is then performed to examine changes in network structure when each identified key industry is hypothetically removed, simulating a complete shutdown scenario. Graph metrics are then recalculated to assess the

consequences of removing these central industries. These key metrics are node and edge counts, graph density, average path length, average degree, and clustering coefficient (Table 2). This process provides insights into network fragility, highlighting industries essential for maintaining connectivity and economic resilience across the region.

Table 2: Network Analysis Metrics Used in the Disruption Analysis
(Graph Metrics)

Description of the metric from	Graph Density	Average Path Length	Average Degree	Average Clustering Coefficient
Network Analysis Perspective	The ratio of actual present edges to all possible edges that can be formed in a network.	The average count of steps along the shortest routes connecting all possible node pairs, a measure of network efficiency.	The average number of edges per node, a measure of network connectivity.	Measures the degree to which nodes in a network tend to cluster together.
Economic Perspective	The extent of interlinkage among industries within the economy. A higher density means the network is more resilient to disruptions due to multiple connection paths.	Reflects the average separation between industries. Shorter paths imply quicker and more efficient transfer of goods and services.	The average number of direct relationships that industries have, which reflects diversification in the economy.	The tendency for industries to form localised clusters. A lower value means the economy is less resilient to shocks.

Source: Authors.

Finally, the results of the disruption analysis are contextualised by examining each high-impact industry's economic role in the Western Balkans. Relevant studies and industry data are referenced to explain the structural importance of these industries, including their influence on upstream and downstream sectors. This step provides a deeper understanding of regional interdependencies and the potential economic consequences of industry-specific disruptions.

Results

Table 3 presents results for five Western Balkan countries with results according to previously identified metrics. Industry code abbreviations are provided in the Appendix.

Table 3: Network analysis results

Country	Industry Code	W In-Degree	W Out-Degree	W Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Authority	Hub
SRB	ELE	124,484	-	124,484	-	0.75	-
SRB	TRA	54,173	-	54,173	-	0.62	-
BIH	PET	19,584	19,670	39,254	73.25	0.04	0.13
MKD	AGR	10,285	10,253	20,537	103.25	0.04	0.12
MKD	PET	6,516	46,109	52,625	90.58	0.02	0.18
MKD	MET	2,541	34,787	37,328	141.83	0.03	0.16
MKD	ELM	-	24,302	24,302	-	-	0.16

Source: Authors.

The network analysis for the Western Balkans region reveals a concentrated reliance on a few high-authority and high-output industries, particularly in Serbia and North Macedonia. Serbia's Electricity, Gas, and Water (ELE) industry stands out with the highest authority score (0.75) and weighted in-degree (124,484), indicating its central role as a critical receiver of inputs within the network. Similarly, Transport (TRA) in Serbia also shows a strong authority score (0.62), suggesting that it serves as a significant destination for intermediate goods. In North Macedonia, industries like Petroleum, Chemical, and Non-Metallic Mineral Products (PET) and Metal Products (MET) are key output providers with high hub scores (0.18 and 0.16, respectively), signalling their importance as primary suppliers across the network. Additionally, Agriculture (AGR) in North Macedonia has a notable betweenness centrality (103.25), highlighting its bridging role in connecting disparate sectors. Bosnia and Herzegovina's Petroleum (PET) industry, with balanced in- and out-degrees, plays a dual role in sourcing and supplying the network.

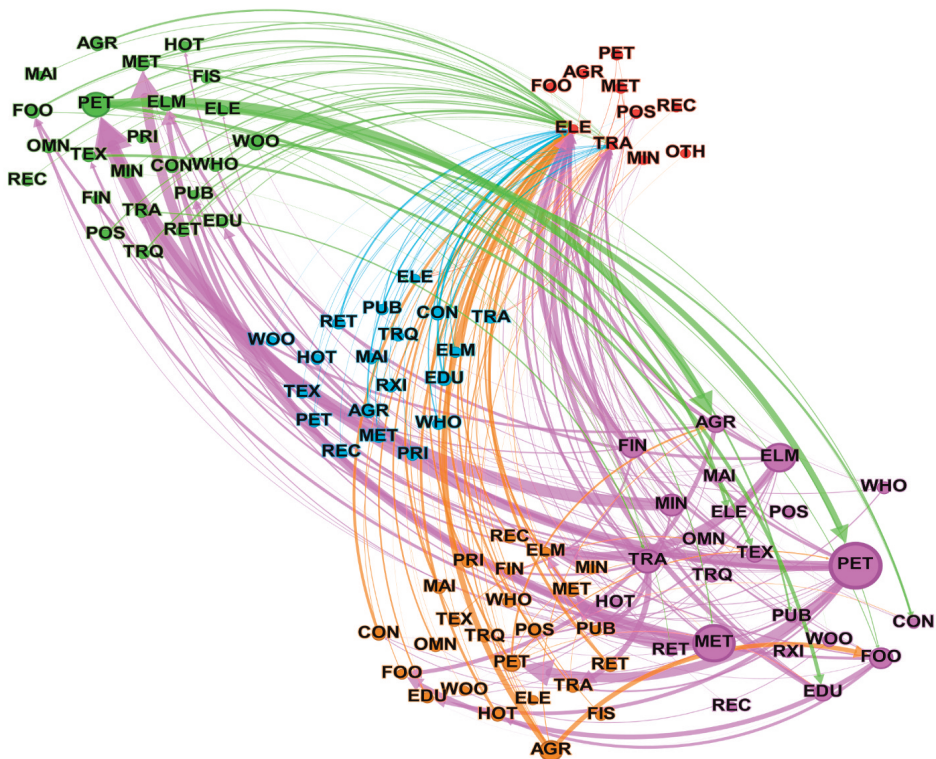
Table 4: Disruption analysis

Network Measures	Baseline	SRB-ELE	SRB-TRA	BIH-PET	MKD-AGR	MKD-PET	MKD-MET	MKD-ELM
Nodes	100	87	99	99	99	99	99	99
Edges	270	184	208	259	260	246	251	257
Graph Density	0.027	0.025	0.021	0.027	0.027	0.025	0.026	0.026
Average Path Length	2.121	2.292	2.241	2.12	1.81	2.061	1.734	2.117
Average Degree	2.7	1.859	2.101	2.616	2.626	2.485	2.535	2.596
Average Clustering Coefficient	0.128	0.103	0.14	0.124	0.131	0.134	0.127	0.129
Average % Change from Baseline	0%	-18.40%	-10.73%	-1.88%	2.01%	-2.94%	0.61%	-2.07%

Source: Authors.

The disruption analysis reveals that Serbia's Electricity and Gas (SRB-ELE) and Transport (SRB-TRA) industries have the most severe impacts on the network structure when removed, highlighting their critical importance within the Western Balkans economic system. The removal of SRB-ELE results in an 18.4% average decrease from baseline across all network metrics, reducing the node count from 100 to 87 and edges from 270 to 184 and increasing the average path length to 2.292. That indicates significant fragmentation and reduced connectivity as fewer industries remain interconnected and economic "distances" between industries grow. Similarly, the removal of SRB-TRA leads to substantial disruptions, with a 10.73% decline from the baseline, edges dropping to 208, and average path length increasing to 2.241, demonstrating its role in maintaining efficient flow across sectors. These results highlight SRB-ELE and SRB-TRA as essential infrastructure nodes; their absence would not only hinder direct trade links but also create greater economic distance between industries due to the region's reliance on them as the main customers of many industries.

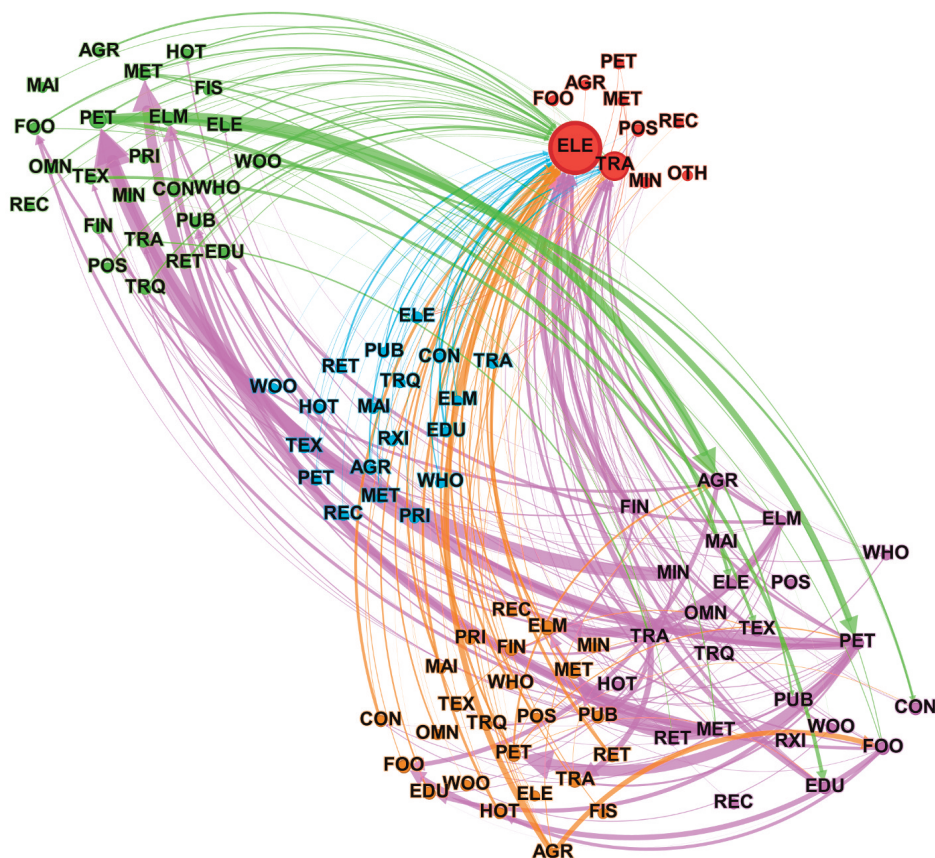
Graph 1: Weighted out degree



Source: Authors.

In this weighted out-degree graph, Petroleum, Chemical and Non-Metallic Mineral Products (PET) and Metal Products (MET) in North Macedonia (MKD) stand out due to their strong outgoing connections, indicating significant contributions to other industries within the network. This high out-degree suggests that both sectors are crucial suppliers in the region's economy, likely providing essential intermediate goods to multiple downstream industries. Additionally, Agriculture (AGR) in Albania (ALB) shows a notable presence with substantial outgoing links, emphasising its role as a key provider of primary products supporting other sectors in the regional value chain.

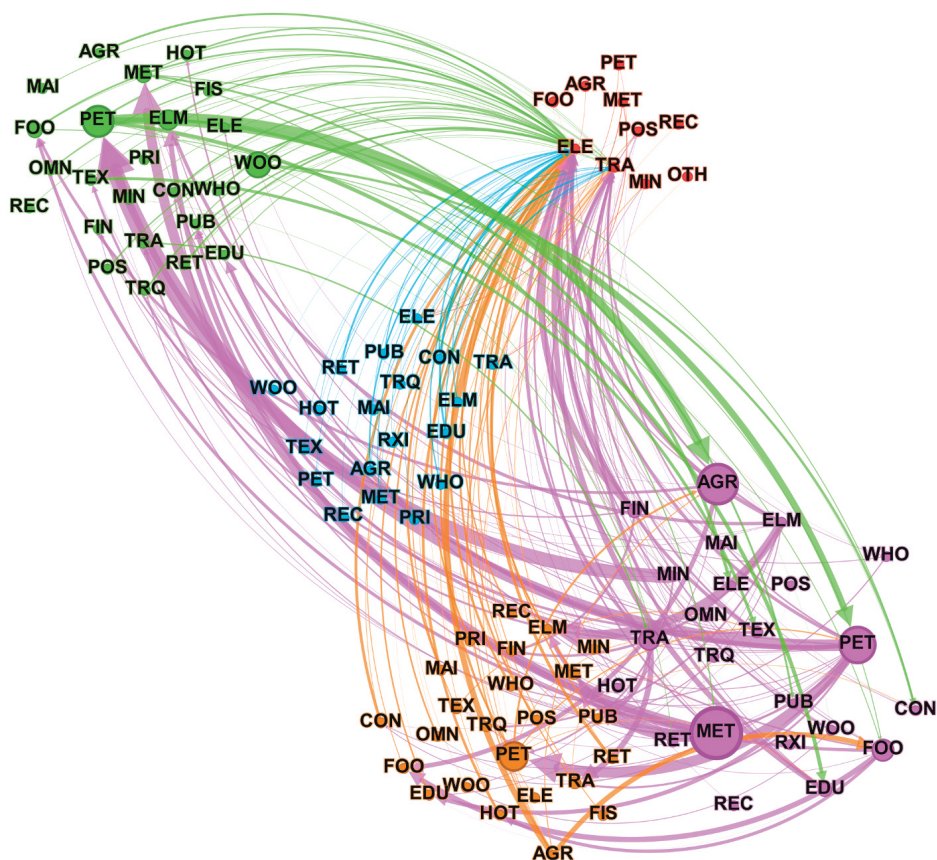
Graph 2: Weighted in degree



Source: Authors.

Electricity, Gas and Water (ELE) and Transport (TRA) in Serbia emerge as major hubs, receiving a substantial amount of inputs from multiple industries across the network. Notably, these industries absorb a significant volume of connections originating from Montenegro (MNE) and Albania (ALB), which highlights their central role in processing or utilising imports from these countries. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) also channels a high number of connections to ELE and TRA, reinforcing their critical position within the regional supply chain.

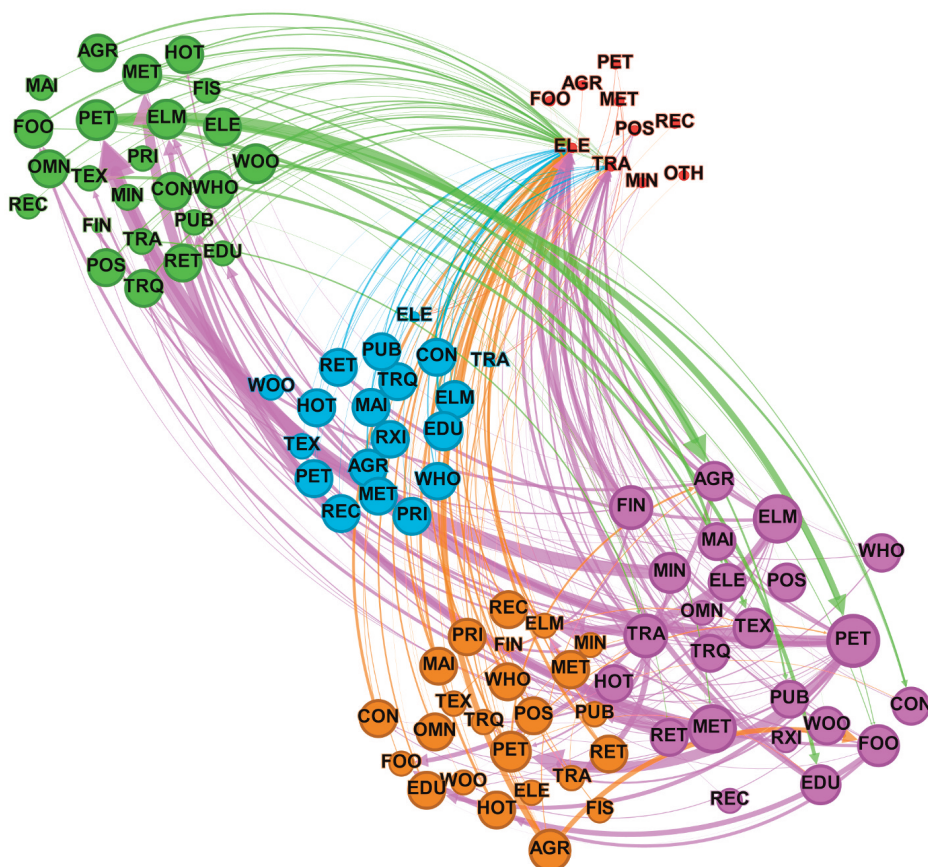
Graph 3: Betweenness centrality



Source: Authors.

In this betweenness centrality graph, Metal Products (MET) in North Macedonia (MKD) stands out as a pivotal industry, serving as a key intermediary that facilitates connections across different industries within the network. Its high betweenness centrality indicates its critical role in linking various sectors, potentially making it a bottleneck for regional value flows if disrupted. Additionally, Petroleum, Chemical, and Non-Metallic Mineral Products (PET) in Albania (ALB), North Macedonia (MKD), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) also exhibit elevated betweenness centrality. That suggests that PET in these countries holds a significant intermediary position within the network, underscoring its importance in maintaining efficient connectivity across industries in the region.

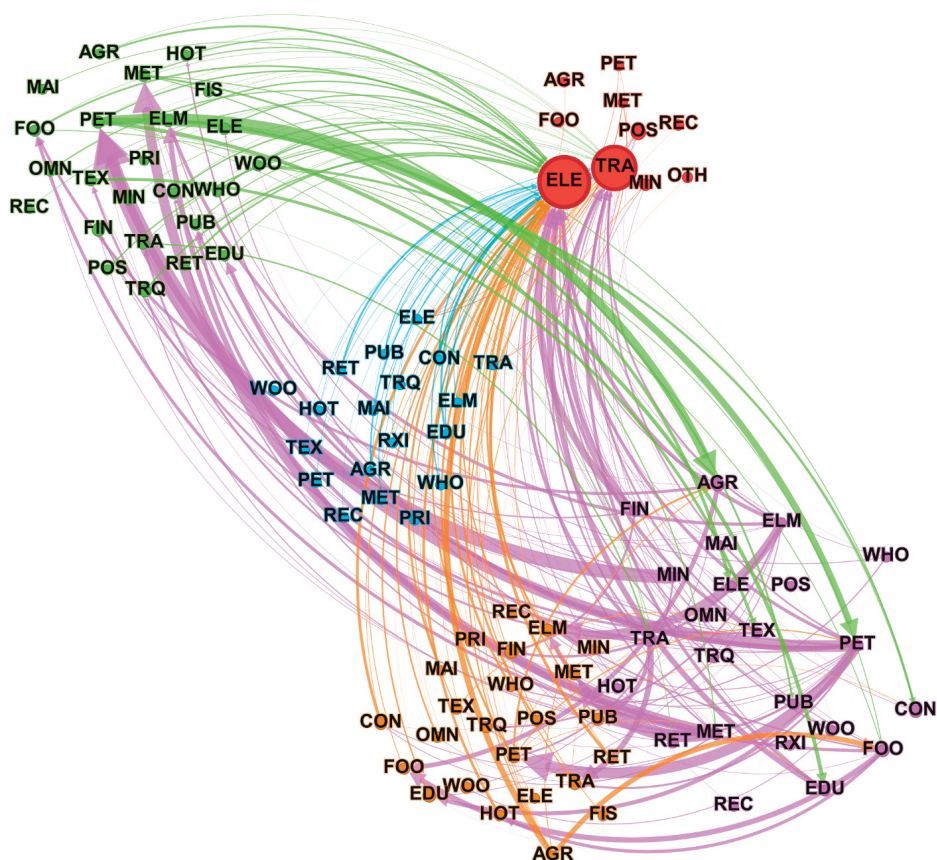
Graph 4: Hub



Source: Authors.

We observe that most countries in the network—Albania (ALB), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), Montenegro (MNE), and North Macedonia (MKD)—exhibit high hub scores, represented by larger node sizes. In contrast, Serbia (SRB) shows noticeably lower hub scores, suggesting that its industries are less central in initiating connections within the regional trade network. This discrepancy indicates a different structural role for Serbian industries, reflecting more reliance on inbound connections or a lesser degree of influence in driving value chain flows outward. It is also connected with Serbian dependency on trade out of the region, especially with the EU.

Graph 5: Authority



Source: Authors.

Analysing the authority score, we see again the prominence of Serbia's Electricity (ELE) and Transport (TRA) industries. That reaffirms their critical role as central nodes attracting substantial trade and value chain dependencies from other industries across the region, positioning them as significant areas of economic activity and interconnectivity.

Discussion and Implications

Regarding the ELE industry, all WB economies must enhance the energy sector's contribution to economic growth by improving energy efficiency, increasing energy security, and attracting investments in new capacities. That requires strengthening the internal market, restructuring public enterprises,

adjusting energy prices, advancing the decarbonisation process, and expanding the use of renewable energy sources. Additionally, these economies must align their national legislation with the EU *acquis* and deepen regional cooperation. MKD's economy remains highly dependent on energy imports, characterised by high energy intensity, inefficiencies in ageing energy production systems, and continued reliance on highly polluting coal. Furthermore, inefficient energy use exacerbates these challenges, underscoring the need for systemic reforms.

The energy sector in SRB accounts for about 4% of GDP, and coal-fired thermal power plants produced 66%, hydropower plants 26.1%, thermal power plants – heating plants 3.3%, wind power plants 2.7%, and other power plants 1.9% of electricity in 2022 (Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2024). For MNE's energy consumption, one of the main challenges is the insufficient level of energy efficiency and high energy intensity of its industry. MNE is facing a challenge of carbon intensity and has limited support mechanisms for the decarbonisation of the economy. In BiH's energy sector, the agriculture, industry, and transport sectors are the largest polluters and emitters of carbon dioxide (70% of total emissions related to energy, despite the share of renewable energy sources). One-third of electricity comes from hydropower potential. BiH's economy is highly energy-intensive (three times more than the EU average). ALB is a net importer of electricity. Both countries are vulnerable to hydrological conditions and insufficient to meet their energy supply needs. Dependence on energy imports accounts for 20-30% of the energy demand. For some WB economies, ensuring power supply security is the challenge, where Serbia holds the highest potential within the region.

On the other hand, transportation with warehousing and logistics is important for the WB economies concerning the increased openness to trade, FDIs, and integration in international supply chains. It has a significant impact on international trade and the economic development of the region. As all WB economies are small and open, the development of transportation and logistics quality is important for increasing trade flows domestically, regionally, and globally, as well as for improving their level of competitiveness. Efficient movement of goods and services is particularly important not only for landlocked economies (BiH, MKD, and SRB) but also for the economies with access to the sea (ALB and MNE). The average share of Transport and Warehousing in GDP in the WB is 3.5% (2021). It used to be higher in the pre-COVID-19 periods (3.7% in 2019). The total number of employees in Transport within the WB economies is 338,200 (2022). SRB has the most employees (157,600), which explains their level of importance in this sector.

The economies within the WB also heavily depend on the Petroleum, Chemical, and Non-Metallic Mineral Products (PET) and Metal Products (MET) industries in North Macedonia. They stand as key output providers and primary

suppliers across the network. Besides, the Agriculture (AGR) in North Macedonia and the Petroleum (PET) industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina play a notable role in connecting disparate sectors, according to our network analysis results. The other two countries, Montenegro and Albania, do not stand out with dominant industries in this context, primarily due to the size of these economies and the primary focus on tourism. As for the connection of individual industries, it is noticeable that the highest connection is with Serbia, as the largest economy in the region. Links from Montenegro and Albania are mostly directed exclusively towards Serbia, while among other countries, there is a significant connection of industries from Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia.

One recommendation from previous studies regarding industrial networks (Chopra and Khanna 2014) is to design new strategies. Increasing diversity, redundancy, and multifunctionality are important to ensure flexibility and to develop resilient and sustainable industrial symbiotic networks. On the other hand, Nuss, Graedel, Alonso, and Carroll (2016) conclude that the network analysis of supply chains could be combined with criticality and scenario analyses for raw materials to comprise a comprehensive picture of product platform risk. These ideas can be considered in the example of the WB industries to improve the stability of the supply chains within the region. In addition, the high density of the agricultural sector in the observed countries is in line with their level of development, which is explained by previous evidence, also based on the network analysis, which shows that when the development level increases, the role of agriculture as an exporter declines (Soyyigit and Çırpıcı 2017). As they found, service sectors in developed countries have an important role. In developing countries, that is the food sector. Also, the results found the transportation sector to be one of the most important in terms of imports in different countries' samples.

Conclusion

The obtained results indicate trade patterns, supply and value chains, and the dominance of certain industries within the WB region. Our analysis confirms the key role of individual industries from Serbia as the largest economy in the region. The most important implications can be drawn for Serbia's Electricity, Gas, and Water (ELE) and Transport (TRA) industries. Greater attention directed towards these sectors can bring even greater dominance in the region. These findings can have wider strategic significance and be useful as key implications in the creation of future regional policy. They also indicate the need for more active involvement of other industries at this level. On the other hand, the high level of In-Degree scores shows the high dependence of these industries on inflows from other countries in the region. That represents the level of dependency on the products and services from other industries. That may be a consequence of

Serbia's main focus on other markets, primarily the EU, while key import resources may be sought in the region.

Potential differences in the sense of dominance of certain industries concerning raw data for import and export are a consequence of the data used. We use input-output tables, showing the participation of these industries in movements exclusively within the region and the dependence of the observed sectors. The main limitation of the research is the limited availability of the required data for the WB in recent years. However, given the relatively stable patterns of trade structure within the WB region, that should not represent a significant problem in providing insights and policy recommendations. Also, the applied methodology has great potential in observing relations at the level of other countries and integrations, where significant insights and implications can be drawn and compared with current industrial and trade policies. A larger number of countries and a different focus on individual industries could be a key direction for future research.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Industry Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Industry
AGR	Agriculture
FIS	Fishing
MIN	Mining and Quarrying
FOO	Food and Beverages
TEX	Textiles and Wearing Apparel
WOO	Wood and Paper
PET	Petroleum, Chemical and Non-Metallic Mineral Products
MET	Metal Products
ELM	Electrical and Machinery
TRQ	Transport Equipment
OMN	Other Manufacturing
REC	Recycling
ELE	Electricity, Gas and Water
CON	Construction
MAI	Maintenance and Repair
WHO	Wholesale Trade
RET	Retail Trade
HOT	Hotels and Restaurants
TRA	Transport
POS	Post and Telecommunications
FIN	Financial Intermediation and Business Activities
PUB	Public Administration
EDU	Education, Health and Other Services
PRI	Private Households
OTH	Others
RXI	Re-export and Re-import

ISTRAŽIVANJE VEZA IZMEĐU INDUSTRIJA U ZEMLJAMA ZAPADNOG BALKANA: MREŽNA ANALIZA

Apstrakt: Ova studija koristi okvir mrežne analize za procenu ekonomskih ranjivosti unutar lanaca vrednosti Zapadnog Balkana (ZB), fokusirajući se na Srbiju, Severnu Makedoniju, Albaniju, Bosnu i Hercegovinu i Crnu Goru. Cilj je da se identifikuju industrije kritične za strukturni integritet mreže i procene potencijalni uticaji poremećaja. Ovaj pristup pruža nove dokaze u veze između zemalja ZB i industrija u regionu, na osnovu ulaznih/izlaznih podataka za svaki sektor. Podaci o bilateralnoj trgovini često izostavljaju te uvide i ne pružaju dokaze o nivou međupovezanosti između industrija. Naši nalazi ukazuju na dominantan značaj srpske industrije Električne energije, gasa i vode (ELE), kao i Transporta (TRA). Takođe, nekoliko industrija iz Severne Makedonije se pokazuju kao važne u regionu. Dobijeni rezultati se mogu koristiti za reviziju i prilagođavanje industrijske i trgovinske politike u zemljama ZB. Identifikovana međusobna povezanost je značajna za poboljšanje položaja zemalja u međunarodnim okvirima i njihovih mogućnosti za aktivnije učešće u lancima vrednosti.

Ključne reči: pristup mrežne analize; Zapadni Balkan; industrija; trgovina; lanci vrednosti.

DELIBERATION AMID DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING: INSIGHTS FROM CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Stefan SURLIĆ¹, Ljiljana KOLARSKI²

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of Citizens' Assemblies (CAs) in fostering deliberative democracy and resisting authoritarian tendencies in the Western Balkans, a region facing significant democratic backsliding. Analysing three assemblies held in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro between October 2023 and February 2024, with 133 participants, the study investigates citizens' willingness to participate and their satisfaction with deliberations on critical societal issues. While CAs remain primarily organised by civil society organisations and face limited institutional support, they have demonstrated significant potential to enhance citizen participation and bridge societal divides. The findings reveal high levels of citizen engagement, with participants articulating perspectives that often challenge dominant political narratives. Notable examples include fostering inter-ethnic dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina and producing actionable recommendations on disinformation in Serbia. However, CAs' influence on formal policymaking is constrained by entrenched political structures, resistance from elites, and funding uncertainties. Despite these challenges, CAs serve as vital platforms for deliberation, offering a corrective to the deficits of traditional governance in hybrid regimes. This study highlights the transformative potential of CAs in building democratic resilience, emphasising their role in advancing deliberative practices and challenging authoritarian norms in fragile political contexts.

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Introduction

In an era marked by the worldwide resurgence of illiberalism and democratic erosion, the concept of Citizens' Assemblies emerges as a beacon of hope for fostering deliberative democracy and safeguarding against authoritarian tendencies. Nowhere is that more relevant than in the Western Balkans, a region grappling with significant challenges to its democratic institutions amidst shifts towards illiberal governance. This paper delves into the role of Citizens' Assemblies in supporting democracy-building efforts, with a particular focus on their application and impact within the context of the Western Balkans.

Citizens' Assemblies in the region are a relatively recent phenomenon, primarily initiated and facilitated by non-governmental organisations and supported by international institutions. Their implementation, starting in Serbia in 2020 and extending to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, has demonstrated a growing interest in deliberative democratic practices. However, their influence on formal decision-making processes remains limited, often hindered by resistance from entrenched political structures and a lack of institutional support. Despite these limitations, the emergence of Citizens' Assemblies highlights a promising deliberative culture in a region characterised by democratic backsliding, offering a platform for inclusive dialogue and alternative perspectives.

The primary objective of this paper is to critically examine how Citizens' Assemblies function as a mechanism for promoting deliberative democracy and resisting illiberalism in the Western Balkans. In pursuit of this objective, the research question driving this study is articulated as follows: Why do citizens' assemblies have an impact through their implementation even in hybrid regimes or regimes where authoritarian tendencies are strengthening? Methodologically, this paper adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising a literature review, case study analysis, and empirical evidence to elucidate the efficacy and implications of Citizens' Assemblies within the three Western Balkans countries.

The findings reveal significant insights through an examination of three Citizens' Assemblies convened in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro from October 2023 to February 2024, involving 133 citizens from diverse backgrounds (European Partnership for Democracy n.d.). Despite their limited policy influence, these assemblies showcase citizens' eagerness to engage in deliberative democracy and their capacity to address sensitive societal issues. Notably, participants often articulated perspectives diverging from dominant political narratives, demonstrating the potential of Citizens' Assemblies to challenge established norms and introduce alternative viewpoints.

By focusing on the applicability and effectiveness of Citizens' Assemblies in contexts marked by democratic backsliding, this research underscores their potential to foster a more robust and inclusive democratic ethos. While challenges persist, the experiences of Citizens' Assemblies in the Western Balkans highlight their role in cultivating deliberative practices and mitigating the threats posed by authoritarianism. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on contemporary illiberal practices, emphasising the importance of citizen participation in advancing democracy within the region and beyond.

The advent of Citizens' Assemblies (CAs) in the Western Balkans represents a relatively recent but significant development in democratic practices within the region. The first of these assemblies emerged in 2020 in Serbia, specifically in the cities of Belgrade and Valjevo, as part of the European project titled "Active Citizenship: Promoting and Advancing Innovative Democratic Practices in the Western Balkans", coordinated by the Foundation BFPE for a Responsible Society (Aleksić 2020). These assemblies convened 45 randomly selected citizens to deliberate on pressing local issues, including the expansion of pedestrian zones in Belgrade's city centre and addressing the acute air pollution in Valjevo. Unique to these initial efforts was their online format, a necessary adaptation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, marking a novel approach to democratic engagement in the region.

In 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina hosted its first citizens' assembly in the city of Mostar, organised by the Council of Europe and the City of Mostar (GradiMO n.d.). Bringing together 48 citizens from diverse ethnic groups, the assembly focused on the long-standing challenge of improving local governance in a deeply divided city. The Mostar CA exemplified the capacity of these assemblies to foster inclusive dialogue across ethnic lines, offering recommendations that emphasised social cohesion and governance reforms.

The same year witnessed the first citizens' assembly in Montenegro, held in the capital city of Podgorica with support from the European Parliament and the Parliament of Montenegro (Meija 2023). This assembly gathered 53 citizens to deliberate on the pervasive issue of corruption, further demonstrating the region's growing embrace of deliberative democratic practices. In Serbia, the evolution of CAs continued with a 2023 assembly organised as part of a regional project funded by the European Union and led by the European Partnership for Democracy (European Partnership for Democracy n.d.). This assembly focused on combating disinformation and brought together 40 citizens representing a diverse cross-section of society, selected based on criteria such as age, gender, region, and education level. Throughout the assembly, participants developed twelve recommendations aimed at improving media literacy, promoting ethical journalism, and increasing transparency in media ownership.

These initial citizens' assemblies represent pivotal moments in advancing participatory governance across the Western Balkans. While these assemblies have demonstrated the potential of CAs to foster democratic engagement and inclusive decision-making, significant challenges remain. Securing sustainable funding is a pressing concern, as it threatens the long-term viability of these initiatives. Additionally, the absence of formal decision-making power and resistance from entrenched political structures often hinders the full implementation of the recommendations. Despite these obstacles, the ongoing experiences of CAs across the region underscore their capacity to enhance democratic practices and contribute to the broader evolution of participatory governance. However, the limited recognition and data on CAs within these contexts highlight that much work remains to solidify their role as effective tools for citizen engagement in the Western Balkans.

Despite the challenges, these countries are at a critical juncture where democratic innovations could foster greater participation, bridge societal divides, and demonstrate that even amidst authoritarian tendencies, democratic initiatives persist, with citizens willing to engage on critical societal issues. By focusing on these nations, this research aims to provide insights into how CAs can challenge prevailing assumptions about widespread apathy, showing that individuals are, in fact, prepared to participate in discussions on politically significant topics. Ultimately, this contributes to a broader theoretical understanding of how deliberative democracy can be sustained in fragile democratic contexts.

Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Foundations of Citizens' Assemblies

Robert Dahl (1989) first introduced the concept of mini-publics in 1989, proposing that a small, demographically representative group of citizens could come together to learn about and deliberate on public issues, thereby influencing decision-making. This idea, grounded in democratic principles and social science, has since evolved into various participatory innovations worldwide—including citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, and citizens' assemblies—each tailored to address diverse topics from electoral reform to complex social challenges, including contemporary issues such as climate change (Elstub 2014; Grönlund, Bächtiger, and Setälä 2014; Chwalisz 2017).

In response to the myriads of challenges democracy has faced in recent decades, a pressing need for the development of innovative democratic mechanisms has emerged. Innovative democratic mechanisms, often referred to as "democratic innovation", are specifically developed to enhance and expand citizen participation in the political decision-making process (Smith 2009, 5).

Among all the above-mentioned forms, citizens' assemblies represent the most recent iteration and potentially the most radical and democratically robust of all the mini-public types developed to date (Escobar and Elstub 2017, 3). These assemblies represent an institutionalised mechanism that provides citizens with the space to participate in an open discussion with their fellow citizens on a certain topic (Electoral Reform Society 2019, 1). The more comprehensive definition of citizens' assemblies is that they constitute a deliberative forum wherein a stratified sample of individuals, selected through (random) sampling techniques, convene to engage in structured dialogue and collective decision-making processes concerning matters of societal import while at the same time making conclusions and recommendations directed to the decision-makers.

Despite the diversity of viewpoints on how mini-publics should be designed, as they are combined with the varied political, cultural, and organisational contexts in which they operate, the assumption is that a one-size-fits-all standard can exist along with distinct integrity challenges (Parry, Curato, and Dryzek 2024). The process unfolds in three phases: first, participants familiarise themselves with the issues over several weekends; next, randomly selected citizens hold local public hearings to gather opinions; finally, they deliberate on the evidence, form a final proposal, and vote on the outcome (Elstub and Escobar 2017).

The design of a citizens' assembly should be structured around fundamental principles that ensure its effectiveness and legitimacy. These core principles include representative inclusion, deliberative process, and systemic efficacy (Merkel, Milačić, and Schafer 2021, 11). The deliberative process—facilitated by independent experts—fosters critical reflection, informed decision-making, and mutual respect among participants. As highlighted by Paulis and Pospieszna (2024), these assemblies can act as “learning schools for democracy”, enhancing political knowledge, civic efficacy, and interest, even in environments marked by democratic backsliding.

In the case of mini-publics or citizen assemblies, the question of legitimacy is most frequently raised regarding their capacity to engage in deliberation and make decisions on specific issues. Most often, the legitimacy of mini-publics depends on micro-level design choices—such as participant recruitment, modes of engagement, and the formulation of recommendations—which collectively influence both input and throughput legitimacy (Harris 2019). Conventional arguments for descriptive representation, which emphasise the democratic legitimacy of non-elected participants, fail to account for its crucial function in fostering diverse interactions that facilitate the formation of well-considered and interpretative opinions within the deliberative process (Khoban 2021). “In many respects, the key point of mini-publics is precisely to be different from other elements of the political system—not to present a challenge to other

processes and institutions, but to help the overall system to function better” (Pow 2023, 27).

Hybrid regimes, characterised by a combination of democratic and authoritarian elements, often display a facade of electoral processes while subverting institutional checks and balances. In such contexts, traditional representative systems fail to inspire citizen trust or engagement, exacerbating democratic disenchantment (He and Warren 2011; Fiket, Ilić, and Pudar Draško 2022). Moreover, liberal democracies have fallen into an intense circle in which citizenship feels insufficiently respected, causing it to withdraw from the public sphere, which, in turn, produces a weakened democracy in which citizenship is increasingly unrecognised (Fiket 2019, 9).

Deliberative democracy has emerged as a significant theoretical response to these challenges. It emphasises reasoned discussion, inclusivity, and collective decision-making, offering mechanisms such as citizens’ assemblies to bridge gaps between governance and citizen engagement (Bohman 1998, 401). By prioritising public discourse among free and equal citizens, deliberative democracy addresses the perceived deficits of electoral systems and enhances legitimacy through rational consensus. However, its success depends heavily on the socio-political context, particularly in hybrid regimes, where democratic institutions are frequently co-opted (Fiket and Đorđević 2022).

Additionally, addressing the global decline in trust and engagement with conventional processes like elections necessitates the development of a system of citizens’ assemblies, which presents significant potential for enhancing citizens’ participation (Venter 2023). Based on the example of Poland, Paulis and Pospieszna (2024) highlight that deliberative mini-publics can shape citizens’ perceptions in a polarised political environment. Especially in the case of Ireland, research findings indicate that citizens who are “dissatisfied” and believe that things are not going well are more likely to participate in citizens’ assemblies. However, that does not necessarily mean they view CAs as the only means of change (Walsh and Elkind 2021). Jain and Dienel (2024) argue that citizens’ assemblies are indispensable in urgent times and that their ad-hoc use requires CAs to become an integral part of the political decision-making system before a crisis arises.

Thus, the shift towards exploring a more active citizen engagement in democratic processes is imperative for several reasons. Firstly, traditional electoral systems, while fundamental to democratic governance, may fall short of adequately representing the diverse interests and perspectives within society, particularly in contexts marked by polarisation and disenchantment with political institutions. Secondly, active citizen engagement fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among the populace, reinforcing the legitimacy

of democratic governance structures and enhancing social cohesion. Moreover, by promoting dialogue and deliberation among citizens, innovative democratic mechanisms have the potential to generate more inclusive and effective policy outcomes, thereby addressing pressing societal challenges and strengthening the resilience of democratic institutions in the face of authoritarian threats.

Contextual Analysis: Hybrid Regimes in the Western Balkans and Deliberation

The global struggle to transition from post-socialist systems to democratic governance has been fraught with complexities, particularly in regions like the Western Balkans. These transitions often carry the weight of hybrid regimes, the erosion of civic trust, and authoritarian tendencies, presenting significant barriers to democratic consolidation. In the Western Balkans, democratic backsliding manifests through restrictions on freedom of speech, curtailment of political pluralism, and the weakening of institutional checks and balances, mirroring broader global trends in democratic erosion.

Authoritarian tendencies often emerge in contexts where political institutions are fragile and economic or social crises provide fertile ground for the centralisation of power. In the post-Soviet context, the interplay of institutionalised ruling party structures, coercive power, and state economic control has served as partially interchangeable mechanisms by which autocratic regimes resisted the challenges of the post-communist third wave (Way 2010, 229). The absence of a vibrant political and economic society in regimes is further complicated when a leader—claiming democratic legitimacy—can override institutions such as the legislature and judiciary and fails to meet basic rule of law standards (Linc and Stepan 2001).

Additionally, Levitsky and Way (2010, 28) have highlighted how hybrid regimes sustain themselves by maintaining democratic façades while undermining core democratic principles, and such tendencies are often bolstered by the manipulation of electoral processes, control over the media, and the marginalisation of political opponents, creating an uneven playing field that perpetuates authoritarian control. It is worth mentioning that authoritarian regimes are typically marked by the presence of formal institutions resembling democratic structures, the concentration of power in a single leader or a small group with significant governing authority, and a constrained level of political pluralism (Linz 2000, 43).

In the Western Balkans, regimes commonly manipulate electoral processes, control media narratives, and marginalise opposition parties to consolidate power. Kapidžić (2020) provides further insight into these dynamics,

emphasising that these illiberal practices are part of a broader trend in Southeastern Europe, where weak institutions and inherited governance practices preserve executive dominance, patronage, and informality. Despite holding regular elections, the Western Balkans remain competitive authoritarian regimes because they lack the substantive rule-of-law attributes essential for genuine democracy (Kmezić 2020).

Historical and geopolitical factors further intensify these authoritarian trends. Leaders in Serbia, North Macedonia, and Montenegro frequently instrumentalise ethnic divisions, ideological narratives, and wartime legacies to entrench their authority and deepen societal polarisation (Staletović and Bieber 2024). Hybrid regimes exploit the façade of democratic structures to suppress dissent and curtail civil liberties, often with tacit or indirect support from international actors (Pano 2023). Moreover, external influences such as Russia and the UAE contribute to state capture and illiberal governance through opaque business dealings and strategic investments (Prelec 2020). Democratic backsliding is occurring despite earlier assumptions that the region would permanently abandon authoritarian frameworks (Cohen and Lampe 2010).

This erosion of institutional safeguards creates fertile ground for disinformation to thrive, as weakened democratic structures are less capable of countering the manipulative tactics used to polarise and mislead the public. Therefore, coupled with increasing political polarisation, the spread of disinformation has contributed to a significant decline in public trust and the erosion of democratic norms and institutions. All the aforementioned factors have contributed to the characterisation of the political landscape in the Western Balkan countries as hybrid regimes—systems that exhibit a combination of autocratic and democratic features, with a growing tendency towards authoritarianism (Freedom House 2024, 3).

The Western Balkan countries that are central in this case study (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) were chosen as a case study because they share a complex political history marked by legacies of war, post-socialist transitions, and a prolonged struggle to establish stable democratic governance. Several scholars on transitions have demonstrated that consolidating democracy is impossible without taking into account the historical context, the institutional behaviour of actors, and the history of warfare (Pop-Eleches 2007; Way and Levitsky 2007; Zakosek 2008) when analysing the complex trajectory between authoritarianism and democracy. Each country illustrates different facets of democratic development in the Western Balkans, from Serbia's backsliding towards authoritarianism and Bosnia and Herzegovina's ethnic divisions and complex governance structure to Montenegro's ongoing political reconfiguration. The shared experience of post-conflict reconstruction, combined with the varying degrees of EU integration and internal democratic

deficits, makes these countries ideal for examining the role of Citizens' Assemblies as a tool for deepening democratic participation.

However, achieving representativeness remains a challenge, as politically active individuals are often over-represented, potentially limiting the broader societal impact of these initiatives in hybrid regimes. The political environment can either enhance or undermine these principles. The risk of assemblies being co-opted or rendered performative is significant, as evidenced in studies from Serbia, where deliberative innovations occasionally reinforced disillusionment with local democracy instead of mitigating it (Fiket, Ilić, and Pudar Draško 2022). Yet, participatory initiatives in Serbia have also shown potential for democratisation, especially when linked to grassroots movements and conflict-orientated issues (Fiket and Đorđević 2022).

Despite reservations about the effectiveness of citizens' assemblies in authoritarian regimes, it is evident that deliberative practices can serve as a tool against the contemporary use of vertical/horizontal, rational/irrational, and agitation/integration authoritarian propaganda (Hinck, Hawthorne, and Hawthorne 2018). Unlike the divisive policy frames employed by authoritarian regimes, mini-publics adopt depolarising frames that encourage citizens to reflect on issues while considering diverse perspectives and interests (Richards 2018). Moreover, the conducted citizens' assemblies demonstrated a reduction in populist behaviour among participants (Jacobs 2024). In the following sections, we will demonstrate through the results that citizens' assemblies provide empirical support for their theoretical significance, even within the framework of hybrid regimes.

Methodological Framework

This case study examines three citizens' assemblies held between October 2023 and February 2024 in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro as part of the EU-funded project *Combating Disinformation in the Western Balkans*. Since the media landscape in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro is shaped by political influence, financial instability, and evolving digital consumption habits, the citizens' assemblies were organised in response to the growing threat of disinformation that undermine democratic processes, distort public perception, and erode trust in institutions. The primary objective was raising awareness and educating participants on how to identify and report disinformation. Through structured deliberation, the assemblies provided a platform for citizens to engage in discussions, build consensus, and develop strategies for combating disinformation in their respective countries.

The methodological framework of citizens' assemblies was designed to facilitate informed, democratic deliberation on combating disinformation, where a representative group of citizens gathers to develop policy recommendations. The assemblies engaged 133 citizens from diverse backgrounds in structured deliberations on strategies to counteract disinformation in their respective countries.

Participants were selected through a democratic lottery³ to ensure a diverse range of views, reflecting the broader population in terms of age, gender, education, income, and ethnic background. It is also important to note that the selection criteria for participants should be tailored to the specific context and objectives of the research. In all three citizens' assemblies studied, the primary selection criteria included age, gender, region, and education. However, in the case of Montenegro, employment status was added as a criterion, though no specific rationale was provided for its inclusion. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnicity was introduced as an additional criterion, reflecting the diverse ethnic composition of these countries. The adjustment of selection criteria in these cases highlights the need to account for local contextual factors when designing such participatory initiatives.

To facilitate high-quality discussions, citizens were divided into small groups of 9 to 12 participants, led by experienced facilitators who guided the conversation towards consensus-building on the challenges of combating disinformation and formulating actionable recommendations. To ensure the citizens' assembly was informed by the most relevant and up-to-date knowledge, a carefully selected group of experts and decision-makers participated in the expert panels. The experts and decision-makers were selected based on their relevant expertise and experience in media, disinformation, and policy-making to ensure that the assembly's discussions were informed by diverse and well-rounded perspectives. Academics were chosen for their deep knowledge of the media landscape, disinformation trends, and their ability to provide evidence-based analysis. Their role was to help citizens understand the broader context of disinformation and answer questions

³ A democratic lottery is a method of selecting participants for a citizens' assembly or similar democratic processes in a way that ensures representation from a diverse cross-section of the population. Rather than relying on voluntary sign-ups or expert nominations, a democratic lottery randomly selects individuals from a predefined pool of eligible citizens to participate. The goal is to achieve a representative sample that mirrors the broader population in terms of key characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, and region, ensuring that the assembly reflects a wide range of perspectives and experiences. This approach enhances the legitimacy of the process by minimising bias and providing equal opportunity for citizens to be involved in decision-making on public matters.

that arose during the deliberations. On the other hand, decision-makers, such as members of parliament, ministry staff, and representatives from regulatory bodies, were included to offer practical insights into potential policy responses and the feasibility of implementing measures to combat disinformation. The inclusion of both academics and decision-makers ensured that the assembly had a comprehensive understanding of the issue, combining theoretical knowledge with real-world policy implications. This diverse representation was essential for grounding the assembly's recommendations in academic research and practical, actionable solutions.

During the citizens' assembly, participants raised a wide range of questions to media experts and decision-makers, aiming to deepen their understanding of disinformation and explore potential solutions. Questions for media experts focused on the nature and mechanisms of disinformation, such as distinguishing fake news from disinformation, identifying reliable sources, and methods for recognising sophisticated disinformation. Participants also enquired about the role of institutions in combating disinformation, questioning the effectiveness of existing regulatory bodies, the independence of media regulators, and the adequacy of current laws and sanctions. Further questions addressed international experiences, seeking examples of successful disinformation combat strategies from other countries. Lastly, participants asked decision-makers about the effectiveness of institutions like the Press Council and the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), including questions about accountability, transparency, and the enforcement of penalties. These questions were raised to ensure that recommendations for combating disinformation were informed by academic insights and practical policy considerations while also addressing concerns about the effectiveness and accountability of existing institutional frameworks. Additionally, the outcomes of these discussions were used to formulate concrete recommendations for policymakers, ensuring a more coordinated and effective response to the challenges of disinformation.

To evaluate the impact of the citizens' assemblies and gather feedback from participants, the study employed a quasi-experimental design⁴ by dividing citizens into two groups: a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group comprised individuals who actively participated in the citizens' assemblies. These participants completed pre- and post-assembly questionnaires designed to assess various relevant variables related to the topic of the assembly. In contrast, the control group, which was demographically matched to the treatment group but did not attend the assembly, completed

⁴ A quasi-experimental design is a research method where subjects are assigned to groups using a non-random method; researchers often don't have control over the treatment (pre-existing treatment), and control groups are not mandatory.

identical questionnaires during the same timeframes. The purpose of having both groups is to compare the outcomes and determine whether attending the citizens' assembly had a measurable effect on participants' perceptions and attitudes towards disinformation. By using a control group, researchers can isolate the effects of the assembly from other external factors, ensuring that any changes observed in the treatment group are directly attributable to the experience of attending the assembly, rather than other influences.

Citizens' Assemblies Data

Table 1: Empirical data of the citizens' assemblies

Criterion	Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Total
Number of participants	45	39	49	133
Men	22	18	24	64
Women	23	21	26	70
Age: 18-34	10	10	32	52
Age: 35-64	23	25	14	62
Age: 64+	12	4	3	19
Region: North	23	17	14	54
Region: Center	12	14	24	50
Region: South	10	9	12	31
Education: Elementary school	11	8	9	28
Education: High school	24	23	25	72
Education: University	10	9	16	35
Employment: Employed	0	0	0	0
Employment: Unemployed	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity: Serbs	13			13
Ethnicity: Bosniaks		20		20
Ethnicity: Croats			6	6
Ethnicity: Albanians				0
Ethnicity: Other (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians)				0
Experts	4	4	3	11
Moderators	4	4	5	13
Facilitators	4	4	5	13
Decision makers	0	5	5	10
Recommendations	12	18	15	45

Source: Authors.

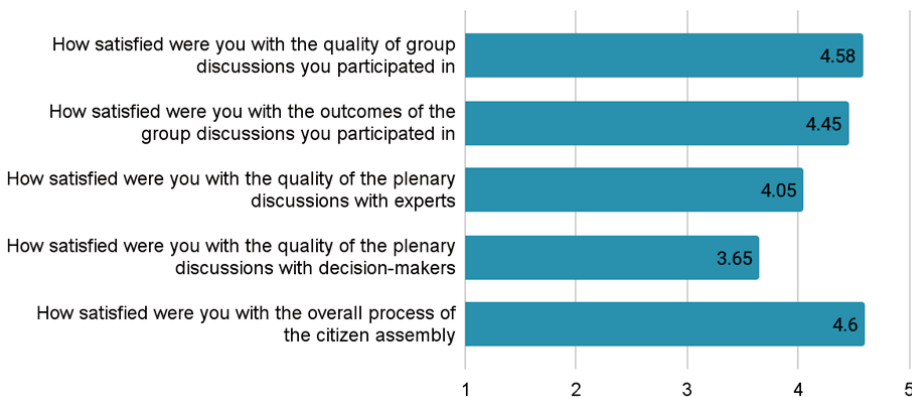
The contribution of this paper lies in its focus on citizens' assemblies in the specific context of the Western Balkans, an area where this form of democratic innovation is relatively new and currently marginal. Unlike many existing studies that explore citizens' assemblies in established democracies, this paper examines their emerging role in a region with distinct political challenges. Specifically, we aim to demonstrate that despite the limited policy impact of citizens' assemblies and the absence of a tradition of their organisation in these societies, all participants in these sessions expressed satisfaction with their participation and a unanimous willingness to participate in similar initiatives in the future. This finding underscores the potential of citizens' assemblies to foster civic engagement and deliberation, even in contexts where democratic practices are still evolving.

Results and Discussion

Participant Evaluations of the Citizens' Assembly on Combating Disinformation in Serbia

The Citizens' Assembly on Combating Disinformation in Serbia was designed to address the growing challenge of disinformation and its impact on democratic processes. By bringing together participants from diverse backgrounds, the assembly aimed to foster informed discussions, enhance understanding, and generate actionable insights to combat this pressing issue. This section evaluates the outcomes of the assembly based on participant feedback, highlighting key successes, areas for improvement, and implications for the design of future assemblies.

Figure 1: Participant Satisfaction with Key Aspects of the Citizens' Assembly

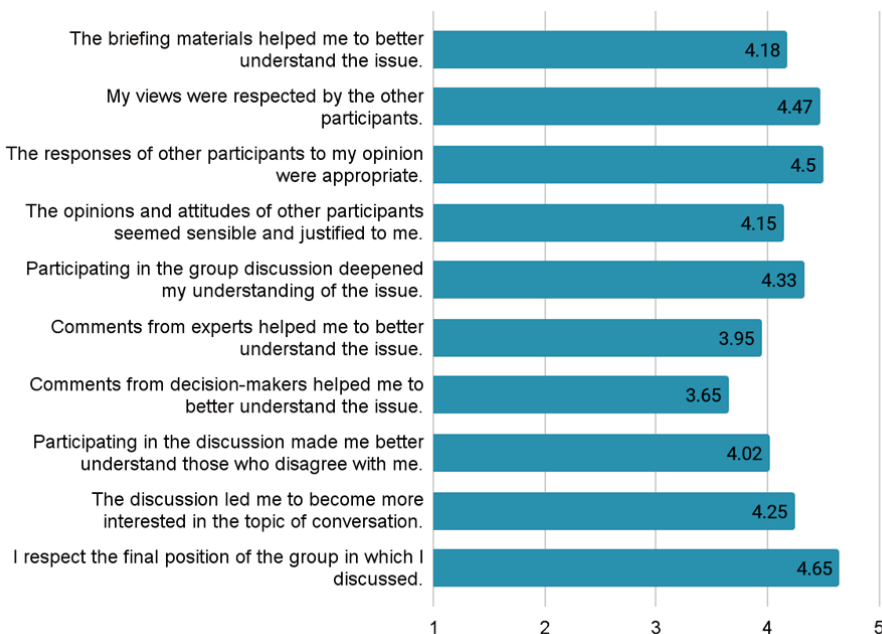


Source: Authors.

Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the overall assembly process, as reflected in an average rating of 4.6 out of 5 (on a scale where 1 indicates “extremely dissatisfied” and 5 signifies “completely satisfied”). The assembly succeeded in creating an inclusive and engaging environment where participants felt respected and valued. This is evident from the high ratings for the respect shown by others (4.47) and the appropriateness of responses to their opinions (4.5). Furthermore, participants demonstrated strong agreement with the final group position, assigning it the highest average rating of 4.65, which underscores the collaborative and consensus-driven nature of the discussions.

The assembly effectively deepened participants’ understanding of disinformation, with group discussions receiving a positive average rating of 4.33. Participants noted that the collaborative and deliberative nature of these discussions significantly contributed to their comprehension of the issue. Preparatory materials provided before the assembly were also highly rated, with an average score of 4.18, indicating their role in facilitating informed dialogue. Additionally, the assembly succeeded in sparking interest in the topic, as reflected in a rating of 4.25 for heightened interest in the subject matter.

Figure 2: Participant Reflections on the Deliberative Quality and Learning Experience in the Citizens’ Assembly

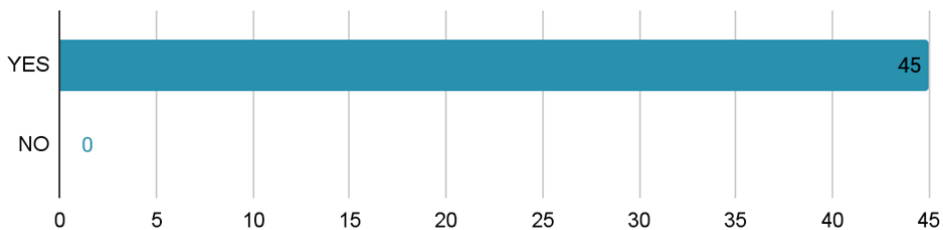


Source: Authors.

While the assembly received strong overall evaluations, the contributions of media experts and decision-makers emerged as areas for potential improvement. Participants acknowledged the value of expert insights, assigning an average rating of 3.95. However, some participants criticised the lack of direct and practical answers to their questions, particularly regarding international best practices for combating disinformation. The high volume of questions—approximately 40 within a 90-minute session—may have limited the depth and specificity of expert responses, pointing to the need for better time allocation and focus on future assemblies.

Feedback regarding decision-makers, particularly the representative from the broadcast regulator, was more critical. Participants cited vague and noncommittal responses, leading to an average rating of 3.65, the lowest among all aspects evaluated. While participants valued the opportunity to engage directly with decision-makers, the perceived ineffectiveness of these interactions suggests a need for clearer, more actionable contributions in future assemblies. The assembly also succeeded in promoting empathy and mutual understanding among participants. The deliberative discussions were rated 4.02 for their ability to help participants better understand perspectives different from their own. This reflects the assembly's success in fostering constructive dialogue and bridging divides, a critical component of addressing polarised societal issues like disinformation.

Figure 3: Would you participate again in a citizen's assembly?



Source: Authors.

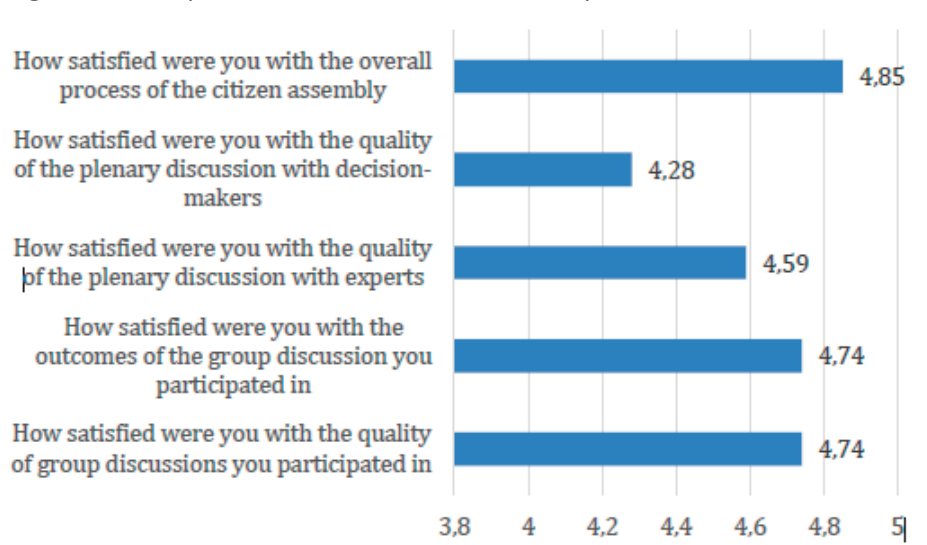
A particularly significant outcome was the unanimous willingness of participants to participate in future citizens' assemblies. This strong endorsement underscores the perceived value of the process and highlights its potential as an effective mechanism for addressing complex societal challenges and promoting democratic engagement.

Participant Evaluations of the Citizens' Assembly on Combating Disinformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Citizens' Assembly on Combating Disinformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) provided a platform for deliberation on one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary ethnically divided societies. Participants expressed overwhelmingly positive feedback about various aspects of the assembly, as reflected in their responses to the evaluation survey. The assembly's design, inclusivity, and organisational quality received the highest praise, with an average rating of 4.85. That suggests that participants found the process well-structured, transparent, and successful in meeting its objectives.

Participants rated the quality of group discussions particularly high, with an average score of 4.74. These sessions were seen as engaging, productive, and conducive to meaningful dialogue. That reflects the success of the assembly in fostering a deliberative environment. Similarly, plenary discussions with experts received a positive average rating of 4.59, indicating that participants valued the insights provided by subject-matter experts. These contributions were perceived as credible and instrumental in shaping participants' perspectives on the problem of disinformation.

Figure 4: Participant Satisfaction with Different Aspects of the Citizens' Assembly



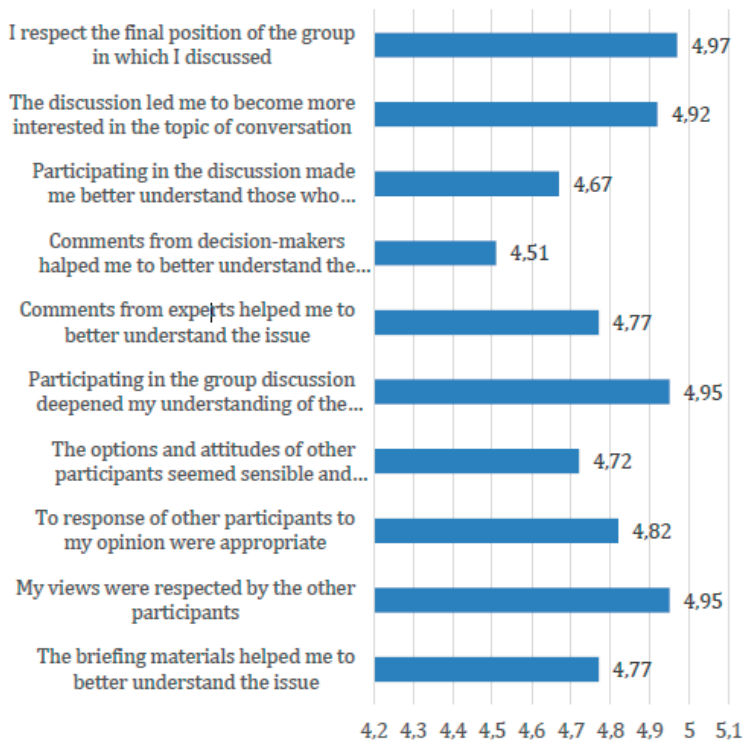
Source: Authors.

One of the most notable outcomes of the evaluation was the exceptionally high level of respect participants felt during the assembly. With an average

rating of 4.95, participants overwhelmingly reported that their views were respected and valued by others. Additionally, participants were highly satisfied with the way their opinions were addressed, reflected in an average rating of 4.82. That indicates a constructive and inclusive atmosphere that fosters meaningful exchanges of ideas.

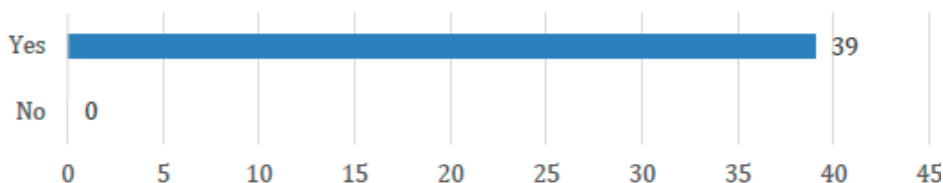
Participants also noted the importance and validity of diverse perspectives, as reflected in the average rating of 4.72. That demonstrates that the assembly successfully created a space for acknowledging and integrating differing viewpoints, contributing to a richer and more nuanced discussion. Participants reported a heightened interest in the topic of disinformation, as evidenced by an average rating of 4.92. That indicates that the assembly not only informed participants but also succeeded in capturing and sustaining their attention. Furthermore, discussions helped foster mutual understanding, with an average rating of 4.67 for improving participants' ability to empathise with those holding differing views.

Figure 5: Participants' Reflections on Learning, Respect, and Group Dynamics in the Citizens' Assembly



Source: Authors.

Figure 6: Would you participate again in a citizens' assembly?



Source: Authors.

The fact that every single participant expressed a desire to participate again in a citizens' assembly represents a significant result. This unanimous positive response implies a high level of satisfaction, perceived value, and positive experiences throughout the civil assembly process. Participants not only found value in the current experience but also expressed a strong willingness to engage in similar initiatives in the future.

Participant Evaluations of the Citizens' Assembly on Combating Disinformation in Montenegro

The evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly initiative in Montenegro revealed a significant increase in participants' awareness of political processes and government policies following their involvement in the Citizens' Assembly. Before participation, many respondents expressed moderate to low levels of knowledge about democratic processes. For instance, only 17% rated their awareness as "high" (score of ten), with the majority assigning themselves a moderate score of five (19.1%). Post-assembly, the percentage of highly informed participants rose to 21.3%, accompanied by incremental increases across other high-score categories. That indicates that the assembly succeeded in equipping participants with a deeper understanding of democratic processes.

Participants also reported an increased willingness to engage in civic activities. Attendance at public debates, for example, rose from 78.7% before the assembly to 89.4% afterwards. Similarly, the inclination to join collective actions with local representatives increased from 87.2% to 91.5%, while participation in civil society activities grew from 74.5% to 83%. These shifts reflect a growing sense of empowerment and readiness among participants to actively contribute to democratic processes.

One notable outcome was the heightened critical perspective on Montenegro's democratic processes. Participants identified significant barriers to political participation, such as corruption, the arbitrariness of political elites, and a lack of institutional accountability. Many expressed scepticism about the

authenticity of Montenegro's democratic framework, describing it as largely "illusory". Furthermore, participants developed a more critical and distrustful attitude towards the media and their reporting. The assembly increased awareness of the pervasive impact of fake news and disinformation, fostering a more discerning approach to media consumption. This shift underscores the role of citizens' assemblies in promoting media literacy as a foundational component of democratic engagement.

The assembly also influenced participants' satisfaction with opportunities for civic involvement. Initially, 23.4% believed there were sufficient opportunities for participation, a figure that slightly declined to 21.7% in the final evaluation. Conversely, the percentage of those who believed there were insufficient opportunities increased from 55.3% to 60.9%. Despite these perceptions, participants showed increased readiness to engage in specific activities, such as attending protests (70.2% to 83%) and signing petitions (91.5% to 93.6%). Notably, participation in political parties increased from 29.8% to 38.3%, reflecting a gradual shift towards institutional engagement.

Participants identified numerous obstacles hindering greater citizen involvement in democratic processes. Chief among these were safety concerns stemming from perceptions of corruption and political arbitrariness. Many respondents also highlighted societal apathy and a lack of trust in the political system as critical barriers to engagement. These findings emphasise the importance of addressing systemic issues to create an enabling environment for meaningful citizen participation.

The Citizens' Assembly in Montenegro demonstrated its capacity to inform, empower, and engage citizens in democratic processes. Participants not only became more knowledgeable but also more critical of existing political and media structures. Importantly, they expressed an increased willingness to participate in civic activities, highlighting the assembly's role in fostering democratic resilience. These findings reinforce the potential of citizens' assemblies as tools to counter illiberal trends and strengthen deliberative democracy in contexts of political fragility.

Conclusion: Benefits and Drawbacks of Citizens' Assemblies

In the political contexts of countries that remain distant from fully consolidated democracies, the impact of citizens' assemblies as a democratic innovation is both promising and subject to significant constraints. A significant advantage of citizens' assemblies, even within hybrid regimes, is that civil society organisations frequently assume leadership in organising these initiatives. It illustrates that these organisations can actively contribute to fostering citizen

engagement and raising public awareness despite the constraints of a hybrid regime. Another notable strength is the citizens' willingness to participate. Given that citizens' assemblies represent a relatively recent form of democratic innovation in the Western Balkans, initial scepticism is to be expected. However, in all three assemblies conducted under this research, the participation rate was 100%, with every invited citizen taking part. Additionally, post-assembly surveys indicated unanimous support for future participation. This demonstrates that citizens' assemblies facilitate informed decision-making by enabling participants to acquire deeper insights into the issues at hand. In some cases, such as the assemblies held in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these forums also served as mechanisms for bridging ethnic divides and fostering constructive and peaceful dialogue between Serbs and Bosniaks. Moreover, citizens' assemblies are valuable for creating synergies by integrating the perspectives of decision-makers, civil society organisations, experts, academics, and citizens into a cohesive and collaborative process. This integration fosters mutual understanding and cooperation by allowing different actors to share their knowledge, perspectives, and concerns in a constructive setting. Decision-makers gain direct insights into citizens' priorities and experiences, which can help shape more effective policies. Experts and academics contribute evidence-based knowledge, ensuring discussions and recommendations are grounded in facts rather than misinformation or political bias. Civil society organisations act as intermediaries, advocating for citizens' voices and facilitating dialogue between the public and institutions. Meanwhile, citizens play a crucial role by providing firsthand experiences and expressing their needs, ensuring that the proposed solutions align with societal realities. This collaborative approach enhances policy legitimacy, builds trust between institutions and the public, and increases the likelihood of implementing well-informed and broadly supported measures.

While citizens' assemblies have the potential to foster greater public engagement, enhance political legitimacy, and address issues of governance from a grassroots perspective, their ability to effect tangible change in hybrid or semi-authoritarian regimes is limited by several factors. Firstly, in regimes where democratic backsliding is prevalent, the formal recommendations of citizens' assemblies may lack the necessary political backing for implementation. Without the support of political elites, citizens' assemblies risk being relegated to advisory roles with little influence on actual policymaking. Decision-makers often exhibit resistance and tend to disregard the recommendations of citizens' assemblies, as the outcomes of these assemblies may challenge existing political agendas or policy preferences, leading to a reluctance to implement changes that could disrupt the status quo. The recommendations of citizens' assemblies are sometimes perceived as lacking legitimacy or authority, particularly if the

assemblies are viewed as disconnected from formal political institutions or electoral processes. Additionally, decision-makers may question the representativeness of citizens' assemblies, considering them too small or not fully reflective of the broader population's views. Lastly, there may be institutional inertia or political costs associated with adopting citizens' recommendations, especially if they require significant reforms or face opposition from powerful interest groups.

While citizens' assemblies have the potential to foster public engagement, enhance political legitimacy, and address governance issues from a grassroots perspective, their ability to effect tangible change in hybrid or semi-authoritarian regimes is constrained by several factors. In Serbia, during the period when citizens' assemblies were organised, public debates were also held on two key laws—the Law on Electronic Media and the Law on Public Information and Media. The recommendations from the citizens' assemblies were formally presented in these debates and submitted to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications. However, no response was received, reflecting the government's lack of interest in supporting or acknowledging citizen-driven recommendations. This lack of engagement was further evident in the absence of decision-makers at the citizens' assemblies in Serbia. In Montenegro, the response was somewhat more positive. Members of Parliament attended the citizens' assembly, signalling initial interest. However, beyond their presence, no concrete actions were taken to implement the recommendations.

The most promising example comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where not only did members of Parliament attend the citizens' assembly, but a meaningful follow-up was initiated. As the majority of recommendations focused on media literacy, two roundtable discussions were subsequently organised in Tuzla and Banja Luka. These gatherings brought together representatives from cantonal ministries of education, school directors, teachers, the Communications Regulatory Agency, and the Ombudsman to discuss the introduction and improvement of media literacy education in high schools. This case demonstrates how, with institutional engagement, citizens' assemblies can serve as a catalyst for further dialogue and policy discussions, even in challenging political environments.

This raises concerns about the durability and institutionalisation of these mechanisms, as their outcomes may be dismissed or co-opted by dominant political actors who seek to maintain power. The sustainability and institutionalisation of citizens' assemblies are contingent upon funding, which, particularly in the Western Balkans, is predominantly project-based. Consequently, once a project concludes, the continuity of organising future citizens' assemblies becomes uncertain, as does the implementation of the

citizens' recommendations. It is also important to point out that the impact of citizens' assemblies in less democratic contexts is often constrained by the absence of a robust civil society and independent media, which are critical for ensuring transparency and accountability. In such environments, the dissemination of the outcomes of citizens' assemblies may be limited, reducing their ability to generate public debate and hold decision-makers accountable.

However, despite these challenges, the mere existence of citizens' assemblies in authoritarian-leaning contexts can be viewed as a significant step towards democratisation. By creating spaces for deliberation, inclusion, and informed decision-making, citizens' assemblies have the potential to introduce new norms of participation and consensus-building, which could gradually influence the political culture. In some cases, they may also serve as a form of "pressure from below", signalling a public demand for greater inclusivity and responsiveness from governing institutions. Thus, while the immediate impact of citizens' assemblies in such contexts may be limited, their long-term significance lies in their capacity to nurture deliberative practices, challenge authoritarian norms, and contribute incrementally to democratic resilience.

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DELIBERACIJA U USLOVIMA DEMOKRATSKOG NAZADOVANJA: UVIDI IZ SKUPŠTINA GRAĐANA NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU

Apstrakt: Ovaj rad istražuje ulogu skupština građana (SG) u podsticanju deliberativne demokratije i suprotstavljanju autoritarnim tendencijama na Zapadnom Balkanu, regionu koji se suočava sa značajnim demokratskim nazadovanjem. Analizirajući tri skupštine održane u Srbiji, Bosni i Hercegovini i Crnoj Gori između oktobra 2023. i februara 2024. godine, sa ukupno 133 učesnika, studija ispituje spremnost građana da učestvuju i njihovo zadovoljstvo deliberacijom o ključnim društvenim pitanjima. Iako SG uglavnom organizuju organizacije civilnog društva i imaju ograničenu institucionalnu podršku, pokazale su značajan potencijal za unapređenje učešća građana i prevazilaženje društvenih podela. Nalazi pokazuju visok nivo angažovanja građana, pri čemu učesnici često iznose stavove koji dovode u pitanje dominantne političke narative. Među značajnim primerima ističu se podsticanje međuetničkog dijaloga u Bosni i Hercegovini i formulisane konkretne preporuke u vezi sa dezinformacijama u Srbiji. Ipak, uticaj SG na zvanično donošenje politika ograničen je zbog ukorenjenih političkih struktura, otpora elita i neizvesnosti u finansiranju. Uprkos ovim izazovima, SG predstavljaju važne platforme za razmenu mišljenja, nudeći korektivne mehanizme za nedostatke tradicionalnog upravljanja u hibridnim režimima. Ova studija ističe transformativni potencijal SG u izgradnji demokratske otpornosti, naglašavajući njihovu ulogu u unapređenju deliberativnih praksi i suprotstavljanju autoritarnim normama u nestabilnim političkim kontekstima.

Ključne reči: skupštine građana; deliberativna demokratija; deliberacija; Zapadni Balkan.

WHO'S AFRAID OF ROBIN HOOD? THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S MEDIATION ATTEMPTS IN THE MEXICAN DRUG WAR

Milan VESELICA¹

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the potential role of the Catholic Church in mediating Mexico's drug war, particularly in light of the 2024 proposal from the leader of the Mexican Episcopal Conference. While the concept of faith-based mediation has been extensively explored in political science, this specific case is noteworthy due to the involvement of drug cartels in an internal armed conflict. Utilising the theoretical framework established by Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana, the author investigates the Church's identity, resources, challenges, strategies, and motivations as a mediator. The study sheds light on the complex dynamics between the Church and drug cartels, which encompass everything from parallel social activities to instances of victimisation. Despite these challenges, the context in Mexico offers the Church a unique opportunity to confront issues related to drug cartels, including the rise of "narco-religion". As a result, three potential approaches emerge – religious, social, and political – that could mitigate the influence of drug cartels and enhance the mediating power of the Catholic Church.

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Introduction

The legend of Robin Hood tells of a knight and outlaw from Sherwood Forest who rebels against local and central authorities and the church hierarchy. He aids the poor against oppressive feudal lords, embodying a mediaeval hero who fights inequality through violence. This story has inspired political groups, guerrillas, and insurgents, though some use it as a façade to justify their actions. A modern example is Mexican drug cartels, which present themselves as Robin Hood-like organisations while being an unwelcome force in society.

In a Robin Hood framework of conflict, the main adversaries consist of central and local authorities. In Mexico, their power is undermined by drug cartels that effectively control various territories. This situation arises from a federal system that centralises power, often neglecting regional diversity (Krstić 2014a, 185). Cartels, closely linked to local socio-economic groups, function as parastatal entities, fulfilling community needs without genuinely representing the populace (Flanigan 2014). Despite some democratic advancements since the 1917 Constitution, Mexico experienced a period described as a “stabilocracy” under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which forged alliances with cartels (Krstić 2014b, 45). The declaration of the drug war in 2006 transformed Mexico into what is now referred to as a “narco-democracy” (Kos-Stanišić 2011). Additionally, US influence and instability in Central America (Dujčić 2020), coupled with a glorified drug culture—characterised as “pornography of violence” (Grillo 2016)—have further weakened state authorities in their efforts to combat drug cartels.

However, the church constitutes the second branch within Robin Hood’s classification of enmity. In Mexico, the relationship between the church and state has transitioned from one of hostility to a state of ambivalence (cf. Blancarte 2006; Peralta 2012). However, the interactions between drug cartels and the Catholic Church have received comparatively little scholarly attention. A notable exception is Dennis P. Petri’s (2021) study on the regulation of religion by organised crime. While the Catholic Church does not formally participate as a direct actor in the conflict, it plays a crucial role in the broader struggle against drug cartels. This role became particularly pronounced in 2024 when the leadership of the Catholic Church in Mexico offered to act as a mediator in the ongoing Mexican drug war (Sheridan and Rios 2024). Therefore, this paper seeks to explore this potential mediation through the theoretical lens of faith-based mediation.

Theoretical Framework

Since the dawn of the 21st century, religious actors have been increasingly recognised as significant international actors. These actors—whether individuals,

groups, or organisations—espouse religious beliefs and articulate “a reasonably consistent and coherent message about the relationship of religion to politics” (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011, 23). Their influence, while global in scope, often manifests at the national level as well. Jeffrey Haynes (2001, 147) notes, “There is no doubt that religion and religious movements can directly affect the internal politics of states and thus qualify state power, as conventionally understood”. The Catholic Church exemplifies this phenomenon. Established as one of the most influential transnational actors (Ryall 2001; Troy 2008; Vallier 1971), the Catholic Church operates on both internal and international fronts, effectively leveraging various layers of its structure—from the “smallest level of sub-parochial units through to missionary religious orders, such as the Jesuits, that can claim to be prototypes of globalisation” (Ryall 2001, 41).

Religious actors in the global arena engage with various transnational entities and phenomena, including terrorism, human rights issues, and protecting sacred sites (Fox 2018, 200–201). Addressing negative transnational phenomena, such as terrorism and organised crime, requires a counterforce with an equally transnational reach. To enhance effectiveness, states must collaborate with neighbouring countries facing similar challenges. This necessity was underscored by the United Nations Security Council in its 2023 Presidential Statement on Transnational Organised Crime: “The Security Council calls on all Member States to improve border management and international cooperation to effectively constrain the spread of transnational threats” (UNSC 2023). However, given the multifaceted nature of transnational threats, state-led efforts alone are often insufficient. In this context, faith-based mediation emerges as a crucial complement, facilitating collaboration between state and non-state actors to more effectively address these challenges.

In their case study on transnational faith-based diplomacy, Lehmann and McLarren (2023, 256–259) highlight the Catholic Church’s pivotal role in resolving the civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mozambique, as well as during Mexico’s Zapatista uprising. This involvement is grounded in the Church’s evolving social teaching, beginning with Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and culminating in Pope Francis’s 2020 *Fratelli Tutti*. The 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* emphasises the Church’s obligation to engage in social issues due to the relevance of the Gospel and “the corrupting effects of injustice, that is, of sin” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, § 71). This doctrinal foundation explicitly applies to transnational issues that necessitate “mediation between state and non-state delegations by a religious actor in changing locations, over long durations, and under varying political conditions” (Lehmann and McLarren 2023, 259).

The effectiveness of faith-based mediation in internal armed conflicts has been examined in research by Johnstone and Svensson (2013). Their extensive

global dataset reveals that faith-based mediation successfully resolves roughly half of the cases analysed, which Jonathan Fox (2018, 125) describes as a “good success rate for violent conflicts”. A significant finding from their study is that “faith-based mediation primarily occurs in contexts where religion does not play a role in the conflict itself” (Johnstone and Svensson 2013, 557). Nonetheless, it does not preclude religious actors from mediating these disputes. Furthermore, Zachary R. Calo (2025, 159) notes, “Because of their ability to incorporate ‘moral and spiritual resources’ into the mediation, faith-based actors are particularly effective at moving parties towards an agreement”. Moreover, mediation by religious actors represents “a direct, discernible, and often dramatic form of religious influence—and one in which much is at stake” (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011, 186).

There is no universal methodology for faith-based mediation, prompting the authors to focus primarily on the factors contributing to its potential success (e.g., Calo 2025; Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009; Johnstone and Svensson 2013). Thus, Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) identified several key elements that enhance the effectiveness of mediation.

First, the mediator’s identity plays a crucial role in achieving the primary objective of mediation: peace. They note that “mediators who enjoy the trust of the parties and are perceived as legitimate and credible are often the more successful mediators” (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009, 180).

Second, the mediator’s resources refer to their leverage or “ability to become a relevant actor in conflict management”. For non-state actors, this entails utilising intangible resources such as credibility, legitimacy, trust, moral standing, and persuasive power as sources of leverage (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, pp. 180-181). Given that religious actors possess specific moral and spiritual leverage, it becomes essential to explore “how religion shapes identity, behaviour, and belief in ways that inform the conflict and its potential resolution” (Calo 2025, 159).

Third, the mediator’s motivation is critical. If the parties perceive that the mediator is genuinely invested in reducing violence and resolving the conflict, they are more likely to trust the mediator (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009, 181).

Finally, mediation strategies and approaches can be classified into three main categories: communication-facilitation strategies (which involve relaying messages between disputants and providing unbiased information), procedural strategies (which focus on creating conducive environments for negotiation, such as arranging suitable times and locations), and directive/manipulative strategies (which aim to persuade disputants to accept proposals put forth by mediators who hold considerable authority) (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009, 181).

The Mexican drug war may conform to the traditional definition of an intrastate armed conflict—defined as “a conflict between a government and a non-governmental party, with no interference from other countries” (Uppsala University 2024). Its prolonged duration (since 2006) and considerable lethality highlight the necessity for a powerful mediator to facilitate its resolution. The involvement of the Catholic Church in the Mexican drug war is notably justified by its expressed willingness to mediate. The leadership of the Catholic Church in Mexico has made several attempts to position itself as a mediator in the conflict between the state and drug cartels, particularly in 2024 (Sheridan and Rios 2024). Therefore, the paper will explore, following Berkovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana’s methodology, the potential for the Catholic Church to really take that role.

The next sections will be organised as follows. First, I will present the identity of the Catholic Church in Mexico. Next, I will delve into its resources—such as religiosity, individual insecurity, public trust, and social activity—while also addressing the challenges posed by drug cartels, including narco-religion, parallel social activity, paternalism, and victimisation. In the third part, I will discuss the motivations of the Catholic Church to act as a mediator. Lastly, I will briefly outline potential strategies and approaches.

Identity

The Catholic Church has been a vital part of Mexican identity since colonial times, existing alongside the state and military. Figures like Father Miguel Hidalgo, a Catholic priest, were key in the independence movement against Spanish rule. Father Hidalgo raised the flag featuring Our Lady of Guadalupe, a symbol that came to represent the independence movement (Schwaller 2011, 117–118). Following this wave of sentiment, the Declaration of Sovereignty and Independence was adopted in Apatzingán in 1814, proclaiming Catholicism as the state religion. Although Mexicans may express concerns about their political leaders and the church hierarchy, they tend to maintain deep reverence for Our Lady of Guadalupe (Agren 2016).

Following Mexico’s independence in 1821, the Church became a privileged institution, as citizenship was exclusively granted to Catholics. It continued to advocate for the indigenous population that had converted to Christianity. The mid-19th century saw the rise of liberal ideas in Mexico, coinciding with a period of social and national upheaval in Europe. Benito Juárez, a president of indigenous descent and a fierce opponent of the Church, championed agrarian reforms that targeted large church estates, resulting in considerable losses for the Church. Ironically, the promotion of religious freedom led to the suppression of religious orders, a ban on religious symbols in public spaces, and the secularisation of weddings and funerals. In response, the clergy and

conservative factions appealed to Maximilian of Habsburg to seize power in Mexico. However, after the restoration of the republic, the anti-clerical campaign continued unabated (Schwaller 2011, 144-151).

The concerns regarding the church hierarchy persisted throughout the Revolution (1910-1920). Until 1910, the Church held significant power, owning 50% of the total arable land in the country (Paligorić 2002, 80). However, ten years later, the Church's economic and political influence had diminished due to the loss of its estates and voting rights, the confiscation of property, and the imposition of constitutional control over its activities (Paligorić 2002, 221). Article 24 of the 1917 Constitution stipulated that "every religious act of public worship must be conducted strictly within a designated place of worship, which shall always be under government supervision" (Constitution of Mexico 1917, Art. 24). Article 27 stated that churches are prohibited from acquiring, holding, or managing property or taking out mortgages. Any church property acquired prior to this will be returned to the Nation (Constitution of Mexico 1917, Art. 27(II)).

The anti-Church campaign escalated during President Plutarco Elias Calles's administration, leading to a rebellion against anti-clerical laws and secular policies, culminating in the Cristero War (1926-1929). Approximately 50,000 Cristeros rose in defence of Christianity. The outcome of this conflict led to a renewed recognition of the Catholic Church. However, it was not until 1992 that the Law on Religious Communities was enacted, permitting the Church to purchase, own, or manage real estate or capital, but only to the extent necessary for its functions (Blancarte 2006, 427).

The Catholic Church is currently witnessing a decline in the number of adherents in Mexico. According to the 2020 Mexican population census, approximately 78% of the population identifies as Catholic, a decrease from 83% in 2010 (Office of International Religious Freedom 2023, 1). In contrast, there has been a notable increase in followers of Protestant denominations (4.29% in 2020), as well as among independents, Christians without formal affiliation, and agnostics (ARDA n.d.). However, this decline does not suggest that the Catholic Church has lost its social and political influence, which remains shaped by a complex interplay of historical, demographic, and institutional resources that will be explored further below.

Resources and Challenges

Religiosity

The situation becomes more intricate when examining personal religious practices and beliefs. The 2017–2022 World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022) reveals that 74.6% of Mexicans regard religion as

important to varying degrees, a figure that exceeds the percentage of individuals identifying as Catholics. Furthermore, about 87% of respondents indicated that God holds a significant or very significant place in their lives (Table 1).

Table 1: Importance of religion and God in personal life

	Very important (%)	Rather important (%)	Not very important (%)	Not at all important (%)	N
Importance of religion	50.891	23.749	15.009	10.351	1,739
Importance of God ²	79.126	8.568	7.188	5.118	1,739

Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022).

A significant two-thirds of respondents indicate a belief in God, life after death, and heaven, while belief in hell tends to be less prevalent across nearly all countries surveyed. Notably, about 95% of respondents in Mexico express their faith in God (Table 2).

Table 2: Religious beliefs on an individual level

	Yes (%)	No (%)	N
Belief in God	95.975	4.025	1,739
Belief in life after death	71.736	28.264	1,716
Belief in hell	61.111	38.889	1,728
Belief in heaven	78.316	21.684	1,734

Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022).

In terms of religious practices, personal prayer aligns with the broader trend of religiosity, with approximately 70 to 80% of individuals engaging in frequent individual prayer. In contrast, church attendance shows a relatively low engagement level; fewer than 50% of respondents attend religious services on

² The importance of God is assessed using a 10-point scale that gauges individual importance. To facilitate comparison of results, we have divided this scale into four categories. Responses 1, 2, and 3 fall under the “Not at all important” category, while answers 4 and 5 are classified as “Not very important.” Conversely, responses 6 and 7 are categorised as “Rather important,” and those who answered 8, 9, or 10 are placed in the “Very important” category.

a weekly basis. This indicates that nearly half of those surveyed in Mexico do not participate in Sunday mass, which is considered the most significant religious service in the Catholic Church (Table 3).

Table 3: Religious practices on an individual level

	Daily, once or several times a week (%)	Once a month or on special occasions (%)	Once a year (%)	Less often or never (%)	N
Attending religious services	43.416	29.385	5.750	16.273	1,739
Praying	72.743	10.293	1.898	15.066	1,739

Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerper et al. 2022).

Insecurity

In the 1920s, during American Prohibition, smuggling organisations thrived along the US-Mexico border, particularly in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, becoming key centres for drug trafficking. These groups exploited the availability of marijuana and opium poppy in Mexico, leading to a booming drug trade in Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, and Baja California. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), in power since 1929, maintained a clientelistic relationship with drug cartels, which contributed to a relatively stable environment. However, in the 1980s, as the PRI faced electoral losses in northern states, this relationship weakened, resulting in increased drug-related violence, further fuelled by US efforts to combat trafficking (Medel and Thoumi 2014, 196-197).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the largest drug cartels in Mexico were established and consolidated, including the Valencia (Milenio) cartel (1970s–2009), the Juárez Cartel, La Familia Michoacana, the Tijuana Cartel, and the Sinaloa Cartel. Conflicts and alliances among these groups vying for control over trade routes led to the decline of older cartels and the rise of new ones in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, such as the Golfo Cartel, Beltrán Leyva, Jalisco New Generation Cartel, and Los Caballeros Templarios (cf. Kail 2015, 23-32).

The PRI experienced losses in two presidential elections, in 2000 and 2006, during which the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN) assumed power. Under President Felipe Calderón, who served from 2006 to 2012, an extensive drug war was initiated with support from the United States (Medel and Thoumi 2014, 209-212). Although the PRI reclaimed power in 2012 with

Enrique Peña Nieto as president, he continued to deploy the armed forces to combat criminal gangs despite pledging to prioritise violence reduction over a direct confrontation with drug cartels. In 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Morena party took over and maintained the militant approach. His administration upheld the kingpin strategy, which focuses on targeting high-profile leaders of criminal organisations. This militarised approach has contributed to a cycle of violence, resulting in an increase in homicides as the drug war escalates (ICG n.d.). Since 2006, when the government launched its war against the cartels, the country has experienced over 431,000 homicides (UNODC n.d.).

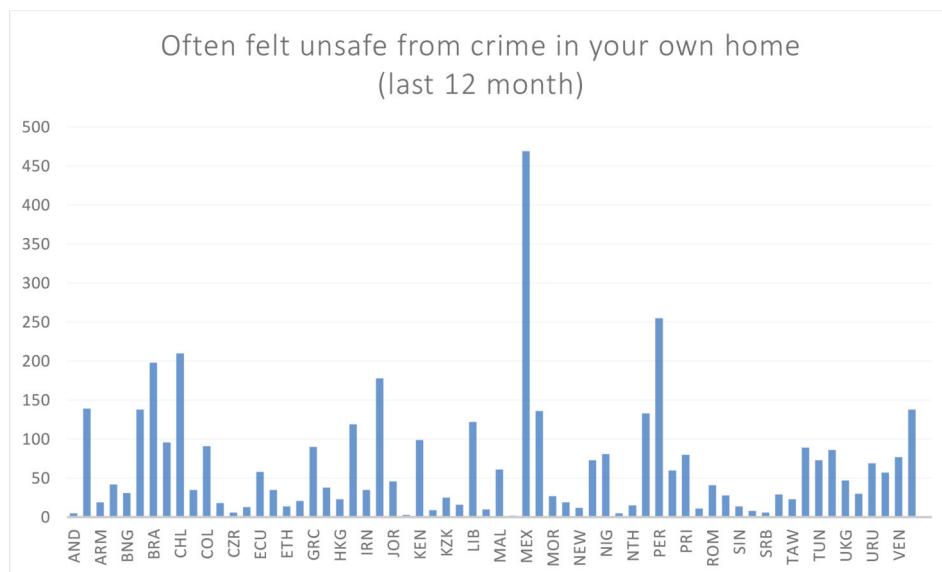
As a result, Mexico has emerged as one of the countries with the highest rates of personal insecurity stemming from crime. According to data from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7, approximately 50% of Mexican respondents reported feeling unsafe (either often or sometimes) in their homes (Table 4). When compared to other countries in the WVS, the percentage of individuals who frequently feel unsafe at home due to crime is the highest in the world (Graph 1). This pervasive sense of insecurity can be attributed to the activities of drug cartels and the ongoing Mexican drug war, which began in 2006.

Table 4: Frequency of feeling insecure in respondent's own home due to crime

	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)	N
Frequency you/family (last 12 month) felt unsafe from crime in your own home	26.954	24.942	18.276	29.828	1,740

Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022).

Graph 1: Frequent feeling of insecurity in one's own home due to crime in countries (N=64)



Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022).

Public Trust

Mexican citizens largely require greater trust in state institutions. According to the 2017–2022 WVS, over 50% of respondents in Mexico indicated a lack of confidence in political parties, civil services, parliament, and the government. Additionally, approximately 45% expressed the same sentiments towards the justice system and police. In contrast, respondents demonstrated a higher level of confidence in the army and churches compared to other institutions (Table 5).

Table 5: Confidence in institutions

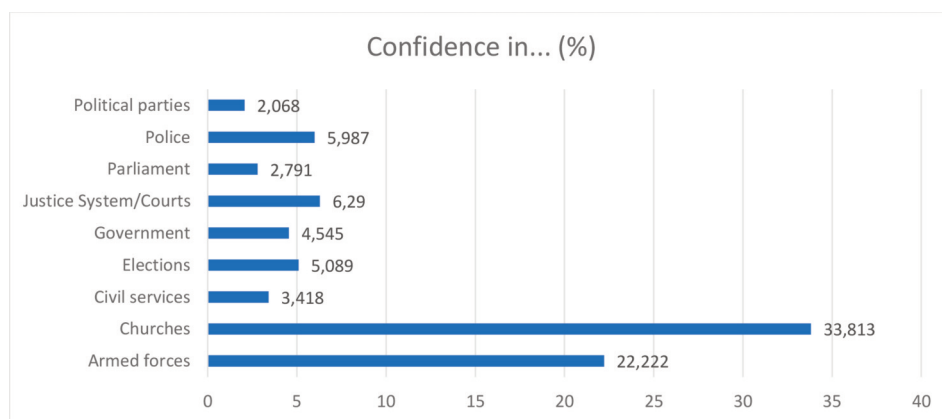
Confidence in...	A great deal (%)	Quite a lot (%)	Not very much (%)	None at all (%)	N
Armed forces	22.222	28.935	30.787	18.055	1,728
Churches	33.813	28.053	25.864	12.27	1,736
Police	5.987	15.486	32.067	46.459	1,737
Justice System/Courts	6.290	15.958	31.974	45.778	1,717
Government	4.545	12.946	28.308	54.200	1,738
Political parties	2.068	9.368	25.747	62.817	1,740
Parliament	2.791	11.802	30.756	54.651	1,720
Elections	5.089	14.633	29.844	50.434	1,729
Civil services	3.418	13.023	27.283	56.276	1,697

Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022)

There has been a noticeable decline in institutional religiosity. However, approximately 62% of respondents expressed confidence in churches, while about 38% reported a lack of trust. According to Latinobarómetro (2023), 9% of Mexican respondents (N=1184) identify as believers who do not affiliate with any church. This general mistrust of churches, coupled with the rise of non-institutional forms of religiosity, has created a conducive environment for the emergence and practice of non-church cults. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church remains the most significant single religious institution, in contrast to the more diffusely represented Protestant communities.

When comparing the confidence in state institutions to the previously mentioned trust in churches, it becomes evident that Mexicans tend to have greater faith in churches than in state entities (Graph 2). This enduring confidence in religious institutions suggests that religion plays a significant role in Mexican society. Consequently, the Catholic Church possesses the potential to provide invaluable resources to mitigate the widespread insecurity generated by crime.

Graph 2: Comparison of Mexicans' confidence in state institutions



Source: Author, extracted from the 2017–2022 WVS Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2022)

“Narco-religion”

To understand the possibility of faith-based mediation, Calo (2025, 159) suggested exploring “how religion shapes identity, behaviour, and belief in ways that inform the conflict and its potential resolution”. In the case of the Mexican drug war, it is a specific form of religion that can be defined as “narco-religion”. It consists, firstly, of narco-cults and folk saints and, secondly, of the co-optation of elements of Catholicism into narco-cults. Narco-cult is “an individualistic, shamanistic, communal or ecclesiastical cult that functions as a source of spiritual or psychological empowerment for individuals or organisations connected to drug production or trafficking” (Kail 2015, 46).

Narco-Cults and Folk Saints

Mexican drug cartels have evolved beyond being just violent criminal organisations. They have created a unique lifestyle often referred to as “living on the edge”, which includes specific codes of conduct, socialisation processes for youth, and distinct business practices. This evolution does not diminish their criminal nature; rather, it is intensified by a unique belief system (ideology) that has taken on a quasi-religious character. Given that the existence of a cartel member is invariably tied to violence, the belief system of these drug cartels is fundamentally centred on the cult of death and ritual sacrifice.

As Mircea Eliade and Ioan P. Couliano (1991, 56) observed, “Unintelligible debris of mythologies, cosmologies, and references to divination or ritual still emerge out of the Mesoamerican imagination”. These remnants reveal

themselves in the synthesis of ancient beliefs and practices with contemporary religious doctrines, giving rise to new cults that garner respect within drug cartels.

Historically, before the arrival of Christianity, humanity engaged in a dual role: participating in the creative process while simultaneously repaying the gods for the debt incurred by their species. That involved nurturing both cosmic and social existence (Paz 1961). The creative aspect of sacrifices can be seen as the ultimate manifestation of the occultation of death, where death must be generated, sustained, and directed towards adversaries. This pattern of religious behaviour has found a modern embodiment in the cult of Santa Muerte (Holy Death).

Santa Muerte is a goddess once exclusively worshipped by lonely and abandoned women. She is depicted as a skeleton dressed in formal attire, often a wedding dress, and is typically featured on candles of various sizes, wielding a sickle in her hands. The cult of Santa Muerte transitioned from private to public devotion in 2001, when a mother, grateful for her son's release from prison, opened her home to allow others to worship and pray to Santa Muerte, ultimately organising a festive city procession (Neumann 2018).

This deity is primarily revered among the poorer classes and members of drug cartels, leading to her being labelled by the American public as a "drug saint". Members of drug cartels are drawn to her due to the belief that she is "willing to honour requests that the Catholic Church's official saints will not" (Neumann 2018, 53), requests that can include release from prison, successful dealings with rival cartels, and the distribution of drugs across US borders. The role of Santa Muerte in the drug trade has often been misinterpreted by US media and law enforcement: she is not a protector of drug traffickers but rather a guardian of those enmeshed in the drug war. As Kail (2015, 181) observes, "The majority of Santa Muerte devotees are not involved in criminal activity. For many of her followers, Santa Muerte represents a saint that hears the prayers of the oppressed and the downtrodden". Consequently, she is venerated by many whose lives are closely associated with death, including lawyers, farmers, and families of drug lords (Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020, 45).

Folk saints are a common phenomenon that contrasts with canonised Catholic saints. These figures, described as "spirits of the demised who have not garnered official recognition but are deemed holy for their miracle-working powers by the local populace" (Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020, 28), include examples such as the Mayan deity Maximón. Additionally, individuals celebrated as saints often possess distinct traits or have overcome unique struggles. However, due to their non-Christian lifestyles, there is no intention for the Church to canonise them. National folk saints like Juan Soldado, Jesús Malverde, Dr Jose Gregorio Hernandez, Don Pedrito Jaramillo, Niño Fidencio, and Teresita Urrea are prominent in Mexico (Kail 2015, 159-175).

The Catholic Church does not acknowledge certain figures from Mexican history or various supernatural beings, leading to the emergence of distinct sects that honour them. One such sect is the Mexican-American Catholic Traditional Church (Iglesia Católica Tradicionalista Mexicana-Estadounidense), which venerates Santa Muerte. This sect was officially recognised in Mexico in 2003, although this recognition was revoked two years later. In 2011, Archbishop David Romo Guillén, the leader of this sect, was arrested on criminal charges (Latin America News Dispatch 2011).

One strategy implemented by the state to counteract drug cartels is to reduce the harmful influence of the Santa Muerte cult. In 2009, the army dismantled around three hundred shrines dedicated to this figure along the border between California and Texas, intending to weaken the drug culture in Mexico (Kingsbury and Chesnut 2020, 25-26). However, this approach did not yield the desired results.

Co-opting Elements of Conventional Religion

The drug cartel La Familia Michoacana/Los Caballeros Templarios (LFM/LCT) is notable for integrating elements of conventional religion into its operations. Anthony T. C. Cowden (2011, 10) identifies several religious components associated with this cartel, including moral justification of its activities, a sacred character, rituals, sacred texts, and the previously mentioned cults of folk saints and heroes. These aspects are categorised as an ecclesiastical cult:

The groups recognise the office of a full-time clergy and professional religious specialists. (...) Members of the clergy are responsible for performing rituals and ceremonies for individuals, groups, and the whole community. There is a clear distinction between clergy and laymen in these groups. La Familia Michoacana is an example of a narco-cult that observes various offices of spiritual leadership that serve the organisation on a full-time basis (Kail 2015, 45-46).

The moral justification for their actions is exemplified in a message left by cartel members following a nightclub massacre: “La Familia does not kill for money, does not kill women, and does not kill innocents. Those who die deserve to die. Let everyone know, this is divine justice” (Cowden 2011, 9). This illustrates how acts of violence are frequently framed within a moral context. Additionally, these drug cartels engage in social activities to cultivate followers, build public trust, and establish a network of dependencies, thus attempting to offset their detrimental impact on society.

The sacred identity of the Knights Templars cartel (Los Caballeros Templarios, LFM) gained prominence following the assassination of LFM leader

Nazario Moreno Gonzáles in 2014. Initially a faction of the LFM, they evolved into an independent drug cartel until 2017, when their leader, Pablo Toscano Padilla, was killed. A notable aspect of their existence is the message directed to Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Mexico in 2012: "The Knights Templar cartel will not take part in any war activity; we are not murderers. Welcome, Pope" (Voz de América 2012). The choice of their name and the iconography associated with the mediaeval Catholic knightly order, along with the direct communication to the head of the Catholic Church, underscore the unique sacred character of this drug cartel. Drawing inspiration from the Templars, they vowed to "avoid robberies, kidnapping, and extortion, and to shield the state from rival organisations" (Cowden 2011, 9).

Rituals within this drug cartel are categorised into initiation rites and ritual sacrifices. The initiation rites of the LFM/LCT incorporate elements associated with the Templar order, including the iconic white cloak adorned with a red cross, a sword, and similar artefacts that evoke the order itself rather than any transcendent being through whom justice is purportedly established. In contrast, ritual sacrifices are often linked to Santa Muerte (Neumann 2018, 51-52).

The sacred texts possess a programmatic-doctrinal nature and are frequently regarded within the community as "a new Bible". In this context, the LFM/LCT cartel has released a Code of Conduct, a pamphlet that outlines the religious foundation for a campaign aimed at defending "the values of a society based on ethics" (Cowden 2011, 10).

Cults centred on folk saints and heroes, alongside the aforementioned worship of transcendent beings, relate closely to findings from the Pew Research Centre (2011), which indicate that 51% of Catholics in Mexico believe there are alternative paths to salvation (eternal life) beyond those offered by the Church. Among these alternative beliefs is the veneration of the narco-saint Jesús Malverde, a figure of dubious historical verification who is remembered by the people as a bandit and a fighter against the regime of Porfirio Díaz, allegedly killed by Mexican police in 1909. The narrative surrounding him as a "Robin Hood-like folk hero" (Cowden 2011, 10) diverges from traditional social banditry through its religious undertones. Malverdian piety exemplifies a distinct type of religious folk practice in Mexico, encompassing the veneration of folk saints, spiritualism, and curanderismo (the practice of supernatural healing) (Creechan and Herrán García 2005, 5). The primary chapel dedicated to Jesús Malverde is situated next to the government building in Culiacán, Sinaloa, a city emblematic of both the geographic and symbolic epicentre of Mexico's drug trade (Creechan and Herrán García 2005, 5).

Social Activities

The Catholic Church is distinguished in every society by its social engagement. While both the Catholic Church and drug cartels undertake forms of social activity that may sometimes intersect, their underlying motives for such actions differ significantly. The very existence of a drug cartel represents a form of social corruption. In contrast, the Catholic Church's social initiatives are rooted in the principles that oppose such perversions. It is summarised in its Social Teaching, "Because of the public relevance of the Gospel and faith, because of the corrupting effects of injustice, that is, of sin, the Church cannot remain indifferent to social matters" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, §71).

The utilitarian factor pertains to the establishment of a relationship marked by dependence. Violent political groups are driven by both utilitarian and ideological motives. From a utilitarian perspective, "service provision can serve as a utilitarian tool used to create dependence within the local population and/or generate goodwill among the local population" (Flanigan 2014, 65). Both facets of this relationship—dependence and goodwill—stem from the inherent nature of power, which both constrains and empowers those under its influence. It "allows the organisation to demand tolerance of or active participation in its less desirable activities by the local population" (Flanigan 2014, 65). The dependence on services provided by drug cartels hampers the state's ability to deliver public services, perpetuating a high level of poverty within the region.

Héctor Gómez Peralta (2012, 18) identifies four distinct periods in the relationship between the Church and the Mexican state. The first period, from the late 19th to the early 20th century, is characterised by Catholic social teaching, particularly as articulated in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). This social doctrine, conceived as a third way between *laissez-faire* capitalism and socialist collectivism, is built upon three foundational pillars: private property, social justice, and unionism (Peralta 2012, 19). In Mexico, these principles were realised through the efforts of the Social-Catholic Congress. When applied to the Mexican context, Catholic social teaching is referred to in the literature as integral intransigence. This concept embodies the "rejection of individualism, defence of organicism and family, the dream of an alliance between the clergy and the people against the ruling classes, a model of society based on small communities or regions with a high grade of autonomy contrasting with central government (judged as an oppressor power), the search for a third way between capitalism and socialism, anti-industrialism, anti-capitalism and anti-semitism" (Peralta 2012, 20).

The Mexican drug cartels exemplify a distinct pattern of social activity. First, their pronounced hierarchical structure and organised functionality highlight a clear rejection of individualism. Second, albeit paradoxically, the cartels often claim to uphold family values and assert their efforts to foster a sense of community among the youth, even going so far as to declare that they aim to protect young people from drugs (Cowden 2011, 9).

Thirdly, the vision of an alliance between the clergy and the people, aimed at challenging the ruling classes, has manifested in a distorted manner as an alliance between drug cartels and the populace pursuing a similar objective. This phenomenon is exacerbated by a pervasive distrust of the state among the people, as illustrated by the words of a Mexican woman:

The heavy deployment of troops and federal police in the area had forced La Familia to lie low. So, who would look after the poor now? The government? (...) No, it would not... Local police were poorly paid and, therefore, incompetent and corrupt. When La Familia was in charge, nobody stepped out of line. You did not even need to lock your door at night (Flanigan 2014, 72).

Fourth, the model of small communities and self-governing regions serves as a framework for the territorial organisation of drug cartels. In the article "Who are we?", the LFM cartel states, "Workers from the Tierra Caliente region in the state of Michoacán, organised by the need to end the oppression, the humiliation to which we have constantly been subjected by people who have always had power" (Flanigan 2014, 74). This struggle is fundamentally against both the central government and the local authorities who are subordinate to it, particularly when they do not serve the interests of the cartels. Furthermore, drug cartels construct a unique alternative that bridges capitalism and socialism. They actively participate in the "free market" as the primary suppliers of narcotics—mainly methamphetamine—to the US. Concurrently, they reduce the prices of essential food items in their regions, framing this action as a means to support the socially vulnerable population (Flanigan 2014, 73).

The socially orientated activities that align with this social teaching represent a significant intersection between the operations of drug cartels and the Church in Mexico. The primary areas in which Mexican drug cartels engage in social initiatives include short-term relief efforts (such as emergency food aid, housing, and medication), health services (including drug rehabilitation clinics specifically for LFM/LCT cartel, along with the ad hoc purchasing of health services and medications), infrastructure development (involving the construction and repair of churches, homes, roads, and schools), provision of utilities (with one-time payments or improvements enabling access to water and electricity), agricultural support (offering agricultural loans and assistance in applying for

federal agricultural aid from the Mexican government), low-interest loans (for personal and business purposes), and justice administration and dispute resolution (Flanigan 2014, 66-67).

Even in the realm of drug rehabilitation, where the Church is positioned to provide immediate assistance to individuals struggling with addiction, drug cartels have exploited this opportunity for their own mobilisation efforts. In treatment centres established by the LFM/LCT drug cartel, individuals undergoing rehabilitation partake in a two-month programme of Christian evangelisation. Upon successfully passing the final scriptural examination, these individuals become integrated into the cartel, effectively transforming into a reliable labour force for the spread of narcotics (Flanigan 2014, 73).

Paternalism and Victimisation

Petri (2021, 124) observed that the threats made by drug cartels against religious groups can be interpreted as a form of “religious policy”. This encompasses various actions, including “interventions in the appointment of religious ministers, the targeting of ministers who are critical of the drug trade, censorship of sermon content, imposition of curfews, implementation of ‘taxes’ through protection rackets, and restrictions on charitable activities” (Petri 2021, 124).

Serious allegations have surfaced against certain church dignitaries, suggesting their involvement in paternalistic relationships with drug cartels. Members of various drug cartels portray themselves as devout individuals; they regularly attend religious services, interact with the Holy Scriptures, and distribute them to local government offices. Notably, Nazario Moreno, the spiritual leader and head of the Knights Templar cartel (LCT), advocated for a “muscular” form of Christianity and authored a book on such a subject (Flanigan 2014, 75).

A significant controversy arose in September 2005 when Ramón Godínez Flores, Bishop of Aguascalientes, admitted that certain drug traffickers were donating substantial sums of money to his diocese. He claimed these traffickers were motivated by a desire for purification (LADB 2005, 1). Bishop Godínez justified that by asserting that the Church should overlook the origins of the funds, much like Christ did not question Mary when she anointed his feet with precious ointment. “Bad money should not be burnt; it should be transformed,” declared Bishop Godínez (LADB 2005, 1).

In response, the Mexican Episcopal Conference dismissed the accusations against the Church as baseless, with Godínez later indicating that his comments had been misinterpreted (LADB 2005, 1). Nevertheless, three years later, Bishop

Carlos Aguiar Retes, then President of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, acknowledged that drug trafficking organisations had indeed provided financial support for churches and other public projects (COHA 2011).

There is an alternative perspective regarding the motives of drug cartels that diverges from the typical notion of “money laundering”. Specifically, the funds invested in church facilities do not return to their donors. As noted by Shawn T. Flanigan (2014, 67), renovating or constructing churches can be viewed as a “form of throwing some money around”. Drug cartels such as the Gulf, Los Zetas, or Sinaloa aim not only to provide less visible, short-term, or routine services but also to make a more significant impact by renovating schools and churches, building parks, repairing sidewalks, and providing electricity or drinking water (Flanigan 2014, 67).

However, Flanigan does not explain why a drug cartel would seek such public affirmation. A potential answer can be found in Mauricio Rubio's (1997) distinction between productive and perverted social capital. Productive social capital, characterised by its institutional framework and network of relationships, fosters economic growth and social change. In contrast, perverted social capital refers to “networks, the contacts, the power relations, the legal system, the informal norms of behaviour, the political activities, and the reward systems established in this society that inspire rent-seeking, or criminal behaviour, to the detriment of productive activities and technological innovation” (Rubio 1997, 815). Thus, while social capital has the potential to reduce violence by empowering the community to act in the collective interest, perverted social capital exploits strong connections and networks within the community to facilitate drug trafficking (Baily 2018, 6-7).

However, the Church stands not only as an indirect actor but also as a victim in the ongoing drug war. Historically, it has faced severe challenges from both the state and the PRI, and currently, it has become a target for drug cartels. Ted Galen Carpenter (2012) recognises it as a casualty of the drug war, noting that “the Catholic Church has always had a murky and, at times, somewhat ambivalent relationship with drug traffickers. Officially, of course, the church condemns their illicit activities, and many church leaders do seem to genuinely detest the drug trade and the people who profit from it” (Carpenter 2012, 79). However, Carpenter (2012, 79) also observes that whether out of fear of retribution or a desire for financial support, “the condemnation lacks intensity”.

On the other hand, the Catholic Church became a target for drug cartels primarily due to its perceived influence in Mexico. Since the onset of the drug war until 2022, there have been between 45 and 50 recorded murders of priests linked to narco-related violence (Luévano 2022). Particularly notable are the killings of a priest and two seminarians in 2009, as well as the murders of two

senior priests in 2022. The motivation behind these attacks is not to extract concessions from the Church but rather to serve as a form of punishment. A notable example is the still unsolved murder of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, the Archbishop of Guadalajara, who was allegedly killed by a member of the Tijuana Cartel in 1993, mistaken for the head of the Sinaloa Cartel, 'El Chapo' Guzmán. In 2006, the US Department of Justice announced the arrest of Mexican drug lord Francisco Javier Arellano Félix, the leader of the Tijuana cartel, who was also charged in Mexico in connection with the conspiracy to murder Posadas in 1993 (Teinhauer and McKinley Jr 2006).

Motivation for Mediation

In a situation marked by daily violence and loss of life, the Church's engagement in dialogue with individuals involved in this violence represents a crucial step for affected communities. Bishop Salvador Rangel Mendoza of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, whose diocese experiences considerable impacts from conflicts involving drug cartels, highlights his ability to communicate with these groups. He recounts that they have indicated, "We are narcotics traffickers, not hitmen", and notes a conversation in which he suggested, "Perhaps try killing less", to which the response was, "When it is not necessary" (Agren 2018). Bishop Rangel highlights his pastoral work with drug addicts and admits to feeling more fear from them than from narco-traffickers. When he reached out to certain politicians for assistance, they responded that they could not get involved (Agren 2018). This situation illustrates how the Church's connections with the community also bring it closer to drug cartels, potentially increasing its mediation capacity beyond that of the state.

Bishop Ramón Castro, the new leader of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, discusses the Church's actions following numerous complaints from parishioners regarding extortion, robbery, and disappearances. He notes, "We are witnessing shocking violence against our people", which has prompted pastors to take action rather than remain passive (Sheridan and Rios 2024). In February 2024, bishops in Guerrero facilitated a ceasefire between the La Familia Michoacana and Tlacos criminal organisations, addressing escalating territorial clashes that had resulted in a massacre in San Miguel Totolapan, where 17 individuals were killed. While the Church acted as a mediator during the Zapatista uprising in 1994, those negotiations did not include the state. The 2024 proposal by Mexican Catholic bishops to mediate between the state and drug cartels represents a notable development, as observed by Roberto Blancarte, who states that the bishops "are intervening where they see a state incapable of doing so, a state that is practically failed" (Sheridan and Rios 2024).

Possible Strategies and Approaches

The situation requires a comprehensive approach. In this context, Cowden (2011, 15-16) proposed several strategies for the Catholic Church to tackle this issue. I categorised and expanded upon them into religious, social, and political approaches.

Religious approach. The Church should actively combat the harmful fusion of Catholicism and folk cults by denouncing them as anti-theological and criminal. That can be achieved by building cults of drug war victims. The Catholic Church in Mexico has endured the terror initiated by the state during the “perfect dictatorship”—especially following the Mexican Revolution and during the Cristero War—only to face continued violence from drug cartels in the democratic era. To date, over 38 victims of the Cristero War have been beatified and canonised (McCleary and Barro 2020, 94). In 2017, Pope Francis introduced a novel means of obtaining canonisation through his apostolic letter, termed “*oblatio vitae*”. This concept recognises “a single act of Christian heroism in an otherwise routine life by those who were not martyred in the strict sense—killed in hatred of the faith—but who made an ‘offering of their life’ that led to their death” (McCleary and Barro 2020, 97). The priests murdered in the drug war have emerged as “people’s saints” (Luévano 2022). Their cases for canonisation are currently under consideration by the Pope, based on the *oblatio vitae* martyrdom, presenting a direct strategy for the Catholic Church in its confrontation with narco saints.

Social approach. Cowden (2011, 15) refers to this as the “soft power” method. The Church should leverage its influential voice in public discourse to condemn the actions of drug cartels based on moral grounds. The notable condemnation of drug cartels came from the Vatican. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who served as Secretary of State of the Holy See during the papacy of Benedict XVI, asserted that drug trafficking represents “the most hypocritical and terrible way of murdering the dignity and personality of today’s youth” (Wilkinson 2009). In response, he proposed the Church’s most drastic measure: excommunication. Individuals involved in the drug cartel would be barred from receiving the Holy Sacraments and participating in services. However, this stance did not gain active support from the Mexican Episcopal Conference, which stated that “excommunication is a punishment that touches only those who have some form of ecclesiastical conscience, an ecclesiastical education” (Wilkinson 2009). However, that cannot be dismissed as a way to enhance the Catholic Church’s influence in Mexico, as membership in this Church remains a significant aspect of social identity.

Political approach. It plays a crucial role in shaping global response. It is important to recognise that “while not an arm of government, organised religion

is at least aligned with the rule of law” (Cowden 2011, 16). Recently, Pope Francis extended a letter of encouragement to the Catholic community in Mexico’s Terra Caliente region, which is grappling with one of the most violent conflicts involving drug cartels (Ernst 2022). This correspondence is significant in the context of former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s approach, which emphasises “hugs, not bullets” (Montes 2024). In a letter dated June 2021, the Pope conveyed, “The climate of terror and insecurity that afflicts the population is against God’s will” (Agren 2021). He called for the establishment of “dignified work” to help individuals “escape poverty ... and avoid the temptations of narcotics trafficking and violence” (Agren 2021). However, he did not revisit more confrontational stances, such as the excommunication recommended by Cardinal Bertone. As this strategy incorporates appeals to human rights, it can primarily function within the global arena, where the Pope wields considerable political influence.

These approaches can be classified as directive and manipulative strategies that aim to persuade disputants to accept proposals made by mediators who possess significant authority (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009, 181).

Conclusion

As a longstanding institution in the context of Mexican intrastate conflict, the Catholic Church has maintained a significant capacity for mediation. It possesses a historical and social depth that surpasses that of drug cartels; however, this does not guarantee success in a mediation of conflict that extends beyond religious boundaries and is, in some cases, motivated by religious ideologies. Drug cartels utilise religion as both a mobilising force and an ideological foundation. By presenting themselves as modern-day Robin Hoods, these groups aim to defend the poor against the powerful, all while masking their underlying cognitive dissonance. Such portrayals allow their social initiatives aimed at marginalised communities, as well as their financial support for the Church’s silence, to gain traction.

However, this research indicates that the Catholic Church possesses essential leverage derived from its identity, resources, strategies, and motivations for the mediation process. The Catholic Church still holds significant influence as a religious actor in Mexico. As an institution that commands considerable trust from the populace, it stands in stark contrast to the uncertainty generated by drug cartel activities. The relationship between the Church and drug cartels encompasses various dimensions, from social engagement to instances where the Church itself has been victimised. Throughout the 20th century, the Church in Mexico faced challenges from both state and non-state actors. This context allows the global Church to assume a

unique role in mediating the drug war, potentially addressing the complex issues posed by drug cartels, such as “narco-religion”, through a tripartite strategy—spanning religious, social, and political dimensions. This distinctive case enriches our understanding of the Catholic Church’s role on a global scale.

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KO SE PLAŠI ROBINA HUDA? POKUŠAJI POSREDOVANJA RIMOKATOLIČKE CRKVE U MEKSIČKOM RATU PROTIV DROGE

Apstrakt: U radu se ispituje potencijalna uloga Rimokatoličke crkve u posredovanju u meksičkom ratu protiv droge, posebno u svetlu predloga iz 2024. godine koji je izneo lider Meksičke biskupske konferencije. Iako je koncept posredovanja zasnovanog na veri proučavan u političkim naukama, ovaj specifičan slučaj je značajan zbog umešanosti narko-kartela u unutrašnji oružani sukob. Koristeći teorijski okvir koji su uspostavili Berković i Kadajfči-Oreljana, autor istražuje identitet, resurse, izazove, strategije i motive Crkve kao posrednika. Studija osvetljava složenu dinamiku između Crkve i narko-kartela, koja obuhvata sve – od paralelnih društvenih aktivnosti do slučajeva viktimizacije. Uprkos ovim izazovima, kontekst u Meksiku pruža Crkvi jedinstvenu priliku da se suoči s pitanjima vezanim za narko-kartele, uključujući i porast „narko-religije“. Kao rezultat toga, izdvajaju se tri potencijalna pristupa – religijski, društveni i politički – koji bi mogli umanjiti uticaj narko-kartela i ojačati posredničku moć Katoličke crkve.

Ključne reči: Rimokatolička crkva; narko-karteli; rat; posredovanje; verski akter.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH TELEVISION EXPORTS: ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF CHINESE AND SOUTH KOREAN PERIOD DRAMAS ON YOUTH IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Dalibor SAVIĆ¹, Ljiljana STEVIĆ², Anja MUDRENOVIĆ³

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the impact of Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, considering this format as one of the instruments of cultural diplomacy. The primary goal of the research is to determine how these media contents shape the cultural values and attitudes of the target population. Additionally, the paper analyses the development, characteristics, and mutual relationships between Chinese and South Korean TV productions. The research was conducted in two phases, employing a comparative-historical method and thematic analysis of data collected through focus group interviews with sinology students at the Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka. The results indicate that Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas have no significant impact on young people in BiH, with the absence of their influence representing an epiphenomenon of Western cultural hegemony. In this context, the findings contribute to the understanding of the soft power dynamics and cultural interactions in BiH, as well as the challenges faced by alternative cultural contents in a globalised society.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, South Korean and Chinese TV production have experienced significant growth, establishing themselves as one of the key players on the global media stage. This rise is not merely the result of regional success but also of the strategic use of mechanisms aimed at internationalisation. In this context, it is noticeable that these productions have employed various mechanisms to differing extents and in different ways, such as collaboration with international partners, content localisation for the global market, leveraging the potential of streaming platforms, and investing in high-quality production (Keane, Fung and Moran 2007; Rawnsley and Rawnsley 2015).

The South Korean TV industry, particularly, has stood out for its ability to adapt and innovate. It has primarily focused on high production values and the quality of its content. Moreover, South Korean producers actively collaborate with international partners to adapt content for diverse markets and cultures. They utilise various strategies, including promoting South Korean celebrity culture, tailoring the length and plot of content, and providing high-quality translations. In this context, many researchers have noted that the international success of South Korean TV production is largely linked to its openness to American popular culture and streaming platforms such as Netflix (Lee 2023).

On the other hand, the Chinese TV industry has also seen exceptional growth, driven by its vast domestic market and increasing interest from foreign viewers. However, the Chinese strategy for media internationalisation typically focuses on creating content with global appeal while maintaining an authentic Chinese identity. Chinese producers often use large budgets and spectacular productions to capture the attention of international audiences. Additionally, the Chinese TV industry increasingly relies on its streaming platforms, such as iQIYI, Tencent Video, and Youku, to distribute content beyond national borders (Yan and Li 2018).

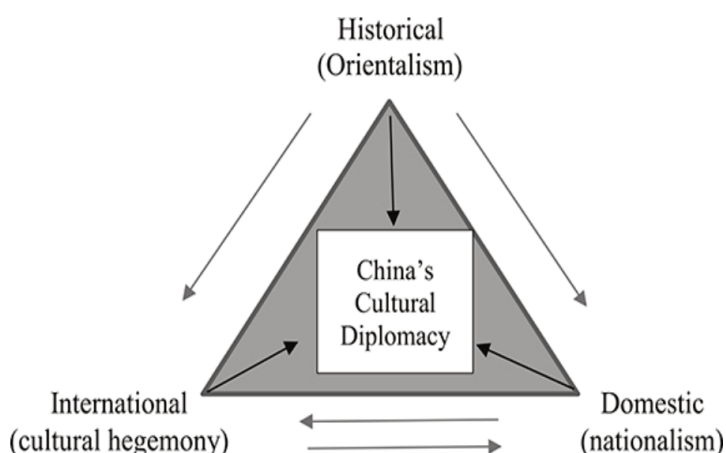
Undoubtedly, these TV productions represent an integral part of the global influence of these countries, serving as a form of cultural diplomacy. From this perspective, this paper aims to analyse the cultural-political impact of Chinese and South Korean TV production on young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given the lack of similar research in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider Southeast European region, the authors decided that the study would be exploratory in nature, focusing on the historical drama TV genre. The research was conducted in two successive phases. The first phase was based on a historical-comparative analysis of the development and mutual influences of Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas and their cultural-political impact in the global context. The second phase was conducted through a thematic analysis of data collected via focus group interviews with students of

Sinology at the Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka. In the following sections, the authors will present the theoretical and methodological framework of the research in greater detail, followed by a discussion and interpretation of the results.

The Chinese Cultural Diplomacy Evaluation Framework as a Theoretical and Methodological Tool

In a narrow sense, cultural diplomacy carries a pronounced instrumental connotation and can be understood as the “active, planned use of cultural, educational and informational programming to create a desired result that is directly related to a government’s foreign policy objectives” (McClellan 2004, 23). In a broader sense, it provides a foundation for enhancing intercultural communication, serving as the basis for “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding” (Cummings 2009, 1). British cultural scholar Xin Liu (2020, 42-43) has used the dynamic tension between these connotations of cultural diplomacy to develop a theoretical model for analysing contemporary Chinese cultural diplomacy. This model is based on the assumptions of Foucault’s theory of power, highlighting the complex dynamics of power relations between historical, domestic, and international factors.

Figure 1: Chinese cultural diplomacy Evaluation Framework



Source: Liu 2020, 43.

We believe that this model, in addition to the positioning of Chinese cultural diplomacy globally (in relation to Western cultural hegemony), can also be applied to the global positioning of South Korean cultural diplomacy, particularly in understanding their mutual relations and their culture-power dynamics with other nations, i.e., in the context of international relations. Its heuristic potential is particularly evident due to the pronounced historical dimension, offering the possibility to examine the influence of Chinese and/or South Korean cultural diplomacy not only synchronically but also diachronically. Given that the scope of this research is narrower in comparison to the aforementioned model—internationalisation of popular culture being just one of the instruments of cultural diplomacy—we have decided to employ it as a heuristic framework for a historical-comparative analysis of the development and mutual influences of Chinese and South Korean TV dramas.

The results of this historical-comparative analysis provided us with a conceptual foundation for planning and conducting an exploratory study on the influence of Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study continues our ongoing interest in analysing the impact of Chinese soft power and cultural diplomacy in the country (Stević 2022; Savić, Stević, and Janković 2024). Previous studies have revealed that the Confucius Institutes in Sarajevo and Banja Luka play a significant role in projecting Chinese soft power in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stević 2022, 117-119; Savić, Stević, and Janković 2024, 36). These institutes are closely linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, as they serve as important cultural tools to strengthen China's economic and political influence in Bosnia and Hercegovina and the broader Southeast European region. The influence of the mentioned institutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly evident through the organisation of Chinese language courses, mostly attended by young participants, as well as through the organisation of public events that promote traditional Chinese culture (Cai 2022). In contrast to these earlier findings, this research focuses on cultural content within popular culture, specifically TV production. We aimed to examine the influence of cultural content that does not have direct institutional support within the recipient country, lacks targeted promotion, and is informal in nature but still promotes an authentic Chinese identity. The genre of historical dramas naturally emerged as the ideal choice for this type of analysis. In addition to Chinese dramas, we chose to examine the influence of South Korean historical TV dramas for three primary reasons:

1. The cultural and production similarities with Chinese historical TV dramas;
2. Their global popularity;
3. As a basis for comparison how the target audience perceives Chinese historical TV dramas.

Given the results of the initial study, where participants in Chinese language courses at Confucius Institutes demonstrated a higher interest in Chinese popular culture compared to other target populations (Stević 2022, 117), we decided to conduct this exploratory research with students of Sinology at the Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka. We based this decision on the assumption that their interest, or lack thereof, in Chinese and South Korean historical dramas would serve as an indicator for assessing the impact of these contents on the cultural attitudes and values of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and as an indicator of the feasibility of conducting a more extensive study among this population group. Data collection was carried out through a focus group interview involving 10 first-year undergraduate students (class of 2023/2024) originating from various regions across Bosnia and Herzegovina. First-year undergraduate students were selected because their knowledge of the Chinese language and culture is relatively limited compared to students in higher years, making them more representative of the typical young person in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus group interview took place in April 2024.

Chinese and South Korean TV Drama Production: A Historical Perspective

In this section, we will reflect on the historical development, mutual influences, and the current production and cultural specificities of Chinese and South Korean (historical) TV dramas. Additionally, we will highlight certain (non-)diplomatic aspects of cultural exchange between these two countries. This review will be framed by the cultural diplomacy model developed by Xin Liu (2020), focusing on the intertwined dynamics of cultural diplomacy and power relations within historical, national, and international contexts.

According to Australian cultural theorist Michael Keane, the development of Chinese TV drama production can be understood in three distinct phases. The first phase, the Industrial period (1958–1989), was characterised by a strong propagandistic function. TV dramas were used to promote positive role models in line with the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This era saw a high level of political control and a low level of professionalisation in TV production. The second phase, the Market-orientated period (1990–2002), marked a shift towards a more market-orientated approach, where TV production moved away from a purely standardised supply model. During this period, there was an attempt to balance commercialisation, driven by audience expectations, with socially desirable norms endorsed by the CCP. Western production practices, such as contemporary themes, soap operas, sitcoms, and product placement, began to be adopted. The third phase, the Interpersonal period (2003–present), has focused on targeting specific market segments, with

international influences adapted to suit local production needs. One notable trend during this time was the rise of historical dramas, which became the dominant TV form as they allowed for the exploration of topics that were less politically sensitive and subject to the CCP's censorship. (Keane 2005, 85-89). A slightly different account of the development of Chinese TV drama is provided by Chinese communications scholar Shanshan Zhang, who emphasises its global spread and identifies four key phases in this process. The Budding Era (1980–1991) marked the beginning of Chinese historical TV drama exports, primarily to other Asian countries, as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Iconic series such as *Journey to the West* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* played a central role during this time. This period was followed by the Growth Era (1992–1999), characterised by efforts to enhance profitability in South Asian markets, with historical dramas continuing to dominate the export landscape—well-known examples include *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Princess Pearl*. The next phase, the Challenge Period (2000–2012), brought a significant decline in the export of Chinese dramas to Asian countries, largely due to the growing popularity and influence of South Korean TV productions. Finally, the Platformisation Era (2013–present) has been defined by strong governmental support and the increasing availability of Chinese dramas on local, regional, and global streaming platforms, making Chinese TV content more accessible to international audiences than ever (Zhang 2022, 70–71).

To understand the role of Chinese historical dramas in the context of cultural diplomacy, it is essential to consider the categorisation and specificities of different dramatic forms that characterise Chinese TV production. In this regard, Keane distinguishes three categories of dramatic content:

1. Historical/political dramas, which include subgenres such as kungfu (wǔdǎ piàn 武打片), reworked legends (chuánqí 传奇), biopics of great leaders, statesmen, and patriots, as well as tales of power and passion from the dynastic past, often referred to as Royal Court “costume” dramas (gǔzhuāng 古装);
2. Reform dramas (zhǔxuánlǜ 主旋律) aimed at glorifying the norms and ideals of socialist realism;
3. Contemporary popular dramas that focus on narratives of interpersonal relationships in modern society (Keane 2005, 84).

Although Chinese TV drama production has evolved “from national preoccupation to overseas aspiration” (Keane 2008), it remains caught between “propaganda and marketisation” (Wang and Klein 2022). In other words, the CCP continues to exert significant economic and political influence on Chinese TV production (e.g., through regulatory legislation, financial incentives, censorship, supervision, and sanctions). For instance, in 2012, the Chinese government enacted the “Advertising Order”, prohibiting TV stations from airing

commercials during dramas and films longer than 45 minutes. Additionally, in 2015, the “one drama and two stars” measure was introduced, limiting the airing of a series to two TV stations. That led to a steep rise in the prices of episodes of the most popular TV dramas, prompting further restrictive measures in 2018, such as capping actors’ fees per episode at 1 million yuan and setting a maximum price of 9 million yuan per episode (Yan and Li 2018, 840–841). At the same time, political pressures on Chinese TV production are primarily aimed at promoting national interests, particularly those of the CCP (e.g., promoting “positive values” and Chinese identity/nationalism). The significance of Chinese TV production in promoting national interests within the context of international relations is strictly regulated. Media regulators, such as the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) and the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA), oversee the radio/television and print media sectors, respectively, while the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) oversees online content (Wang 2022, 5). These regulations ensure that media content aligns with China’s foreign policy goals, thereby shaping global perceptions of China and its strategic interests.

In this context, historical TV dramas have become an exceptionally popular genre, often receiving direct support from Chinese authorities, particularly when exported to Western markets, as they promote Chinese history and customs. As such, they can be perceived as a tool of cultural diplomacy, serving as the “forefront of articulating political and legal principles based on the Confucian-influenced traditional Chinese culture” and playing a significant role in the “support of the state’s propagandist purposes” (Dawei Guo 2015, 374). However, although there is a prevailing belief in Western markets that these are the most popular forms of Chinese TV drama, recent studies suggest that contemporary dramas, especially on online platforms like YouTube and Rakuten Viki, are actually more popular:

Table 1: Top 10 C-dramas on YouTube based on the average view counts

English title	Chinese title	Total VC	Number of EPs	Average VC	Category
1 Boss & Me (2014)	杉杉来了	3.183 b	33	96.5 m	Cp
2 Eternal Love (2017)	三生三世十里桃花	5.368 b	58	92.6 m	Cos
3 A Love So Beautiful (2017)	致我们单纯的小美好	2.024 b	24	84.3 m	Cp
4 Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019)	致我们暖暖的小时光	1.959 b	24	81.6 m	Cp
5 Princess Agents (2017)	楚乔传	4.497 b	58	77.5 m	Cos
6 Falling into Your Smile (2021)	你微笑时很美	1.850 b	31	59.7 m	Cp
7 Sweet Combat (2018)	甜蜜暴击	1.826 b	37	49.4 m	Cp
8 Go Go Squid! (2019)	亲爱的热爱的	1.906 b	41	42.4 m	Cp
9 The Brightest Star in The Sky (2019)	夜空中最闪亮的星	1.853 b	44	42.1 m	Cp
10 Empresses in the Palace (2011)	甄嬛传	3.149 b	76	41.4 m	Cos
1. In Table 1, VC stands for view counts, EPs for episodes; b for billion, m for million.					
2. In Tables 1 and 2, the last column lists the category of the dramas, Cp for contemporary drama, Cos for costume drama.					

Source: Chen and Chang 2024, 3.

Table 2: Top 10 C-dramas on Viki based on the number of ratings

English title	Chinese title	Number of ratings	Rating	Category
1 Go Go Squid! (2019)	亲爱的热爱的	193,631	9.6	Cp
2 Falling into Your Smile (2021)	你微笑时很美	185,057	9.6	Cp
3 You Are My Destiny (2020)	你是我的命中注定	163,684	9.4	Cp
4 My Little Happiness (2021)	我的小确幸	127,489	9.6	Cp
5 Go Ahead (2020)	以家人之名	126,955	9.6	Cp
6 My Unicorn Girl (2020)	穿盔甲的少女	111,931	9.6	Cp
7 Love O2O (2016)	微微一笑很倾城	97,454	9.5	Cp
8 A Love So Beautiful (2017)	致我们单纯的小美好	91,843	9.4	Cp
9 Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019)	致我们暖暖的小时光	87,331	9.6	Cp
10 You Are My Hero (2021)	你是我的城池营垒	74,454	9.5	Cp

Source: Chen and Chang 2024, 3.

Research conducted by Li suggests that the reasons for the relatively lower popularity of historical TV dramas among Western audiences can be attributed to their temporal, spatial, and, in many cases, cultural distances, which require additional cognitive resources to process. This complexity can be off-putting for a segment of viewers. Li argues that these dramas often face criticism regarding the length of their storylines, which are frequently perceived as repetitive, boring, and lacking dynamism, leading to lower viewing rates. On the other hand, most viewers appreciate the visual effects, such as the sets, costumes, and makeup. However, Li's research indicates that the storyline remains the central focus of audience interest (Li 2022). Due to these factors, Chinese historical dramas are often adapted for Western markets by reducing the original number of episodes. For example, in the case of the historical drama *Empresses in the Palace*, the series was shortened from 76 episodes to just six (TMTPOST 2019).

From the late 1990s to today, there has been enormous global interest in South Korean pop culture (music, films, TV dramas, etc.), first in East and Southeast Asia and later worldwide. This phenomenon, known as the "Korean Wave" or Hallyu, owes much of its success to the South Korean government, which acted as both a promoter and sponsor, recognising the economic

potential of the “cultural industry” or “content industry”. One significant factor in the success of the Korean Wave was South Korea’s adherence to neoliberal principles and its readiness to adopt and adapt cultural content from the West (Mustafha and Razak 2020, 3-4). Cai (2011) has pointed out that “the Korean Wave is the combination of Confucianism and Western industrial culture” and that “Korean pop culture has borrowed the best of Western popular culture and recreated it according to Korean tastes”. Reflecting on this, Ryoo argued that Korean pop culture acted as a cultural mediator, reinterpreting Western popular culture and making it more accessible to Asian audiences (Ryoo 2009). At the same time, the South Korean government actively used this cultural phenomenon as a tool of cultural and public diplomacy to improve its national image and brand. Agencies like the Korea Creative Content Agency, the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, the Korea Foundation, and the Presidential Council on Nation Branding played essential roles in this effort (Mirshahi 2021, 53-54; Jang and Paik 2012, 196).

South Korean TV dramas, including those in the historical genre, have been instrumental in the spread of the Korean Wave. Their success was partly due to being more affordable than competing productions and their promotion of Korea’s celebrity culture (Mustafha and Razak 2020, 3). However, the expansion of South Korean dramas into Asian markets encountered both positive reception and resistance. That was particularly evident in China, which transitioned from being one of the largest consumers of South Korean dramas to outright banning them. In that context, Park, Lee, and Seo identify four distinct periods in the relationship between Chinese authorities or other actors (e.g., investors) and South Korean dramas:

1. Early period (1997–2005): The flourishing of Korean dramas

This period culminated in 2005 with the broadcast of the historical drama *Jewel in the Palace* (Dae Jang Geum). Due to cultural similarities (Confucianism) and less national resistance compared to other foreign series (particularly Japanese), South Korean dramas filled a significant part of China’s growing TV market. However, the success of these dramas was interpreted by some in China as a symbol of cultural invasion and trade deficit, leading to strict limitations on the airing of South Korean dramas (TV stations were allowed only 20 hours of South Korean TV dramas per year).

2. Second period (2006–2012): Korean dramas stagnated on TV but flourished online

In 2007, part of the Chinese public reacted against South Korean historical dramas like *Jumong*, *Yeon Gaesomun*, and *Dae Jo Young*, citing alleged distortions of Chinese history, which led to even stricter regulations on

broadcasting South Korean dramas. Despite this, these series gained popularity due to the increasing effects of platformisation.

3. Third period (2013–2016): The inflow of Chinese capital

The success of the South Korean series *My Love from the Star* (2013–2014) encouraged Chinese investors to invest in South Korean dramas and hire South Korean professionals in the production of Chinese dramas. Despite new restrictions imposed by Chinese authorities, this collaboration produced the series *Descendants of the Sun* (2016), which became highly popular throughout Asia.

4. Fourth period (2016–present): Blockade of Korean dramas

The political conflict over the deployment of the American THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) system on the Korean Peninsula served as an excuse for China to impose even stricter measures or a complete ban on South Korean dramas and other pop culture content on domestic TV stations. This move has both economic and political dimensions aimed at curbing the influence of South Korean cultural diplomacy on Chinese citizens (Park, Lee, and Seo 2018, 6–14).

Having outlined the development, characteristics, and mutual relationships between Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas in a global context, the following section will focus on analysing their impact among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Influence of Chinese and South Korean Historical TV Dramas on Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina

When asked whether they regularly watch South Korean and Chinese historical TV dramas, most students responded negatively, and all agreed that their acquaintances do not watch them at all. Only female students S1 and S3 stated that they regularly follow these media contents, and they made the following comments:

I believe that we are increasingly encountering Chinese and Korean pop culture, both in the world and in our regions. It is especially interesting because they are quite different from our culture. I think this is why people are interested in them, myself included, especially since we have not had any points of contact with these cultures...We can see a lot of fascinating historical details, costumes, the layout of the imperial court, relationships between dynasties... (S1)

These series are watched by people who are in some way already connected to Asian cultures, meaning they have had some contact with them. Take us as an example. We study Chinese culture and language, so we are familiar with this content, but it is not that present here... I had watched them before, and for this focus group, I watched some more. Previously, I watched

Hwarang and, more recently, *Under the Queen's Umbrella* and *Alchemy of Souls*. (S3)

In contrast, the views of the majority of students regarding Chinese and South Korean historical dramas are reflected in the statements made by students S4 and S6. In this context, student S4 refers exclusively to personal interests, while student S6 speaks more about the attitudes of their peers towards different Asian pop cultures:

I have never been particularly interested in them. I have watched some movies, but they focus on general themes and are closer to our time. In my opinion, there is nothing that requires prior knowledge of historical events... I have always been interested in Asia and China—in history, geography... ways of life, business, and politics—but I mostly approached those subjects through books and documentaries. (S4)

I think that among the younger population here, Asian culture is not that popular. The only popular things are anime and manga, but these are Japanese. Asian series and music are not as popular. The only Asian series I have watched is *Squid Game*. I do not think historical TV dramas from those regions are popular among our peers. (S6)

Almost all students stated that they had watched the mentioned historical TV dramas exclusively on online platforms (most often Netflix and YouTube). Only two female students mentioned having the opportunity to watch them as part of domestic TV station programming.

During the focus group, students mainly referred to two subgenres of historical TV dramas: “royal court” and “reworked legends”. In this context, we have compiled the titles of the TV dramas they mentioned and linked them to the corresponding production, subgenre, and year of production:

Table 3: Historical TV dramas mentioned during the focus group interview

English title	TV Production	Subgenre	Year of production
1 Hwarang	South Korean	Reworked legends	2016-2017
2 Under the Queen's Umbrella	South Korean	Royal court	2022
3 Legends	Chinese	Reworked legends	2019
4 Alchemy of Souls	South Korean	Reworked legends	2022
5 Scent of Time	Chinese	Royal court	2023

Source: Authors.

Based on the table presented, it is evident that students have primarily had the opportunity to follow more recent TV dramas, which likely corresponds to the already mentioned awakening of their interest in Asian cultures. In a few instances, students also mentioned other historical dramas but could not recall their titles. That is why we could not include them in the table presented. Regarding the core values and narratives characteristic of the mentioned dramas, most students emphasised the context of love. However, they also pointed to the existence of themes such as political relationships and intrigues, questions of social status, respect for elders, self-sacrifice, and others.

I did not watch the series to the end, but the context of romantic relationships was dominant in it as well. The girl was a street performer, and she began to dance at the court... there she fell in love with a nobleman... the plot revolved around that. (S6)

I also watched the series *Under the Queen's Umbrella*, and the theme of love was woven throughout, but it was not the main theme. In my opinion, the main theme in that series is the issue of supremacy and political problems. That narrative of love is constantly present, but it does not mean it is the focus of every series. (S4)

For example, there is also an emphasis on the social status of the characters. The guy was an emperor, and she was a concubine, and they were forbidden to be together. (S9)

At the same time, students noted similarities and differences between the values and patterns of behaviour depicted in these series and those specific to their own culture. They highlighted the differences between “Eastern” and “Western” mentalities. For example, students S1 and S4 particularly emphasised that in Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas, there is a pronounced authoritarian mentality, as well as familism and gerontocracy:

There is a strong emphasis on those hierarchically above you, on authority, and on the elderly; family is highly valued and placed above all else. (S4)

The “cult of ancestors” is often mentioned... the theme of what some great-grandmother or great-grandfather said will always come up, and this hierarchy of relationships is genuinely nurtured, with greater respect given to the elderly than to the young. (S1)

Building on the previous thoughts, student S3 emphasises that the mentioned traits of “Eastern” mentality are part of their tradition and that they hold a special status in historical TV dramas:

This is still present among them today, so it is to be expected that they emphasise it in their dramas, striving to showcase it as a sign of respect for their own tradition. I believe they insist on making it as authentic as possible,

even if the storylines are not entirely historically accurate or involve some fiction. (S3)

In a similar context, some students referred to the depiction of the concept of “guānxi”, with student S3 stating that “it is highly valued there” and “it is not seen as something negative”. Student S4 noted how they like to highlight favouritism in terms of social connections, providing the example of the queen mother from the series *Under the Queen’s Umbrella* (who openly favours one of the concubines over the current queen), while student S6 mentioned the character of a mother who publicly praises only one son.

An interesting discussion about the similarities between the cultural patterns depicted in TV dramas and those in Bosnia and Herzegovina was initiated by student S6:

Our people have certain principles they adhere to, which often coincide with those over there... At first glance, they may not seem similar, but when you delve deeper into the analyses, you can notice some similarities. For instance, courage and respect for family, parents, and, to some extent, authority... as a form of collectivism. This is also expressed in our culture, although not to the same extent, but there are similarities. Then there is perhaps hospitality... that kind of warmth among people. I would not compare us to the West; that is really a completely different extreme. (S6)

Student S3 disagreed with the assertion about the prevalence of collectivism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stating that she believes individualism is more pronounced in the country. In response, student S6 remarked that she thinks the opposite, suggesting that we are at least somewhere in the middle between the East and the West. Student S7 joined the discussion, pointing out that we have also had a “cult of personality” in this region. However, he is still fascinated by how the relationship with authority is portrayed in those series:

What is surprising is how much they believe in their authorities and rulers, and they do not publicly speak out against them to the same extent. In contrast, people here feel the need to express whether they are for or against the ruling party or anything else. (S7)

Building on that observation, student S3 described a scene from the drama *Under the Queen’s Umbrella* where a concubine scolds her son for gossiping and causing a fight:

It shows that they do not emphasise public slandering of authority that much... The concubine told her son something like, “If you cannot say it to her face, then do not talk about it publicly...” I think that is quite different compared to us, where people here do not really care who they say what to. (S3)

A similar observation was made by student S6, who pointed out that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina “talk more than they act”, noting that “it is different for them, even for the characters in the series... if they say something, they will try to follow through, while we are more relaxed about it”.

Regarding production differences between Chinese/Korean and Western series, students mainly referenced aspects like the slowness and repetitiveness of the plot, as well as the different portrayals of love and violence scenes.

But that slow pace is, in a general sense, a characteristic of Chinese and Korean series... They have series that have thirty episodes, each lasting about an hour... It does not matter whether they are historical or contemporary... and I do not think they plan to change that. (S3)

I do not have a completely negative opinion, but I also find that slowness is noticeable in some scenes... At one moment I am interested, and in the next, I am not. (S10)

For example, there are not many scenes of violence... Rarely will you see that concept of violence or any aggressive scenes. Everything is somewhat milder and calmer. (S3)

They are not that explosive. They are more passively aggressive... they send messages. They do not go directly; rather, everything is somehow implied, and situations are resolved that way. On the other hand, with us, it is much more explosive. (S6)

I find it interesting how all these themes are actually more controversial in the East than in the West... As my colleagues mentioned, the plot is slow, but that is more valued there. For example, with a Western series, you might see a romantic couple and something happening in the first episode, while in Asia, everything is more childish and innocent... those themes are still taboo there. (S4)

At the same time, most students noted that Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas are extremely visually appealing. In this regard, we would particularly highlight the thoughts of student S3, who expresses admiration for this aspect of production but simultaneously questions it in the context of historical authenticity:

They really strive to make it aesthetically pleasing so that it is enjoyable to watch. I say this from my perspective, as it is one of the reasons why I was drawn to Asian cultures... Everything they create related to history aims to showcase their culture, attire, architecture, and customs in the most beautiful way possible.

They make maximum effort in that promotion to ensure everything looks nice, elegant, calm, and composed. I think this emphasis on beauty is typical for them, regardless of whether it is about the past or the present. (S3)

However, I believe it is not entirely realistic... those were times when makeup was not as developed, and it was impossible for them to look that beautiful. (S3)

Most students believe that Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas have a limited contribution to cultural promotion and influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of them felt that this influence could be much more pronounced. However, that would require significant changes in their production or a greater need for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be more familiar with their cultural and historical context.

We are used to watching Western series, and that format typically allows us to relax and not think too much about the content, as it is mostly entertainment. In contrast, Eastern historical dramas require prior knowledge of those cultures... They should speed up the pacing to adapt to Western audiences... Sometimes, it is quite tedious to watch those series because of their slowness. (S6)

I think Asian cultures are quite foreign to people here, especially their historical development... If these contents were promoted more, people here could learn more about their history. (S3)

These reflections are further supported by the views of students regarding the content of Chinese and South Korean pop culture dedicated to contemporary themes. In this regard, most students emphasise that their interest in Asian cultures is a result of the “Korean Wave”, primarily K-pop music. Some of them also point out specific characteristics of this cultural phenomenon:

“Korean Wave” is linked to South Korea’s pronounced capitalist environment, where public figures are presented as consumer products, resulting in a massive influence and a loyal fan base. This phenomenon fosters parasocial relationships, where fans feel a personal connection to these celebrities, leading to high consumption of content associated with them, from albums to various merchandise. Thus, it becomes one of their main sources of revenue (S4).

In the case of Korea, there is a notable influence from Western culture, which is quite significant. When comparing Chinese and Korean series, it seems that Chinese series promote Chinese culture more, while the influence of the West on Korean series is strongly pronounced. For example, *Squid Game* has an English dub that makes it feel like an American series, even though it was made by Koreans. This series does not promote Korean culture and includes representatives of other ethnic groups, not just Koreans (S5).

Some students pointed out that alongside the Korean influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, attention should also be paid to the Japanese cultural impact, suggesting that it might even precede the Chinese cultural influence:

I believe that we all started with anime or K-pop, and there are many more influences from those cultures than from China. Those contents are much more present in public. Similarly, content about Japan or South Korea is played more often than that about China. Everything I learnt about Chinese culture, series, and celebrities is connected to watching Korean and Japanese content, and then Chinese content started popping up, which piqued my interest. (S3)

Chinese pop culture is nowhere near Japanese or South Korean. I even think that if we had Korean studies or Japanology here in Banja Luka, no one would sign up for Sinology. I believe that young people here are far more connected to those cultural influences. (S7)

Student S4 attempted to link the mentioned context of the under-representation of Chinese popular culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the preservation of Western cultural hegemony:

It has a lot to do with Western propaganda, particularly American... This is how Chinese media are actually blocked... That is why content from South Korea and Japan is more accessible to us. (S4)

The results of the analysis and interpretation of the collected data presented in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- Students and their acquaintances generally do not watch Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas, and if they do, they watch them through online platforms;
- Students mostly had the opportunity to view the “royal court” and “reworked legends” subgenres of historical TV dramas;
- Students generally understand the core values and narratives of these series but believe that adequate following necessarily requires a significant level of historical and cultural knowledge;
- Students notice certain similarities and differences between the cultural patterns depicted in these series and those in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Students observe production differences between Chinese and South Korean series compared to Western (primarily American) TV dramas and relate these to cultural differences between the “East” and the “West”;
- Most students believe that historical dramas have limited potential to promote South Korean and Chinese culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Students prefer content related to contemporary themes, and they mostly follow South Korean and/or Japanese pop culture.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted exploratory research indicate that the genre of historical TV drama does not serve as an effective tool of cultural diplomacy for the People's Republic of China and South Korea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is particularly evident in the case of Chinese historical TV dramas, which, despite the existence of institutional channels for promoting Chinese culture and language (in the form of Confucius Institutes and sinology studies), still do not capture the attention of most young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this sense, their influence on the formation of cultural attitudes and values is only somewhat present among those individuals within this demographic who are interested in Asian cultures.

However, even in such cases, young people are more interested in media content related to contemporary social processes. In this context, the research findings suggest that young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are more interested in and familiar with Asian pop cultures that model themselves on Western TV production, particularly South Korean and Japanese pop culture. In other words, young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina prefer media content from Asian pop cultures that are integrated within the framework of Western cultural hegemony. From this perspective, Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas can be interpreted as alternative media content that, due to typical genre conventions, fail to bridge the cultural and temporal gap with young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Consequently, their role in promoting Chinese and South Korean (traditional) culture and values, as well as in undermining Western cultural hegemony in Bosnia and Herzegovina, remains extremely limited.

We believe this exploratory research has fulfilled its purpose for two primary reasons. The first reason pertains to the justification for conducting similar research on a larger sample of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presented results indicate that this would not be justified; rather, the available research resources and capacities would be far better directed towards the issues raised by this research than towards verifying the findings achieved. That brings us to the second reason regarding the heuristic potential of the conducted research. In this regard, and given the previous observation that similar projects have not been realised, it is evident that there is a scientific justification for conducting research focused on examining the impact of various aspects of the Korean Wave on young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The same applies to the influence of contemporary Japanese pop culture.

Additionally, there is an evident scientific justification for a more comprehensive comparative study that would more thoroughly address the reasons why young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina prefer certain Asian pop

cultures, as well as the specific mechanisms of cultural production and diplomacy that characterise them.

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**KULTURNA DIPLOMATIJA KROZ TELEVIZIJSKI IZVOZ:
ANALIZA UTICAJA ISTORIJSKIH KINESKIH I KOREJSKIH DRAMA
NA OMLADINU U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI**

Apstrakt: U radu analiziramo uticaj kineske i južno korejske istorijske TV drame na mlade u Bosni i Hercegovini, uzimajući u obzir ovaj format kao jedan od instrumenata kulturne diplomatije. Primarni cilj istraživanja je da se odredi do koje mere sadržaji ovog medija oblikuju kulturne vrednosti i stavove ciljne grupe. Pored toga, rad analizira razvoj, karakteristike i međusobni odnos između kineske i korejske TV produkcije. Istraživanje je rađeno u dve faze, koristeći komparativno istorijski metod i tematsku analizu podataka koje su prikupljeni na fokus grupama sa studentima sinologije Filološkog fakulteta, Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci. Rezultati pokazuju da kineska i južnokorejska istorijska drama nema značajan uticaj na mlade ljude u BiH, te da odsustvo uticaja ovog tipa drame predstavlja epifenomen zapadne kulturne hegemonije. U ovom kontekstu rezultati doprinose razumevanju dinamike meke moći i kulturne interakcije u BiH kao i izazova za alternativne kulturne sadržaje u globalizovanom društvu.

Ključne reči: kulturna diplomatija; kineska i južno korejska TV produkcija; istorijska TV drama; omladina; Bosna i Hercegovina.

MIGRANT CRISIS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF REALISM THEORY

Slobodan M. RADOJEVIĆ¹

ABSTRACT

The Mediterranean migrant crisis, fueled by conflict, poverty and political instability in countries of origin, positions the Mediterranean as the deadliest sea in the world. Thousands risk perilous sea crossings, while transit and destination countries struggle with humanitarian relief and asylum challenges. The European Union initially responded to the crisis by applying the principles of unity and liberalism. This paper deploys political realism as a theoretical lens to analyze the crisis, demonstrating how state sovereignty, national interests, and security concerns dominate policy responses – often at the expense of humanitarian principles. The main concepts employed in the analysis include the state as the primary and most significant actor in international relations, sovereignty as the state's right to control its borders, national interest as the central motive driving state policy, and security as the paramount priority of states within an anarchic international system. The concepts of anarchy and self-help describe the absence of a superior international authority and the necessity for states to independently ensure their own security. Within the context of the migrant crisis, migration is often perceived as a threat to national security and social stability, while humanitarian concerns are frequently relegated to a secondary position. Research concludes that although the European Union still has mechanisms for the demonstration of cohesion and comprehensive actions, we might expect further strengthening of a realistic approach.

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Introduction

The migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea is a complex issue with multiple dimensions. The crisis is partly the result of armed conflicts, poverty, unfavourable climatic conditions and other conditions prevailing throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The migrant crisis in the Mediterranean is still an ongoing problem. Ten years after the greatest migrant tragedy in the Mediterranean, the situation has not changed significantly. Migrants from Africa still embark to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa. Italy takes rigorous measures to prevent the influx of migrants from Africa, and the European Union prepares to help Tunisia strengthen its economy and stop the departure of ships. However, there are gaps in European cooperation, and France has refused to accept the arrival of migrants from Lampedusa. That is a complex problem that requires coordinated efforts and cooperation of all parties involved.

Search and rescue at sea has gained high political attention after various serious migrant incidents in the Mediterranean Sea in the past years (Dijstelbloem, van Reekum, and Schinkel 2017; Cuttitta 2018; Cusumano 2018). The world's most dangerous migrant routes pass through the Mediterranean Sea. Many of these migrant attempts to cross the sea have tragically ended. Recently, the Mediterranean Sea has become a "maritime cemetery" (Tazzioli 2015, 2-6; Radojević 2020, 56). In 2011, according to UNHCR's statistics, more than 1,500 migrants drowned or went missing trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea (Wilkes 2012). As noted by Brian and Laczo, "According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in 2014, up to 3,072 migrants are believed to have died in the Mediterranean, compared with an estimate of 700 in 2013" (2014, 11). In 2015, over one million migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Actually, "the flow of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean has increased dramatically in 2015" (Grečić 2016). Only in 2016, more than 5,000 migrants lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea (Cusumano 2018). In 2017, at least 3,119 persons died or went missing in the Mediterranean Sea (Albahari 2018). According to data reports by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), from January to August 2018, 60,309 migrants and refugees entered Europe by sea, and 1,524 people lost their lives on the Mediterranean Sea (IOM 2018). According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), more than 400 migrants and refugees drowned in the first three months of 2023 while trying to cross from North Africa to Europe via the central Mediterranean Sea. That is "the deadliest first quarter on record since 2017" (UN 2023).

Since 2014, "more than 28,000 migrants have been reported missing in the Mediterranean" (European Parliament 2023). In reality, since 2014, a total of 31,272 missing migrants have been recorded in the Mediterranean (IOM

2025). The scale of the flows reached previously unseen levels in 2014 and 2015, as did the number of deaths (UNHCR 2015). In response to the high flows across the Mediterranean, the policy has prioritised search and rescue operations and the establishment of maritime patrols.

Migrants undertake perilous journeys, often crossing dangerous waters in unseaworthy boats operated by human traffickers. Many die at sea due to drowning. European host nations sometimes refuse to accept distressed migrants upon arrival. Migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea “face the risk of injury and death relating to the nature of the overseas journey, increasingly dangerous smuggling practices and, in some cases, risky rescue operations” (IOM 2017). Numerous boats and ships frequently sink in the Mediterranean Sea while transporting migrants and refugees. There are many programmes and projects aimed at taking a proactive stance to address the Mediterranean Sea shipwreck issue and enhance migrant safety (Tazzioli 2015; Stierl 2016). Many regional and international agencies, including the UN, IOM, EU, OSCE, UNHCR, and others, are working to address the issue of migrants at sea.

Search and rescue at sea has existed since the beginning of navigation. From first experiences and accidents during sailing, people have developed different rescue techniques and gained knowledge of favourable and unfavourable aspects of rescue and maritime conditions, the functioning of the human organism, and means of lifesaving. It is not uncommon for opposing fleets to act to save enemy soldiers and sailors from the water after sinking enemy ships during combat. In such acts lie the most basic principles of humanity.

According to the Missing Migrants Project, an initiative implemented in 2014 by the IOM to document deaths and disappearances of people in the process of migration, “Saving lives at sea is a legal obligation for States. There is an urgent need for proactive State-led search and rescue across all sea routes to Europe and for an immediate end to the criminalisation, obstruction, and deterrence of the efforts of those who provide such assistance, including NGOs and commercial ship operators” (IOM 2022).

This paper’s methodological approach derives from analysis of the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, observing this specific and complex problem of contemporary international relations from the perspective of the realism theory. The categorical apparatus of the realist approach is reflected in statism, where states are the key decision-makers acting according to their national interests, and in the pursuit and preservation of power to ensure survival. This approach emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system as the reason for limited international cooperation and the predominance of the self-help principle. The migrant crisis is thus viewed primarily as a security challenge, which limits the scope for humanitarian and solidarity-driven policies.

Methodologically, the author employs the theoretical framework of political realism as a basis for a systematic analysis of state motivations and behaviors in the migrant crisis. The analysis includes the study of concrete state policies and international agreements, such as the European Union's cooperation with third countries (e.g., Turkey and Libya), as well as military and border operations like Mare Nostrum, SOPHIA, and activities of the FRONTEX agency. Furthermore, the paper applies critical reflection on political decisions and their consequences for the humanitarian situation of migrants, acknowledging the limitations of the realist approach in addressing ethical and human rights aspects. The research integrates political, security, and humanitarian dimensions, providing a comprehensive insight into the complexity and multidimensionality of the migrant crisis. This approach enables a deeper understanding of state motives and dynamics in crisis conditions but also highlights the necessity for complementary approaches that incorporate humanitarian values and international norms.

The paper highlights the ongoing tension between security imperatives and human rights, underscoring the need for a balanced and coordinated approach. The 2024 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum exemplifies efforts to reconcile these competing demands, though future policies may increasingly prioritize realism if security concerns escalate.

Does the European Union Control Maritime Migrant Routes?

The Italian state-led operation "Mare Nostrum" began as a result of the highly publicised shipwreck that occurred on October 3, 2013, off the coast of Italy, near Lampedusa, where 368 migrants and refugees perished (Zamatto et al. 2017). The Italian navy was entrusted to run the first truly humanitarian operation. Search and rescue was its core activity. The Italian navy monitored and rescued migrants in an area of 70,000 square kilometres between Italy, Libya, and Malta. Mare Nostrum proved to be efficient in saving lives, as it helped 150,000 refugees and other migrants to reach safety.

The EU has increased its capacity for search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and for tackling criminal networks. By tripling the available resources, it helped save over 400,000 lives in 2015 and 2016. Over 2,000 traffickers and smugglers were caught, and 375 vessels were removed.

To replace Mare Nostrum, the EU leaders have enhanced two European Patrol Network Operations, "Poseidon" in the Aegean and "Triton" in the Central Mediterranean, and a military operation, EUNAVFOR MED Operation SOPHIA. Operation SOPHIA aims to control maritime migrant routes through the Mediterranean Sea, suppress the smuggling of people and help

shipwreckers. The increased frequency of migrant maritime accidents limited the possibilities for exploiting search and rescue forces.

On the night of April 18, 2015, a ship carrying more than 800 migrants capsized off the coast of Libya (Johansen 2017). While that was not the first of such incidents, it marked the largest loss of life in a single incident in the Mediterranean. Irregular migration to the EU via the Mediterranean has been increasing since late 2013 due to a combination of push factors in the EU's southern neighbourhood. The scale of the flow of migrants reached previously unseen levels in 2014 and 2015, as did the number of deaths. 2014 marked a particularly lethal year with over 3,500 fatalities, but by early spring of 2015, it was clear that this number was going to be surpassed within a few months (UNHCR 2015). The shipwreck of April 18, 2015, affected the EU in such a way that it immediately began preparation for a possible Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operation to undertake "systematic efforts to identify, capture, and destroy vessels before they are used by traffickers" (European Council 2015). Following the extraordinary European Council of April 23, 2015, EU Foreign and Defence Ministers agreed to create a naval force, EUNAVFOR MED, and to launch a CSDP naval operation in the Mediterranean on May 18, 2015. From June 2015 to March 2020, the EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA, in its efforts to combat illegal migration in the Mediterranean Sea, has managed to save no less than 45,000 lives at sea, arresting over 150 suspected smugglers and traffickers and removing more than 550 vessels from illegal organisations (Pricopi 2020). Its successor, EUNAVFOR MED IRINI ("peace" in the Greek language), commenced on March 31, 2020, and had a different purpose. The core task of Operation IRINI was the implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya and inspections of vessels bound to or from Libya in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2292 from 2016.

Nearly 13,000 people have died or are missing in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic since 2015 in an attempt to enter Europe (European Council 2021). Namely, "In 2019, over 100,000 people tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea and enter Europe illegally; concurrently, the newest naval operation of the European Union, EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, does not actively and purposefully conduct patrolling or search and rescue missions in the international waters, thus signalling a downscale of the EU's involvement in the migration crisis" (Pricopi 2020). Who is then responsible for conducting search and rescue at sea?

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on rescues in the Mediterranean Sea have called on the European Union to continue conducting search and rescue operations to help them respond to the huge influx of migrants. In a joint statement, the non-governmental organisations SOS Mediterranee, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and Sea-Watch have urgently called for "the provision of European state-led search

and rescue maritime assets in the central Mediterranean to prevent more deaths” (MSF 2022).

In 2020, the EU ended the Operation to Suppress People Smuggling and Rescue Migrants in the Mediterranean Sea and replaced it with Operation IRINI, which focused on enforcing the UN arms embargo on Libya. Operation IRINI is a European Union naval operation established on March 31, 2020, with the main objective of strengthening the UN arms embargo on Libya. This mission was launched in response to the chaotic situation in Libya caused by the protracted civil war and international interventions. The main objectives of Operation IRINI were the implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya to support the political dialogue and efforts of the international community aimed at achieving lasting peace in Libya; the fight against illegal oil trade; and training and equipping the Libyan coast guard to fight more effectively against human and arms smuggling. Further, “equally binding upon IRINI are the UNSC Resolutions on combating migrant smuggling and human trafficking into, through and from the Libyan territory and off the coast of Libya” (Stribis 2020, 20-21). From the beginning, the naval Operation IRINI “has had scant resources”, and its results were poor. In short, after the poor results of the naval Operation SOFIA in the last months of its operation, this operation “represents a new setback for the CSDP and for the EU’s ambition to become a relevant actor in contemporary international society” (Espaliú Berdud 2024). Rescuing migrants is then left to countries, but NGOs complain that countries are ignoring calls for help.

Therefore, without a specific EU naval operation, the burden falls on the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX, the EU southern border member states, non-governmental organisations and various activist individuals. FRONTEX is currently deploying three operations in the Mediterranean to rescue vulnerable migrants and fight migrant smuggling: Operation Themis (formerly Triton), covering the Central Mediterranean; Operation Poseidon, covering the Eastern Mediterranean; and Operation Indalo, covering the Western Mediterranean. Thanks to these efforts, over 544,000 lives have been saved since 2015 (European Council 2021).

The EU’s operational patrols in the Mediterranean aim to secure the EU’s borders, fight against migrant smugglers, and rescue migrants at risk. Frontex also extends its activities beyond the EU, cooperating with countries that have signed Status Agreements with the European Commission. These agreements allow Frontex to operate in Moldova, Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania.

After years of activity, the European Union adopted a new Pact on Migration and Asylum in April 2024. The Pact consists of a set of new legal acts, all published in the EU’s Official Journal on May 22, 2024 (European Commission 2024). The Pact, entering full application by June 2026, aims to create a more

unified approach to managing migration and asylum. The four pillars of the new migration and asylum policy are secure external borders, fast and efficient procedures, an effective system of solidarity and responsibility, and embedding migration in international partnerships. The Pact also introduces a new legal framework for people saved in search and rescue operations and those entering the EU territory, i.e., stricter border screening procedures and a “mandatory solidarity mechanism”. This mechanism requires all EU countries to either host asylum seekers, contribute financially, or provide operational support.

The Mediterranean migrant crisis has also strained resources in the frontline EU states like Italy and Greece, fuelled debates on burden-sharing, and highlighted concerns over human rights and the effectiveness of migrant policies. However, “civil society organisations, researchers and experts have raised concerns about the detrimental impact of the pact on the right of migrants to claim asylum and on the overall functioning of the EU common asylum system” (Conte and Yavcan 2024, 2). Besides, some authors claim that “on the humanitarian side, the New Pact appears to be less effective” (Gambazza 2024, 289).

However, Antonio Vitorino, IOM Director General, pointed out that “the persisting humanitarian crisis in the central Mediterranean is intolerable” (IOM 2023). He emphasised that states must respond to prevent further loss of life.

The Migrant Problem from the Perspective of Realism Theory

Social unrest, political violence, uprisings and wars in the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe have initiated a refugee and migrant crisis which has “fuelled the rise of illiberal, anti-EU and anti-immigrant sentiments, resulting in a security crisis, ruptures between the EU member states” (Düvell 2017, 35). The Mediterranean migrant crisis is a pressing issue, and understanding how political theories apply to it is crucial. Further, the problem is analysed using realism as a theoretical “lens”. Realism postulates that states are central actors in international relations, driven by self-interest and security concerns. According to the realism theory of international relations, the international system is anarchic; states are the primary actors in the international system; states are rational actors; all states are autonomous and unitary actors; and states’ principal interest is their security.

Since the international system is anarchic, there is no overarching authority above states, leading to a concept of “self-help” in which states prioritise their security (Abedin and Akgul 2019, 170). States are the primary actors in international relations, while other actors, such as international or non-governmental organisations, have limited influence. International relations are

driven by the pursuit of power. States strive to increase their power to ensure survival and achieve national interests. States act in their interest, primarily due to a particular need for security and survival.

The Mediterranean migrant crisis represents one of the greatest humanitarian and political challenges Europe has recently faced. This crisis is the result of a complex interaction of geopolitical, socioeconomic, and humanitarian factors, which have influenced the mass movement of people from the regions of North Africa and the Middle East towards Europe. On the other hand, the movement of people across national borders potentially disrupts the internal order and social structure of a state.

States prioritising national security can adopt restrictive border control measures to limit the migration flow, thus putting national interests ahead of humanitarian ones. The arrival of large numbers of migrants is perceived as a threat to national security, and states may prioritise measures to protect citizens and maintain social stability, even if this means denying entry to migrants. The absence of global authority in international relations forces states to rely on themselves for their security, which in the context of the migrant crisis leads to a “self-help” approach, where states prioritise national state interests and are not united towards a common solution.

Realism provides a framework for understanding state responses to the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, emphasising the importance of national security, national interest, and challenging cooperation in an anarchic international system. Realism does not provide a definitive one-stop solution to the refugee and migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, but it acts as a critical corrective. In fact, realism encourages different views of the problem to be transformed into the potential for creating solutions (Rösch and Lebow 2018). Dissanayake (2019) states, “Realism can serve as a means to look into the crisis through some of its core assumptions, helping to analyse the problem better”.

Initially guided by liberal values of solidarity and human rights, the European Union’s approach has shifted toward a more realist stance amid rising migration pressures and political challenges. This shift emphasizes stricter border controls, cooperation with third countries, and more restrictive asylum policies. While realism effectively explains state-centric motivations and security priorities, it falls short in addressing the ethical and humanitarian dimensions of the crisis.

In summary, the EU’s shift from liberal values to a realistic approach reflects the challenges posed by the refugee crisis and the delicate balance between regional cooperation and national interests. As the challenges and pressures increased, European countries moved towards a more realistic approach, focusing on controlling and reducing the migrant flows. Acting in accordance with the

realism of the state, they strengthen the borders, enter into agreements with third countries, limit access to asylum, and implement internal pressures.

On the other hand, the EU's attempt to implement a quota system for refugees, the distribution of refugees and migrants by member states, might be a starting point for realism theory analyses (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2018). The EU has significantly increased resources for the protection of external borders through agencies such as Frontex, which have received greater powers and capacities for border control and surveillance. Additionally, the EU concluded a series of agreements with countries outside the Union (such as Turkey and Libya) to reduce the flow of migrants. For example, the 2016 agreement with Turkey significantly reduced the number of migrants crossing from Turkey to Greece. Some member states have tightened the conditions for obtaining asylum and introduced faster procedures for the deportation of those who have been refused asylum.

Political pressures within the member states, often driven by the rise in popularity of right-wing and populist parties, have also influenced the EU's policy shift towards a more restrictive approach. The EU countries have started to turn to realism, mainly "statism, survival, and self-help", and they became sceptical about cooperation in the international sphere (Dissanayake 2020). A realistic approach has brought certain results in terms of reducing the number of migrants arriving at the EU borders. However, this approach has also drawn numerous criticisms, including human rights violations, lack of solidarity, and humanitarian crises.

Critics argue that many aspects of the realist approach, such as the agreement with Libya, have led to violations of the human rights of migrants and refugees. Restrictive policies have often led to the worsening of the humanitarian situation in refugee camps and at the EU's external borders. The political security situation in Africa, the Sahel region, and the south of the central Mediterranean regarding the illegal transport of migrants is very complex. By closing the so-called "Balkan route", the migrant flow across the Mediterranean has increased.

Possibilities and Recommendations for Solving the Migrant Crisis in the Mediterranean Sea

Scholarly analysis of the Mediterranean migrant crisis, through the lens of political realism, emphasises the state-centric nature of the issue, focusing on how states' pursuit of national interests, concerns about power and security, and the anarchic structure of the international system shape their responses. In reality, states prioritise their own security and view large-scale migration as

a potential threat to social stability and national identity. Migration “has generated new social, political, and economic pressures” in Europe (Kyriakopoulos 2019).

Analysing the Mediterranean migrant crisis through the lens of realism theory underscores the enduring importance of state-centric motivations and the challenges of achieving a unified and humanitarian-driven response in a system where states prioritise their own interests and security in anarchic international relations (Dissanayake 2021). A classical realist perspective may not fully capture the humanitarian dimensions of the crisis, the ethical considerations involved, or the significant role played by non-state actors and international norms. Overall, scholarly work analysing the Mediterranean migrant crisis through the lens of political realism highlights the enduring importance of state-centric motivations and the challenges of achieving a unified and humanitarian-led response in a system in which states prioritise their interests and security in anarchic international relations.

The theory of realism explains the Mediterranean migrant crisis primarily through the prism of state interest and national security. Therefore, states are primarily concerned with their own survival and maximising power. Migrants and refugees are often perceived as a potential threat to their stability, economy, or national identity. An example of this is the building of fences and increased border control by countries such as Hungary or Italy. In this way, states give priority to sovereignty and security over humanitarian aspects. International cooperation is limited because each country acts in accordance with its narrow national interests, which is manifested through the lack of a unified and coherent EU policy towards the migrant crisis.

Since realism interprets the Mediterranean migrant crisis as the struggle of states to preserve their sovereignty and security in an anarchic international system, this results in a limited will for common solutions, where humanitarian imperatives are often suppressed in front of pragmatic and rigid control measures. Examples such as border barriers and the lack of solidarity among the EU members clearly illustrate this realistic perspective. Finally, the crisis is viewed as a security challenge rather than primarily a humanitarian disaster, thus directly affecting policy responses.

While political theory does not provide a single definitive explanation, it offers insights into some contributing factors. A comprehensive approach, grounded in human rights principles, can help mitigate the crisis. The refugee and migrant crisis in the Mediterranean is a complex problem that requires coordinated efforts at the international level. The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) approach is guided by the fundamental principle that all refugees and migrants have a human right to health, and countries must provide them with

healthcare services free of discrimination. In addition, the WHO focuses on the health needs of migrants and refugees, advocating for equal access to health services regardless of legal status, especially during dangerous Mediterranean crossings. It is necessary to ensure safe access to humanitarian organisations and provide adequate protection to refugees and migrants. That includes housing, healthcare, education, and psycho-social support. Further, the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean requires coordinated efforts and cooperation between the countries along the coast. Organisations such as SOS Mediterranee, Doctors Without Borders, and Sea-Watch play a key role in rescuing migrants at sea. The international community should continue to provide support and resources to countries facing the migrant crisis. Cooperation and joint efforts are key to protecting human lives in the Mediterranean and creating a more humane environment for migrants.

Countries along the Mediterranean should cooperate to manage migration effectively. That includes information sharing, joint patrols, and coordination in addressing challenges. Focusing on the prevention of human smuggling and trafficking is key to solving the migrant crisis. That requires the strengthening of border controls and the suppression of criminal networks. People smuggling in the Mediterranean is a serious problem that requires coordinated efforts and cooperation between countries along the coast. Some key steps to resolve this issue are strengthening border controls in such a way that countries improve surveillance of coasts and sea lanes to make it more difficult for smugglers to transport migrants. Cooperation between countries should be improved because joint work and information exchange between countries along the Mediterranean can help identify smugglers and their networks. Prevention plays a key role and should be implemented through education and raising awareness about the risks of migration, which can affect the reduction of demand for smuggling services. International organisations such as UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) should continue to provide support and resources to countries facing the migrant crisis. Penalty measures and effective justice for smugglers can deter these illegal activities. In addition to immediate measures, it is necessary to develop long-term strategies for the integration of refugees and migrants into the societies of host countries. That includes training, employment, and social inclusion.

These are just some of the steps that can be taken. It is important to involve all relevant actors to achieve a sustainable and humanitarian approach to solving this problem. The migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea is a complex problem that requires coordinated efforts and long-term solutions. Taking into account these facts, solving the migrant crisis requires the cooperation of international organisations, states, and humanitarian agencies. It is important to work on prevention, saving lives, and providing safe alternatives for migrants

seeking a better life in Europe. Consequently, understanding the migrant crisis involves considering political, socioeconomic, and human rights dimensions while acknowledging the complexities of migration.

Conclusion

The Mediterranean migrant crisis, driven by conflict, poverty, and political instability in countries of origin, has had devastating consequences. Thousands have lost their lives attempting the perilous Mediterranean Sea crossing, making it the deadliest migration route globally.

Due to its proximity to North Africa, the Mediterranean is a prime destination for those willing to risk crossing the sea. The Mediterranean Sea is a “maritime cemetery”, as many ships and boats transporting migrants and refugees shipwreck. Many migrants have decided to take that dangerous transit route, and rescue ships and humanitarian organisations try to help them. The enormous difficulties that transit and destination countries have in handling arrivals, delivering humanitarian relief, and putting in place cogent, compassionate asylum rules are also part of the Mediterranean migrant crisis. The situation still requires coordinated efforts and cooperation of all involved parties.

The paper shows that realism helps develop a more critical awareness of international politics and the problems of the twenty-first century. To demonstrate the potential of realism as a theory, the refugee and migrant crisis in the Mediterranean was chosen as a case study. Realism does not provide a definitive one-stop solution to this crisis. It acts as a critical corrective. More precisely, realism encourages different perspectives of this problem to be turned into potential for creating solutions.

The application of realism theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the complexity of the Mediterranean migrant crisis. The analysis reveals that the actions and policies of the key state actors involved, including the EU member states and North African countries, are significantly shaped by the core principles of realism theory: state sovereignty, national interest, power politics, and the anarchic nature of the international system. The pursuit of national interests, especially security and stability, often takes precedence over humanitarian interests, leading to different and sometimes conflicting state responses.

The migrant crisis that has hit Europe caused significant changes in the European Union’s approach to migration. The European Union initially acted in line with the expectations of the liberal approach based on the values of solidarity, human rights, and the integration of migrants. However, due to increased migrant pressure and political pressures within the member states,

the EU gradually adopted a more realistic approach. European countries are increasingly following the realist theory in solving the migrant crisis.

The European Union's liberal approach to the migrant crisis was guided by the principles of humanitarianism and solidarity. This approach included open borders and asylum, distribution of refugees, and integration. Many EU member states were initially open to accepting migrants, especially during the height of the crisis in 2015, when Germany, for example, received large numbers of refugees from Syria. The EU tried to establish mechanisms for the fair distribution of refugees among the member states to reduce the pressure on countries on the EU's external borders, such as Greece and Italy.

As the challenges and pressures increased, the EU moved towards a more realistic approach, focusing on controlling and reducing the flow of migrants. This approach includes several key elements, such as strengthening borders, agreements with third countries, limiting access to asylum, and internal pressures. The EU has significantly increased resources for the protection of external borders through agencies such as Frontex, which have received greater authority and capacity for border control and surveillance. Further, the EU has concluded a series of agreements with countries outside the Union (such as Turkey and Libya) to reduce the flow of migrants. For example, the 2016 agreement with Turkey significantly reduced the number of migrants crossing from Turkey to Greece. Some member states have tightened the conditions for obtaining asylum and introduced faster procedures for the deportation of those who have been denied one. Political pressures within the member states have also influenced the change in EU policy towards a more restrictive approach. A realistic approach has brought certain results in terms of reducing the number of migrants arriving at the EU borders.

While realism theory provides a powerful lens for understanding the state-centric motivations and power struggles inherent in the Mediterranean migrant crisis, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. A purely realist perspective may not fully capture the humanitarian dimensions of the crisis, the ethical considerations involved, or the significant role played by non-state actors and international norms. Nevertheless, realism theory remains a valuable analytical tool for experts and policymakers seeking to understand the underlying drivers and dynamics of this complex international crisis, highlighting the enduring influence of state-centric motivations in a world characterised by anarchy and the pursuit of power.

However, this realist approach has also drawn numerous criticisms of violation of human rights, lack of solidarity, and humanitarian crisis. Critics claim that many aspects of the realist approach, such as the agreement with Libya, have led to violations of the human rights of migrants and refugees. Some

member states have been accused of a lack of solidarity, refusing to accept migrants according to the quotas agreed at the EU level. Restrictive policies have often led to a worsening of the humanitarian situation in refugee camps and at the EU's external borders.

The migrant crisis has shown how complex the challenge of migration management is for the EU. While the liberal approach focused on humanitarian aid and integration, the realist approach emphasised border control and reducing the flow of migrants. The European Union will likely continue to balance these approaches, such as the new Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2024, seeking sustainable solutions that take into account both human rights and the need for security and stability within its borders. However, if this challenge becomes more complex and dangerous to the security of the member states, one should expect further strengthening of the realistic approach in the future.

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MIGRANTSKA KRIZA NA MEDITERANU IZ PERSPEKTIVE TEORIJE REALIZMA

Apstrakt: Mediteranska migrantska kriza, podstaknuta sukobima, siromaštvom i političkom nestabilnošću u zemljama porekla, pozicionira Mediteran kao najsmrtonosnije more na svetu. Hiljade ljudi rizikuju opasne prelaske mora, dok se tranzitne i odredišne zemlje bore sa humanitarnom pomoći i izazovima u vezi sa azilom. Evropska unija je u početku odgovorila na krizu primenom principa jedinstva i liberalizma. Ovaj rad koristi politički realizam kao teorijsku perspektivu za analizu krize, pokazujući kako državni suverenitet, nacionalni interesi i bezbednosne brige dominiraju političkim odgovorima – često na račun humanitarnih principa. Glavni koncepti korišćeni u analizi uključuju državu kao primarnog i najznačajnijeg aktera u međunarodnim odnosima, suverenitet kao pravo države da kontroliše svoje granice, nacionalni interes kao centralni motiv koji pokreće državnu politiku i bezbednost kao najvažniji prioritet država unutar anarhičnog međunarodnog sistema. Koncepti anarhije i samopomoći opisuju odsustvo višeg međunarodnog autoriteta i potrebu da države samostalno obezbede sopstvenu bezbednost. U kontekstu migrantske krize, migracije se često doživljavaju kao pretnja nacionalnoj bezbednosti i društvenoj stabilnosti, dok se humanitarne brige često stavljaju u drugi plan. U radu autor zaključuje da iako Evropska unija i dalje ima mehanizme za demonstraciju kohezije i sveobuhvatnih akcija, možemo očekivati dalje jačanje realističnog pristupa.

Ključne reči: Teorija realizma; migrantska kriza; Mediteran; Evropska unija.

TIME ECHOES: POLITICAL LESSONS FROM THE PRE-MODERN WORLD

Vladimir N. Cvetković, *Sociology of Politics II: Pre-Modern Political Communities – values, institutions, actors* [Sociologija politike (knjiga druga): Predmoderne političke zajednice – vrednosti, institucije i akteri], Belgrade, Faculty of Security Studies and Čigoja, 2023, pp. 458.

The book *Sociology of Politics II: Pre-Modern Political Communities – values, institutions, actors*, published in Serbian language, in 2023, represents a new contribution to the complex mosaic of thinking about the “political” – its processes, formations, actorhood – within the rich opus of work by Prof. Dr. Vladimir N. Cvetković of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Security Studies. He undertakes a challenging yet necessary intellectual endeavor – to think historically and sociologically about the formation of political communities in the epochs preceding modernity. Embracing both the sterile abstractions of formal theory and the redundancy of mere factual chronology, the book navigates between philosophical reflection and historical narrative, offering a vision of political life as simultaneously material and symbolic, contingent and structured, empirical and conceptual.

This dual commitment is made explicit from the very first pages, where Cvetković introduces the metaphorical framework of “Babylon” and “Athens”, two approaches of knowing that complements and reinforce each other, offering a more holistic understanding. The former, marked by detailed recording and practical experience, evokes the richness of civilizational memory, the cataloging of institutional forms, and the patient collection of empirical facts. The latter, more abstract and speculative, speaks to the construction of concepts, theoretical models, and the pursuit of principles that give meaning to political phenomena. For Cvetković, these are not mutually exclusive approaches, but two necessary poles of any serious inquiry into the history of political life. In this spirit, the book reveals a thoughtful intertwining of case studies and conceptual reflections.

At its core, *Sociology of Politics II* is concerned with the genesis and development of pre-modern political communities; how they came into being, by what values they were governed, through which institutions they acquired

permanence, and by whose actions they were shaped. But the book does more than simply chart the succession of empires, kingdoms, and republics. It asks fundamental questions: What constitutes legitimate authority? How are communities held together? What roles do religion, myth, and tradition play in stabilizing – or disrupting – political order? And crucially, what is the relationship between the historical particularity of political forms and the universalizing tendencies of sociological explanation?

Rather than offering a linear history, Cvetković constructs a conceptual cartography. The chapters move geographically and temporally, from the city-states of Mesopotamia to the bureaucracies of imperial China, from the democratic experiments of classical Greece to the hierarchical sacred monarchies of the medieval Christian and Islamic worlds. Each political form is examined not as a static entity, but as a dynamic articulation of values, institutions, and actors situated within specific historical constellations.

One of the book's most compelling aspects is its refusal to idealize any single model of political life. The *polis* is not elevated over the empire, nor is theocratic order dismissed as irrational. Instead, Cvetković invites the reader to consider each system on its own terms: What conditions enabled its emergence? What internal contradictions marked its trajectory? How did it respond to the perennial challenges of legitimacy, succession, coercion, and belief? By doing so, he resists the teleological impulse that often distorts sociological accounts of political development – a tendency to view the modern liberal state as the inevitable endpoint of history.

The book's methodological sophistication is matched by its intellectual humility. Cvetković is acutely aware of the epistemological limits of social science. The author repeatedly reminds the reader that historical interpretation is shaped by the theoretical lenses through which we view the past. Every sociological theory, he argues, does more than interpret data – it selects, frames, and even constructs what counts as relevant data. Thus, the historian or sociologist cannot be a neutral observer; interpretation is always situated, and the facts themselves are never innocent. This does not lead the author into relativism or cynicism, but to a careful and reflective mode of scholarship, where knowledge is pursued with both rigor and a keen awareness of its contingencies.

The prose is dense, often philosophical, and occasionally elliptical, but always anchored in a deep engagement with both classical and contemporary thought. The influence of authors such as Braudel (1990), Weber (1921), and Voegelin (1956–1987) can be felt throughout, but they are never invoked uncritically. Rather, they serve as interlocutors in a broader conversation about the meaning of politics, the role of history, and the fragile architecture of human communities.

Cvetković is particularly attuned to the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of political life. Unlike many sociologists who treat religion as a mere superstructure or instrument of ideology, he sees in the sacred a constitutive force in the shaping of collective identity and authority. From the divine kingship of Egypt and the ritual power of Chinese emperors, to the complex entanglements of church and state in Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire, the book traces how transcendent claims were translated into institutional permanence. Yet, this is not an exercise in metaphysical speculation. The sacred is understood in sociological terms – as a generator of legitimacy, a mechanism of cohesion, and a source of meaning that undergirds the often-violent machinery of governance.

While the empirical range of the book is impressive, stretching across continents and millennia, it remains unified by a consistent theoretical impulse. The author is not merely recounting the past; he is excavating the political logic embedded in civilizational forms. His goal is not to impose a theory onto history, but to allow theory to emerge from historical understanding. In doing so, he offers a kind of sociological hermeneutics, an interpretative strategy that reads political formations as texts, revealing their underlying structures, tensions, and aspirations.

Certainly, the book is not without its methodological challenges and limitations. Its theoretical density and lack of explicit engagement with contemporary debates in critical theory (Cox 1981; Marcuse 1991), gender studies (Mouffe 2000), or postcolonial (Said 1978) thought may leave some readers wanting. One of them is an author of this book review, whose research interests lie in the field of international law, as well as normative and critical legal theory. In that spirit, it is hoped that the next volume in the *Sociology of Politics* book series will be open to slightly different (theoretical) perspectives on the sustainability of nation-states as such, as well as on the roles, strengths and limitations of the idea of an international order or community. Moreover, the breadth of coverage occasionally comes at the expense of depth; certain chapters – particularly those dealing with non-Western civilizations – might have benefited from closer engagement with indigenous sources or recent historiography. Yet these are not failings so much as invitations for further inquiry. The book does not pretend to be exhaustive, but to provoke thought, to model a mode of inquiry that is as attentive to historical detail as it is to conceptual clarity.

In a time when political discourse is increasingly flattened by ideological polemic or technocratic reductionism, Cvetković's book offers a salutary reminder that political life is not reducible to governance or policy. It is a complex and symbolically charged field of action, grounded in myth, ritual, belief, and power. This book does not offer easy answers, nor does it peddle in

predictions. What it does offer is something far more valuable: a disciplined meditation on the historical foundations of our political being.

Vladimir N. Cvetković's work stands as a compelling contribution to historical sociology and political theory. It challenges the reader to think more deeply, more historically, and more reflectively about the forms of life we call political. It is a book that rewards slow reading, and one that invites ongoing dialogue. In bridging Babylon and Athens, it affirms that political knowledge must be both rooted and reflective, particular and universal, empirical and philosophical. In that delicate balance lies not only the strength of this book, but the promise of sociology itself.

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Marina RADOVANOVIĆ

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Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, and Anuradha Chenoy. 2007. *Human Security: Concepts and Implications*, 2nd ed. Oxon: Routledge.

Vasquez, John A., Sanford Jaffe, James Turner Johnson, and Linda Stamato, eds. 1995. *Beyond Confrontation: Learning Conflict Resolution in the Post-Cold War Era*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Bentham, Jeremy (1907) 2018. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Reprint, London: Clarendon Press. www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html.

Dal Lago, Alessandro, and Salvatore Palidda, eds. 2010. *Conflict, Security and the Reshaping of Society: The Civilization of War*. Oxon & New York: Routledge.

Hayek, Friedrich A. 2011. *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition*. Edited by Ronald Hamowy. Vol. 17 of *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*, edited by Bruce Caldwell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988–.

In-text citation:

(Jabri 2007, 59)

(Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007)

(Vasquez et al. 1995)

(Bentham [1907] 2018)

(Dal Lago and Palidda 2010)

(Hayek 2011, 258)

Journal article

Reference list entry:

Nordin, Astrid H.M. and Dan Öberg. 2015. “Targeting the Ontology of War: From Clausewitz to Baudrillard”. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43 (2): 395–423.

Adams, Tracy, and Zohar Kampf. 2020. “‘Solemn and just demands’: Seeking apologies in the international arena”. *Review of International Studies*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210520000261>.

In-text citation:

(Nordin and Öberg 2015, 401)

(Tracy and Kampf 2020)

Article in edited volume

Reference list entry:

Herman, Michael. 2004. “Ethics and Intelligence After September 2001”. In: *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century: Journeys in Shadows*,

edited by Len V. Scott and Peter D. Jackson, 567–581. London and New York: Routledge.

Reference list entry:

(Herman 2004)

Conference paper (if not published in conference proceedings)

Reference list entry:

Korać, Srđan. 2016. “Human Security and Global Ethics: Can International Organizations be Moral Agents?”. Paper presented at the Third International Academic Conference on Human Security, Human Security Research Center (HSRC), Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, November 4–5.

Reference list entry:

(Korać 2016)

Book review

Reference list entry:

Firchow, Pamina. 2020. “Measuring Peace: Principles, Practices and Politics”, Review of *Measuring Peace*, by Richard Caplan. *International Peacekeeping* 27 (2): 337–338.

Reference list entry:

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Legal and official documents

International treaties

Reference list entry:

[PTBT] Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water. 1963. Signed by US, UK, and USSR, August 5. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20480/volume-480-I-6964-English.pdf>.

[TFEU] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. 2012. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 326, October 26. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>.

[UN Charter] Charter of the United Nations, October 24, 1945.
<https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/introductory-note/index.html>.

In-text citation:

(PTBT 1963, Article III, para. 3)

(TFEU 2012, Article 87)

(UN Charter, Chapter X)

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Reference list entry:

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(UNSC Res. 2222)

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Reference list entry:

[Constitution RS] Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. 2006. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 98/2006.

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Reference list entry:

[YILC] Yearbook of the International Law Commission. 2014. Vol. 2, Part Two. https://legal.un.org/docs/?path=../ilc/publications/yearbooks/english/ilc_2014_v2_p2.pdf&lang=ES.

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(The 9-11 Commission 2004, 437)

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(Directive [EU] 2015/849)

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Reference list entry:

Gibbs, Samuel. 2017. "Elon Musk leads 116 experts calling for outright ban of killer robots", *The Guardian*, August 20.

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Reference list entry:

Scott, Ridley. [1982] 2007. *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. Directed by Ridley Scott. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Blue-Ray disc, 117 min.

Future Weapons. 2019. Waddell Media. Aired on August 7–16 on Discovery Science HD, 3 seasons, 30 episodes (43 min. each). <https://go.discovery.com/tv-shows/future-weapons/>.

Tech Legend. 2020. "Best Drones 2020 – Top 8 Best Drone with Cameras to Buy in 2020". Uploaded on February 7, 2020. YouTube video, 27:20 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6_4JU5Mspw.

In-text citation:

(Scott [1982] 2007)

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Reference list entry:

National Library of Australia. 2020. "National Library of Australia's Facebook Page". Facebook, August 1, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/National.Library.of.Australia/>.

Kruszelnicki, Karl (@DoctorKarl). 2017. "Dr Karl Twitter post." Twitter, February 19, 2017, 9:34 a.m. <https://twitter.com/DoctorKarl>.

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In-text citation:

(National Library of Australia 2020)

(Kruszelnicki 2017)

(Trapara 2018)

Doctoral dissertation

Reference list entry:

Rohrbach, Livia. 2020. *Beyond intractability? Territorial solutions to self-determination conflicts*. Doctoral dissertation. Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen.

In-text citation:

(Rohrbach 2020)

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If citing an undated online document, give an access date and use the year of access as year of publication.

Reference list entry:

Oxford Library. 2012. "Library Strategy". Oxford Library. Accessed 3 June 2012. <http://www.ol.org/library/strategy.html>.

Google Maps. 2015. "The British Library, London, UK". *Google*. Accessed February 5, 2015. <https://www.google.com.au/maps/place/The+British+Library/@51.529972,-0.127676,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m2!3m1!1s0x48761b3b70171395:0x18905479de0fdb25>.

IIPE [Institute of International Politics and Economics]. n.d. "Mission". Accessed August 1, 2020. <https://www.diplomacy.bg.ac.rs/en/mission/>.

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Reference list entry:

Guzzini, Stefano. 2013. *Power, realism, and constructivism*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

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It is necessary to give their number and full title – e.g. *Table 1: Human Development Index among EU members* or *Figure 2: State-Building or Sovereignty Strategy* or *Map 1: Maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic region*.

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Жарко В. Обрадовић, *Кина и Србија: огледи о улози НР Кине у савременом свету, значају иницијативе „Појас и пут“, „Челичном пријатељству“ Кине и Србије и геополитичкој димензији простора Балкана*, 2024, 215 стр.

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