

## Choosing Secession: Evidence from the Balkans

### Research Puzzle

Secessionist movements have emerged in many regions and among many social groups around the world. Contemporary cases of secessionism include Scotland in the United Kingdom, Catalonia in Spain, and Casamance in Senegal. Substantial debate has taken place among scholars as to why these movements have emerged. However, comparatively less attention has been directed toward the microlevel of secessionism: understanding the behavior of individuals who live in regions where secessionist movements have emerged.

Scholars typically treat secessionist cases as monolithic units despite heterogeneity in stances on secession within these units. For instance, Puerto Rico is usually considered a “secessionist case”, but only a minority of the population actively supports secession (Denis 2015). Polls from Scotland reveal sharp divides in support for secession (55 percent in favor, 45 percent against) (Ipsos 2021). In 1995, Québec voters rejected secession by a razor-thin margin (50.6 percent to 49.4 percent) (Clarke and Kornberg 1996). The extant research has done an insufficient job of accounting for this heterogeneity within secessionist cases.

### Research Question

This motivates the question: **In contexts in which secession is a salient issue, what motivates support for secessionist movements?**

### Overview

This study explores variation in support for secessionist initiatives at the level of the individuals who live in regions with secessionist movements. I outline a theoretical framework that identifies motivations for secession at the level of individuals. I contend that the primary motivations behind support for secession at the individual level depend on the relative wealth of the secessionist region compared to the rest of the host state. In relatively wealthy regions, I expect that material considerations – those related to economic factors – will be the primary determinants of support for secession. In relatively poor regions, I expect that non-material considerations – those related to culture or ethnic identity – will be the primary motivation behind support for secession. I present preliminary evidence from interviews conducted in Montenegro and Republika Srpska, a secessionist region of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evidence suggests that in Montenegro – a relatively wealthy part of Yugoslavia – material considerations such as a desire to control local wealth and policy were important motivations for individuals to support secession. Conversely, in Republika Srpska, a relatively poor region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, non-material considerations relating to ethnic identity and interethnic tensions seem to be the primary motivation behind support for secession. I conclude by identifying areas for future research in which this theoretical framework can be tested more extensively.

### Literature Review

Much of the extant literature on secessionism has focused on why secessionist movements emerge among certain regions or social groups. Comparatively less work has been done on individual choices regarding secession. At the individual level, scholars have dedicated considerable attention to national identity as a driver of secessionist support, positing that individuals who feel a stronger connection to their region or social group than to the nation-state are more likely to support secession (Blais et al. 1995; Burg 2015; Costa-Font and Tremosa-

Balcells 2008; Faller 2011; Hierro and Queralt 2020; Howe 1998; McCrone and Paterson 2002; Muñoz and Tormos 2015; Rodon and Guinjoan 2018; Serrano 2013). Scholars have also identified individuals’ material status (Cuneo and Curtis 1974; Hayes and McAllister 2001; O’Gara 2001; O’Loughlin and Tuathail 2009), political ideology (Muñoz and Tormos 2015; Sarigil and Karakoc 2016) and tolerance for risk (Morisi 2016) as helping to shape preferences, but the direction of the correlation between these factors and support for secession varies by study. In addition to individual characteristics, the role of prospective or retrospective considerations has received substantial attention. Individuals’ prospective expectations of how the regional economy would perform in the aftermath of secession is a recurring theme (Bélanger and Perrella 2008; Blais and Nadeau 1992; Blais et al. 1995; Hierro and Queralt 2020; Morisi 2016), with individuals who are more pessimistic about the post-independence economy being less likely to support secession. Scholars have also found that individuals who perceive that they, their region, or their social group have been victims of discrimination (Sarigil and Karakoc 2016) or neglect (Giuliano 2018; Hagendoorn et al. 2008) by the host state as more likely to support secession. For instance, in Catalonia (Costa-Font and Tremosa-Balcells 2008) and Quebec (Howe 1998), individuals who were concerned over the status of local languages were more likely to support secession.

Nevertheless, the literature on individual preferences on secession suffers from several shortcomings. One concern is the possible endogeneity of some of the factors that scholars have argued drive support for secession. National identity – such as feeling more attachment to local identity than to the national identity or vice versa – has received considerable attention in the literature, but it could be that one’s stance on secession actually drives whether the individual feels a greater identification with the local region or the host state (reverse causality). For instance, an individual who feels strongly pro-secession might feel that she has a stronger regional identity than a national one because of her stance on secession. Similar concerns also exist with factors such as perceptions of discrimination or prospective/retrospective concerns on policy issues. For instance, rather than individuals supporting secession because they perceive themselves as victims of discrimination, it could be that individuals who support secession have a post hoc perception that they have been victims of discrimination. In other words, with many of these predictor variables, the direction in which the causal arrow points is unclear.

Therefore, I believe that we need to advance a theoretical framework that goes beyond examining merely the personal characteristics of individuals living in secessionist contexts. We also need to consider structural characteristics that can shape individuals’ support for secession.

### Theoretical Framework

The extant literature highlights two sets of considerations that can motivate secessionism: material considerations and non-material considerations. Scholars have been divided as to which set of factors bears the most relevance for explaining secessionism. On the one hand, scholars who focus on material considerations argue that secession is motivated by the desire to control local resources or power (Alesina and Spolaore 1997, Bolton and Roland 1997, Bookman 1992, Hechter 1992). For instance, regional elites might pursue secession because they would be able to have more control over local inputs if their region seceded, rather than having to compete with other elites in the host state. This perspective is commonly held among scholars of political economy. Other scholars argue that non-material factors, such as ethnocultural identity, are the primary motivators of secession. According to this perspective, secessionism can arise when a social group finds itself politically dominated by an out-group, as exemplified by Gellner’s classical theory of nationalism (Gellner 1983). Some scholars contend that some groups may want to secede out of a

sense of national pride, wanting to have their own state in which their language, religion, or other cultural markers are protected (Bartkus 1999, Gellner 1983, Hagendoorn et al 2008).

I take these theories that have been developed at the macrolevel of groups and regions and apply them to the individuals that comprise these entities. Individuals living in contexts in which the potential secession of their region from the host state may have a variety of motivations for supporting, opposing, or being indifferent toward secession. On the material side, individuals may support secession because they believe that secession will bring economic benefits to them and to others living in the region. This could come in the form of greater redistribution to individuals from the increased regional control of local resources, new or improved job opportunities, and the enactment of policies that more closely reflect the preferences of individuals in the region. Conversely, non-material (cultural) factors can motivate individuals to support secession. Examples of non-material benefits that individuals might expect from secession could be a higher status or protections for a regional language or religion, a sense of security from potential threats posed by other groups in the host state, and even merely pride in having one’s own independent state run by regional elites/co-ethnics.

But which set of considerations explains why individuals support secession? Are individuals guided by material considerations over local political-economy? Or is secession motivated by non-material factors, such as pride in one’s ethnic group? I think that both sets of considerations are present in helping to shape an individual’s stance. But I think that the set of considerations that is more relevant is largely dependent on the relative wealth of the secessionist region compared to the rest of the host state.

In regions that are relatively wealthy, such as Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in the United Kingdom, I expect that material factors will play the dominant role in motivating individuals’ stances on secession. This is because relatively rich regions stand to gain financially from secession because seceding from the host state means ending redistribution to poorer regions of the host state. Thus, the wealth generated in the secessionist region remains within the region. Conversely, in regions that are relatively poor, like Puerto Rico (United States) or New Caledonia (French overseas territory), the material benefits from seceding from the host state are unclear. In fact, secession could harm the region’s economy. This is because poor regions in the host state are beneficiaries of redistribution within the host state. Therefore, it seems to me that absent clear material benefits from secession, non-material considerations would play a stronger role in motivating individuals’ support for secession.

This theory does not mean that I think that only material considerations matter in relatively rich regions and that only non-material considerations matter in relatively poor regions. I expect that a variety of factors influence an individual’s support for secession. However, I expect that material considerations are overall comparatively stronger than non-material considerations in relatively rich regions (and vice versa in comparatively poor regions).

Thus, my theoretical framework generates two testable hypotheses:

- Hypothesis: In relatively rich regions, material factors have a stronger role in motivating individuals to support secession than do non-material factors.
- Hypothesis: In relatively poor regions, non-material factors have a stronger role in motivating individuals to support secession than do material factors.

## Methods

I conducted interviews with political elites as well as ordinary citizens in Montenegro and Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 2021 to understand what motivated

individuals to support secessionist initiatives in each context. In each location, I interviewed local politicians, journalists, academics, and other students and asked why a secessionist movement emerged in each region. I also discussed my participants’ stance on secession as well as why they adopted this stance.

*Context – Montenegro*

Unlike most of the other constituent republics, Montenegro did not secede from Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Instead, it remained in the rump state Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FR Yugoslavia) alongside Serbia. In 2003, FR Yugoslavia became the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. In May 2006, Montenegrin authorities held a referendum on the secession of Montenegro from the State Union. 55 percent of voters voted in favor of secession. Consequently, Montenegro became independent in June 2006.

For much of its history, Montenegro was one of the poorer regions of Yugoslavia. However, toward the late 1990s and in the early 2000s, Montenegro’s economy began to grow faster than that of Serbia (World Bank Data). Therefore, Montenegro became a relatively rich region in the state of Serbia and Montenegro.

*Context – Republika Srpska*

Republika Srpska is one of two entities that comprise Bosnia. It was first established in 1992 by representatives of the Serbian population in Bosnia with the stated objective of safeguarding the interests of Bosnian Serbs (at the time, Bosnia was still formally part of Yugoslavia). The Dayton Accords, which ended the Bosnian War (1992 – 1995), established Bosnia as an independent state with a federal structure, divided between the Republika Srpska and the Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). According to the most recent census data, ethnic Serbs comprise 81.6 percent of the population of Republika Srpska. 92 percent of Bosnian Serbs live within the borders of Republika Srpska.

In recent years, the leadership of Republika Srpska has been vocal about the possibility of seceding from Bosnia. Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska from 2010-2018, publicly advocated for the right of Republika Srpska to secede from Bosnia. Dodik has frequently announced plans to hold a referendum in Republika Srpska on secession. In 2021, he announced the withdrawal of Republika Srpska from participation in several Bosnian federal institutions, such as the armed forces, judiciary, and tax administration.

Republika Srpska is a relatively poor part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Jobs are scarce. It is suffering a brain drain as many young and educated residents have moved to Western Europe to find employment.

Results

*Montenegro – Primacy of Material Considerations*

My interviews in Montenegro suggested that the primary motivation behind support for secession was the desire for an independent Montenegro to control its own policies and resources. From my interviews, there were two main political-economic factors that motivated individuals to support secession. The first was a desire to have greater control over policymaking and local wealth. A common answer that was repeated throughout several interviews was: “We wanted to control our own house.” Many informants who supported independence mentioned that they believed that independence would be a way for Montenegro to improve its economy through attracting foreign direct investment and having more control over revenue generated from tourism.

Anger in Montenegro was also high over Serbia’s involvement in wars in countries of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. In the 1990s, FR Yugoslavia, dominated by Serbian leadership, was involved in bloody wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Croatia. As part of FR Yugoslavia, Montenegrins participated alongside the Serbs, but the conflicts in BiH and Croatia proved deeply unpopular among the Montenegrin public. My informants stated that as the wars in BiH and Croatia dragged on, the Montenegrin public began to view these wars as an expression of Serbian nationalism and expansionism that did not concern Montenegro. When war broke out between FR Yugoslavia and Kosovo in 1997, Montenegro did not participate in the conflict, which was again viewed as a manifestation of Serbian nationalism. However, Montenegro was still subjected to international sanctions and bombings against FR Yugoslavia. This contributed to a feeling in Montenegro that Montenegrins were being punished for the actions of the Serbians. According to my informants, this led many Montenegrins to view secession from FR Yugoslavia as a way for Montenegro to make policies that better reflected their own interests, rather than being subjected to policies designed by the Serbians.

The other factor that I often heard from pro-secessionists was frustration with the unequal treatment of Montenegro by Serbia. Respondents frequently referenced the “big brother/little brother” relationship between Serbia and Montenegro and discussed how Montenegro was marginalized by Serbian policies. Serbia had nearly ten times the population size of Montenegro. Moreover, the capital of FR Yugoslavia and the country’s institutions were located in Serbia. This dynamic led many Montenegrins to feel that they were on an unequal footing vis-à-vis the Serbians. Many perceived that Montenegro was the junior partner in the relationship and that Serbia treated Montenegro unfairly. For instance, during federal elections, all of Montenegro comprised one electoral unit, whereas Serbian towns with populations smaller than that of all of Montenegro were designated as their own electoral units, a move that many suspected was designed to favor Serbian interests and parties. In fact, one respondent flatly said: “Maybe if Serbia had the mentality of treating us [Montenegro] as an equal partner, we would still be one country. But of course, that’s not the mentality they had.”

Non-material considerations were also mentioned in the Montenegrin case, but to a lesser degree. In Montenegro, support for secession coalesced largely along lines of ethnic self-identification. Individuals who self-identified as “Montenegrin” were more likely to support to independence. These individuals believed that Montenegrins were a separate ethnic group from Serbs and as such deserved their own independent state. A related point that was mentioned frequently by supporters of independence was the desire to “restore” the independent Montenegrin state that ceased to exist in 1918. In fact, many supporters of independence with whom I spoke affirmed that Montenegro did not “gain” independence in 2006 – it “restored” or “regained” its independence. Thus, secession represented an opportunity for Montenegrins to have their own independent state. However, other comments that I received suggested that this ethnic self-identification may be at least partially endogenous to the secessionist movement. Some individuals supported secession because they supported the politician who eventually came to be the head of the secessionist movement in Montenegro, Milo Đukanović. Đukanović became president of Montenegro in 1998, before secession became a salient issue in Montenegro. However, over the years, he began to champion the cause of Montenegrin secession from FR Yugoslavia/Serbia and Montenegro. Đukanović was a very divisive figure in Montenegrin politics. According to my interviewees, he portrayed himself as representative of the Montenegrin nation and styled himself as being truly Montenegrin. Therefore, many of his supporters adopted the Montenegrin identity to emulate their leader. On the other hand, Đukanović’s embrace of everything Montenegrin led

many of his opponents to eschew the Montenegrin self-identity. Many of these people came to self-identify as Serbian rather than Montenegrin. Therefore, while it is true that it appears that many of those who supported Montenegro’s secession from the State Union cherished their Montenegrin identity, it is difficult to assert that the decision to assert this identity was completely exogenous.

*Republika Srpska – Primacy of Non-Material Considerations*

My interviews in Republika Srpska suggested that non-material considerations are the primary motivator of support for secession. When I asked individuals who supported secession to explain the reasons behind their support, one of the most common responses that I received was: “We are Serbs, after all. Why should we stay with Bosnia? We should be with our ‘Serbian nation’ (*srpski narod*) and unite with our brothers in Serbia.” They pointed out that the Dayton Accords imposed a border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, thus dividing the ethnic Serb population without the consent of this group. According to my respondents, the Dayton Accords forcibly separated Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina from Serbs in Serbia, forcing the former to live in a state with other groups rather than with co-ethnics. Many respondents argued that Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not consent to the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead, a border was drawn without their consent.

Another extremely common response to my question of why individuals supported secession was that they did not believe that coexistence with other ethnic groups in Bosnia is possible. Many pro-secession respondents spoke at length about atrocities committed against ethnic Serbs in Republika Srpska during World War II at the hands of ethnic Croats and Bosniaks. This conflict seems to loom large in the collective consciousness of inhabitants in Republika Srpska, as many participants referenced the events of World War II while trying to explain the current situation in the country. Several also expressed fear that Bosniaks and Croats would overrun Serbs in Bosnia by attempting to centralize the country and abolish the entities. Some mentioned that for the time being, the existence of Republika Srpska provides them some protection against the Bosniaks and Croats, but seceding from Bosnia would provide the Serbs with even greater protection from interethnic strife. Thus, interethnic tensions and concerns over security seem to be a powerful motivation for secessionist support.

What about the role of material considerations in the case of Republika Srpska? None of my respondents expressed any sense that secession would improve the economy of Republika Srpska. In fact, respondents were often pessimistic about the consequences of secession for the local economy. Many pointed to the mass emigration of young people, the depopulation of villages, and the irregular geography of Republika Srpska as factors that demonstrated the fragility of Republika Srpska’s economy. With the uncertainty associated with secession, my respondents were not optimistic that the local economy would perform well given the aforementioned factors. One respondent pointed out that an independent Republika Srpska would struggle to maintain the massive government apparatus that it has created with the help of foreign funds that are given to Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, if Republika Srpska were to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina, it would likely no longer have access to these funds.

Several respondents indicated that they opposed secession out of fear that the economic consequences of secession would destroy Republika Srpska. However, there were several respondents who acknowledged the potential economic dislocation that Republika Srpska would suffer in the event of secession but still pledged their support for secession. When I asked these participants why they would support secession even if it meant a worsening in living conditions

and the local economy, they responded that they considered that even if Republika Srpska were poor, it would “at least be safe from the Bosniaks and Croats who threaten the Serbs in Bosnia”. Others said that independence or union with Serbia would enable the inhabitants of Republika Srpska to reaffirm their Serbian identity and nationhood.

Thus, it seems that non-material considerations, such as desires to obtain “security” from other ethnic groups in Bosnia and to reaffirm cultural identity, play a central role in motivating support for secession in Republika Srpska. In my opinion, these considerations reflect theories from political psychology that explain non-material motivations for supporting initiatives that do not seem to bring any material benefits. For instance, social identity theory posits that individuals have positive in-group bias, meaning that individuals will tend to have positive evaluations of other individuals whom they perceive belong to their social group (Tajfel 1970, Tajfel and Turner 1979). They can expect to receive favorable treatment from in-group members, and thus if members of their in-group are in power, they can expect favorable treatment from the new government. Individuals can also achieve positive self-esteem benefits from feeling like they are a part of a group. They can also derive a sense of security from seeing their in-group in charge. It seems that these mechanisms manifest themselves in the case of Republika Srpska and might explain why individuals are choosing to forego the economic benefits of union with Bosnia and Herzegovina and embrace the uncertainty associated with secession. While individuals may find their standard of living lowered due to secession, it seems that they believe that the utility that they receive from feelings of membership would offset these potential economic losses.

#### *Preliminary Evidence from Other Contexts*

Beyond Montenegro and Republika Srpska, I have some suggestive evidence from other cases that supports my theory. A small number of preliminary interviews with individuals from Scotland and Puerto Rico suggest that individual support for secession in each case is consistent with my prediction that in relatively wealthy regions, material considerations drive support for secession more than non-material considerations, while the opposite is true in relatively poor regions. In Scotland, a relatively rich region of the United Kingdom, interviewees have highlighted that they consider that support for independence is motivated by a desire to have more control over local policy and resources, especially oil. Indeed, an examination of the rhetoric employed by leaders of the Scottish National Party and the advocacy group Yes Scotland highlights that the main reason that Scotland should seek independence is to align policies more closely to the views of the average Scottish voter. One campaign video highlighted that Scotland voted for the United Kingdom to remain in the European Union in the 2016 Brexit referendum, yet despite the wishes of a majority of Scottish voters, the United Kingdom left the European Union because other regions of the UK had a majority vote for “Leave”. Thus, Scotland’s preferences were overridden by the rest of the United Kingdom. The pro-independence camp in Scotland has downplayed the “ethnic” or “cultural” factor, emphasizing that an independent Scotland is open to anyone regardless of nationality or ethnicity.

Puerto Rico is a relatively poor region that is heavily dependent on economic transfers from the United States. My interviews with Puerto Ricans suggest that support for secession in Puerto Rico is rooted in cultural nationalism rather than being motivated by material factors. As in Republika Srpska, many of my Puerto Rican respondents indicated that they believed that secession would have severe adverse economic consequences for Puerto Rico. Instead, support for

secession appears rooted in a desire to protect Puerto Rican culture and the Spanish language from the pressures exerted by the United States over Puerto Rican society.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study is still in very early stages and thus a considerable amount of future research still needs to be conducted. Obviously, it is impossible to draw meaningful inferences from a handful of interviews in only two cases. An important limitation of interviews is that many answers that respondents provide can be post hoc rationalizations of their motivations, especially in cases where secession occurred a while ago (as in the case of Montenegro, where I conducted interviews fifteen years after secession). To overcome these limitations, I am developing some strategies to test my theory in a systematic manner across other secessionist cases.

#### *Cross-Regional Comparison of Relatively Wealthy and Relatively Poor Regions*

I believe that surveys and survey experiments can be an effective way of testing my theory and understanding what motivates individuals to support secession. The ideal strategy would be to compare individuals in a wealthier-than-average region to their counterparts in a poorer-than-average region, especially within the same country. Conducting the study in regions within the same country allows us to control for several factors. Suitable countries for such a study could be Russia or the United Kingdom, which are both home to numerous secessionist movements in regions of varying relative wealth.

A very tentative design of the survey could be to divide participants into two treatment groups and a control group. In the first treatment group, participants will be exposed to vignettes highlighting material factors in the region, such as the amount of wealth that is redistributed out of the region or the natural resource endowment of the region. In the second treatment group, participants would be exposed to vignettes that highlight non-material concerns, such as the status of a local language or possible threats to a social group. The control group would receive vignettes that contain mundane news relating to the region. At some point, individuals in each group would be asked whether they support secession for the region. I would then expect to see that in a wealthier-than-average region, exposure to vignettes on material factors would have a greater effect on support for secession than would exposure to vignettes on non-material factors. I expect that the reverse would be true in the poorer-than-average region.

Additionally, I might want to introduce even more complexity into the model by examining individual heterogeneity in economic status within each region. I develop a typology that considers potential redistributive flows if the secessionist region became independent. According to this typology, it is possible that secessionist stances stem from an individual’s economic position within the region as well as the region’s relative economic position within the state.

Table 1. Typology of Redistributive Flows After Secession

	Relatively Wealthy Individual	Relatively Poor Individual
Relatively Wealthy Region	Might lose out a little from redistribution, but probably doesn’t have a lot to lose.	Stands to gain from secession because they will receive more from redistribution.



Relatively Poor Region	Stands to lose from secession because of increased redistributive burden.	Does not really stand to gain much from secession, but also doesn't have anything to lose.
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Within this framework, I could test the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis: Relatively poor individuals in relatively wealthy regions are more likely to support secession, because they stand to benefit from redistribution flows in the new state.
- Hypothesis: Relatively wealthy individuals in relatively poor regions are more likely to oppose secession, because they stand to lose from redistribution flows in the new state.
- Hypothesis: Relatively wealthy individuals in relatively wealthy regions, and relatively poor individuals in relatively poor regions, will have relatively ambiguous stances on secession. They are more susceptible to attitude change toward secession. This is because while it is not immediately clear that they would benefit from redistributive flows in the new state, they also do not stand to lose very much from redistributive flows in the new state.

#### *Examination of Non-Material Motivations*

It can be difficult to disentangle non-material considerations from material considerations. To test my theory on the role of non-material factors in motivating support for secession, I think that it could be useful to do a survey in Republika Srpska. Republika Srpska is poorer compared to the rest of Bosnia. In keeping with my theory, I would expect that the driving force behind individuals' support for the secession of Republika Srpska stems from non-material considerations. I conducted exploratory fieldwork in Republika Srpska and interviewed elites and non-elites about their stances on the potential secession of Republika Srpska. It seems to me that for people who support secession, non-material considerations are much more important than material considerations.

What non-material benefits do supporters of secession think they will receive if Republika Srpska secedes from Bosnia? From my interviews, it seems that individuals believe that secession would provide them protection from other ethnic groups. Many Serbs with whom I spoke in Republika Srpska were convinced that there would be interethnic conflict and feared living in a state dominated by Bosniaks. Thus, a non-material benefit from secession could be a sense of security for Serbs in Republika Srpska: if Republika Srpska secedes from Bosnia, then the threat from Bosniaks and Croats toward Serbs would be neutralized. I would therefore expect that individuals who experienced violence or displacement during periods of interethnic conflict, such as during the Bosnian War (or even during World War II), would be more likely to support secession. I would also be interested in seeing how individuals' perceptions of the other ethnic groups relate to individuals' stances on secession. I expect that individuals who report more negative perceptions of Bosniaks, Croats, and other ethnic groups will be more likely to support

the secession of Republika Srpska. This could perhaps be measured through examining individuals’ level of trust in these groups.

Therefore, I think it would be interesting to examine how non-material factors affect support for secession through a case study of Republika Srpska. A survey could measure individuals’ views of ethnic out-groups such as Bosniaks and Croats as well as whether/how people were personally affected by the Bosnian War (or if their families were affected during World War II). With this, I could see whether individuals who report more negative views of out-groups or who were affected by interethnic conflict are more likely to support secession. Through the survey, I could test the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis: Individuals with lower levels of trust in other ethnic groups are more likely to support secession.
- Hypothesis: Individuals who were victims of interethnic conflict are more likely to support secession.

### Intellectual Merit

The examination of individual support for secession is aimed at building a theory of what drives individuals to support secessionist initiatives. I introduce a theory that explores the interaction between material considerations (such as those related to the economy) and non-material considerations (culture) in regions of varying relative wealth. This study departs from much of the extant work on individual support for secession, which has tended to focus nearly exclusively on the role of personal characteristics in structuring preferences.

Beyond the academic sphere, secession has important consequences for geopolitics, economy, and security. Many secessionist movements have turned violent, leading to mass displacement and death of citizens. The Bosnian War left more than 100,000 dead. More than 2.2 million people were forced to flee their homes during the conflict. The continued violent rhetoric of sectors of the secessionist campaign in Republika Srpska, coupled with the fragile political institutions in Bosnia and growing authoritarianism in neighboring states, exposes the potential of secession to have dark consequences for the inhabitants of the region. The litany of unresolved secessionist conflicts in the former Soviet space, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, eastern Ukraine, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, have caused many deaths and displacement. Moreover, these conflicts have led to diplomatic rifts and military tensions between the world’s major powers. Even in cases where secession has not (yet) turned violent, the consequences of secession are substantial. In the case of Scotland, for instance, secession would cause enormous dislocation to the UK, European, and global economies. This could also have important ramifications for security (leading to the dismemberment of a NATO member) and geopolitics. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand not only what catalyzes the emergence of secessionist movement, but also what pushes individuals to support the disintegration of the countries in which they live.

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