



# 7.1 Country Brief: A social psychological perspective on trends of extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

March 2024

Adnan Pečković, Jasmin Jašarević

PRONI Centre for Youth Development



## About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and broader social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) to move towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. We intend to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, including a sense of being victimised, being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures and coming under the influence of “us vs them” identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts, including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation-states adapt to new security challenges. Mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts is crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that radicalisation processes often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national justice frameworks. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation is central to the project’s aims.

## Executive Summary

This country brief summarises the survey findings for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It then embeds the survey findings within a national and cultural context for each country. The aim of these summaries is to situate the findings within their respective sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts. The literature review and rationale for the proposed model, analysis of the full dataset, and discussion can be found in the full 7.1 report, which also contains the country briefs.

## **Table of Contents**

<b><i>About the Project</i></b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b><i>Executive Summary</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>1. Results</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>2. Situating the findings within the Bosnia and Herzegovina context</i></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><i>3. References</i></b> .....	<b>10</b>

# 1. Results

Bosnia and Herzegovina had 33.04% of participants reporting not knowing their political attitudes. These participants were kept, but the variable was removed from the path model, resulting in a sample of  $n = 336$ .

## Descriptives

### Breakdown by age and sex.

Mean age (SD)	Sex					
	Male		Female		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
27.39 (8.59)	159	47.32	177	52.68	0	0.00

### Breakdown by religious affiliation.

	n	%
Muslim	195	58.04
Christian	100	29.76
Other	20	5.95
Agnostic/Atheist	20	5.95
Buddhist	1	0.30
Jewish	0	0.00
Bahá'í	0	0.00
Hindu	0	0.00
Sikh	0	0.00

**Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in this country?**

	n	%
Yes	77	22.92
No	212	63.10
Don't know	47	13.99

### Breakdown of belonging to a group that is discriminated against.

**On what grounds is your group discriminated against?**

	n	%
Nationality	45	58.44
Religion	44	57.14
Language	17	22.08
Ethnic group	15	19.48
Other	9	11.69

Sexuality	8	10.39
Age	6	7.79
Gender	6	7.79
Disability	3	3.90
Colour or race	0	0.00

Note: participants were allowed to select multiple groups. As such, proportions will not necessarily add to 100%

**Breakdown of different organizations participants reported being members of (active or inactive) or not.**

	Active		Inactive		Not a member	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Church or religious organization	124	36.90	95	28.27	117	34.82
Sport or recreational organization	96	28.57	86	25.60	154	45.83
Art, music or educational organization	95	28.27	74	22.02	167	49.70
Labour union	46	13.69	91	27.08	199	59.23
Political party	39	11.61	89	26.49	208	61.90
Environmental organization	61	18.15	89	26.49	186	55.36
Professional association	62	18.45	90	26.79	184	54.76
Humanitarian or charitable organization	125	37.20	79	23.51	132	39.29
Consumer organization	39	11.61	83	24.70	214	63.69
Self-help group or mutual help group	50	14.88	69	20.54	217	64.58
Women's group	64	19.05	64	19.05	208	61.9
Other organization	29	8.63	52	15.48	255	75.89

**Breakdown of different political actions participants reported taking in the last 12 months.**

	Yes		No		Missing value	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contacted a politician or government official	79	23.51	230	68.45	27	8.04
Worked in a political party or action group	65	19.35	251	74.70	20	5.95
Worked in another ideological organization	41	12.20	271	80.65	24	7.14
Displayed a campaign badge/sticker	51	15.18	260	77.38	25	7.44
Signed a petition	162	48.21	149	44.35	25	7.44
Took part in a lawful public demonstration	87	25.89	224	66.67	25	7.44
Boycotted certain products	120	35.71	187	55.65	29	8.63
Posted or shared anything about politics online	111	33.04	195	58.04	30	8.93

**Predictors of realistic threat**

Holding stronger beliefs about group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was linked with perceiving migrants as a threat to one's national ingroup.

**Direct predictors of extremism**

Holding stronger beliefs about group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. In terms of relational factors, higher collective

narcissism and perceiving that one's national ingroup was more economically deprived relative to migrants were both associated with increased support of extremist attitudes. In terms of vulnerability, experiencing increased social alienation and decreased social cohesion both predicted greater support for extremist attitudes.

### Indirect predictors on extremism

SDO did not have any significant indirect effects on extremist attitudes, nor was the sum of these statistically significant. Rather than indirectly influencing extremism via other variables, greater SDO directly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes.

A stronger online group identity indirectly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes via increased collective narcissism and increased social alienation. On the other hand, a stronger online group identity predicted increased social cohesion and increased social cohesion subsequently predicted decreased support for extremist attitudes. The total indirect of online group identity on support for extremist attitudes was not significant.

### Predictors of attitudes towards Russian culture, Russian and Ukrainian migrants

None of the variables of interest (i.e. social dominance orientation, online group identity, collective narcissism, anomie, individual and group relative deprivation, social cohesion, social alienation, populism, political trust, perceptions of migrants as realistic threats, support for extremist attitudes) reliably predicted attitudes towards Russian culture or Russian or Ukrainian migrants.

**Figure 4. Respecified model for Bosnia and Herzegovina.**



## 2. Situating the findings within the Bosnia and Herzegovina context

This report aims to provide information about the sense of discrimination retrieved from the D.Rad survey implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It includes information about the group affiliations of participants and their sense of discrimination. The survey also informs about participants' membership in different religious, cultural, professional, humanitarian or other types of organisations. To provide clear information about the grounds of discrimination, the analysis will also discuss the correlations of the sense of discrimination according to sex, age, and membership of a particular group. The report will also analyse the paths to extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The survey recognises two different types of paths to extremism: direct and indirect pathways to extremism.

Since Bosnia and Herzegovina is a deeply ethnically divided country, which is a direct consequence of the war that took place from 1992 – 1995 and ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995, we still witness discrimination based on ethnical background, which can cause an extremist reaction among members of groups that are being discriminated. Radical right-wing political rhetoric and actions, ethnically divided school curriculums, and high unemployment are certainly all factors that contribute to the rise of extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pečković 2018, IRI 2017, RAN 2022). Ethnicity or religious affiliation is not the only grounds for discrimination in Bosnia. The LGBT population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is often discriminated against and even physically attacked. For instance, a physical attack happened in Banja Luka (A city in north-west Bosnia and Herzegovina) in March 2023 when several activists were injured (RFE/RL's Balkan Service, 2023).

### Overview

336 participants completed the survey, of which 159 (47.32% of all participants) were male and 177 (52.68%) were female. On average, participants were 27.39 years old. Most participants have declared themselves as Muslims (58.04 %). Christians are in second place (29.76 %). After that are Others and Agnostics/Atheists (both 5.95 %).

A significant number of participants feel that they belong to a group that has been discriminated against. Namely, 22 % of participants say that they belong to a group that has been discriminated against, 63.10 % say that they do not feel that their group has been discriminated and 13.99 % are not sure if their group has been discriminated against. Most participants were discriminated against based on nationality (58.44 %) and religion (57.14 %). At this point, it is important to mention two phenomena: in Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion and nationality are closely connected. In most cases, Serbs are Orthodox Christians, and Bosniaks are Muslims. The other phenomenon is that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the political rhetoric casts ethnicities as nations. It is a complex historical issue that demands detailed explanation that is not in the scope of this report. 10.39 % of participants feel discriminated against according to their sexuality.

One of the examples of ethnic discrimination is the case of official language used in the Republic of Srpska (One of the two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina). In Konjević Polje (a



town in east Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska) parents of school children from a local school lead a struggle for their children to learn Bosnian, the language in their school, which is one of the three officially recognised languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Serb language, Croat language and Bosnian Language). Serb authorities have called this language a “language of Bosniak people”, which the parents strongly object to and feel that they and their children are discriminated against since the Bosnian language is officially recognised in Bosnia and Herzegovina (N1, 2022).

The discrimination against the LGBT population was shown in the case of the physical attack on an LGBT activist in Banja Luka on 18.03.2023. A few hours after the police banned the LGBT event, activists met to discuss further activities. During their meeting, they were attacked, and several activists suffered injuries during the attack (CRD, 2023).

All these facts support the thesis mentioned in the introductory part of this report that says that most discriminations in Bosnia and Herzegovina are based on nationality (ethnicity) and sexual orientation.

Most of the participants have reported to be members of some organisation. A significant number of participants (61.90 %) has said to be a member of some political party. According to the National Youth Survey in Bosnia and Herzegovina implemented by USAID, the “*largest proportion of youth prefer working for the government/public sector (36 %) (USAID, 2022).* Being a member of a high-ranking political party increases the opportunities to be employed in the public sector, which guarantees high salaries and safer jobs than the private sector. A large number of participants claim to be members of environmental organisations (55.36 %) or organisations such as women's groups (61.9 %), self-help groups, or mutual help groups (64.58 %). This indicates a high level of social consonance among the participants about issues meant to be for the greater good of the community. Many participants are members of humanitarian or charitable organisations (39.29 %), which indicates an awareness of the necessity to help those in need.

Although 61.09 % of the participants claimed to be a member of some political party, only 19.35 % reported to have worked in a political party or action group in the past 12 months. This could be interpreted as many of them having left the political parties or being inactive members of some political party. The most important political activism of the participants could be seen in the signing of different petitions. Namely, 48,21 % have signed a petition in the past 12 months. These results show low political activism among people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the Youth Study in Bosnia and Herzegovina states (2018), the level of trust of Bosnian and Herzegovinian youth towards politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina is on a very low level. „*Trust in political institutions, including the BiH Presidency, the national Parliament, government and political parties is extremely low. The political system of the country favours informal decision-making between party leaders behind closed doors rather than open and inclusive deliberation, thus limiting avenues for citizens to take direct action*“ (Turčilo, 2018)

According to the survey, members of the groups that have been discriminated against reported greater perceptions of individual relative deprivation (Individual relative deprivation) than members of groups that are not discriminated against. This could come from the fact that members of discriminated groups do not belong to the dominant culture in Bosnia and

Herzegovina. This, again, means that their nationality is not in the majority in the place where they live; they belong to the LGBT population or some other minority group. Participants from discriminated groups have also reported that they, as a group (group relative deprivation-Group relative deprivation), are worse than the groups that are not discriminated against. This means that they perceive themselves discriminated against both on the individual and the collective level. This, again, leads to the feeling of social alienation of members of discriminated groups, which participants (members of discriminated groups) reported.

Participants from discriminated or socially alienated groups reported greater support for extremist attitudes. Social alienation creates a sense of social injustice and grievance, which are among the main push factors for extremist behaviour or joining extremist and radical groups (Oruč & Obradović, 2020). So, if the individuals do not feel attached to their community and feel isolated, there is a great danger that they will seek validation elsewhere, possibly in some of the radical or extremist groups. Considering the correlations with the age of the participants, the survey has shown that older participants share less right-wing values and have less trust in the national political system.

The survey has shown that discrimination is still widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Discrimination is mainly directed toward minority groups, such as ethnic minorities in different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a direct consequence of territorial divisions on the ethnic basis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or minority groups such as the LGBT or Roma population. All of the above mentioned shows the need to question dominant cultures, such as ethnic superiority culture that believes in having the right to dominate territories that mostly remained on the combat lines from the war during the 90s.

The ethnic divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are incorporated in the Bosnian Constitution, based on the Dayton Peace Agreement in distinguishing the three constituent peoples (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks) from others who, according to the electoral law, cannot run themselves for the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina or for the Home of the Peoples. This showcases the institutionalisation of ethnic segregation and discrimination against citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who are not members of the three constituent nationalities. Institutionalised ethnic segregation is also present in the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the sense that three different school curriculums are official in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Serb, Croat and Bosnian) depending on which nationality is in the majority in particular part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### 3. References

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Attitudes on Violent Extremism and Foreign Influence (2017), International Republican Institute

Buljubašić M. (2022), Violent Right-Wing Extremism in the Western Balkans, Radicalisation Awareness Network

Civil Right Defenders (2023), Violent attack on LGBTI+ people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Available at: <https://crd.org/2023/03/20/violent-attack-on-lgbti-people-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>

Imamović A. (2022), Decenija mukotrpane borbe za bosanski jezik u Republici Srpskoj (Decade of hard struggle for Bosnian Language in Republic of Srpska), N1, Available at: <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/decenija-mukotrpane-borbe-za-bosanski-jezik-u-republici-srpskoj/>

National Youth Survey in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022), Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity II, USAID Bosnia and Herzegovina

Oruč N. & Obradović N. (2022), Drivers of radicalisation of youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja, 33:1, 2559-2573

Pečković A. (2018), Contemporary Youth in Bosnian Society: Challenges and attitudes towards radicalisation and extremism, PRONI Center for Youth Development

