

Ethnic Empowerment in Europe: A Framework for Assessing Its Effects

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Abstract

Ethnic diversity is a common feature of many societies and increasing number of European states manage diversity through some form of ethnic empowerment. Nevertheless, the final effect of protection and empowerment of ethnic difference is unclear. I develop a framework which accounts for different types or ethnic groups and modes of their empowerment, with the goal to evaluate its effects in the political arena and wider society. Methodologically, I use inductive approach based on semi-structured interviews with elite actors from political parties, civil society, state institutions, and experts on ethnic politics. I aim to understand how ethnic empowerment and ethnic issues broadly defined are perceived and framed. To account for cross-country variation in degree of salience of ethnic issues, I examine countries with widely different ethnic cleavages and centrality of ethnic politics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Sweden. I point at the limitations of models of ethnic empowerment that focus on institutional solutions, elites, and the political sphere. Instead, informal interethnic contact among ethnically diverse population appears to be one of the key challenges with potential for minimizing ethnic polarization and achieving better interethnic relations.

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Introduction

European societies are diverse and there is an increasing push to politically recognize this fact. While people with different ethno-cultural backgrounds commonly live together, securing their equality and shared participation in political and social life has never been easy. Managing diverse societies requires political inclusion of diverse populations, guarding against discrimination targeting minorities, developing channels for different individuals and groups to communicate with state institutions on equal terms, preventing animosities between ethno-cultural groups, and rejecting forced assimilation of those that are different. European countries have historically struggled with diversity, with anti-diversity outbursts ranging from genocide and ethnic cleansing to ethnic segregation and assimilation. Even today, the debates centered on diversity are far from settled. For example, despite promoting the value of diversity (which is symbolized by the motto of the European Union, “United in Diversity,” or the work of the Council of Europe¹), the use of policies promoting cultural diversity, especially for immigrant minorities, is contested (cf., Banting and Kymlicka 2013; Joppke 2017) even though the evidence shows that multicultural policies generally promote integration (Bloemraad and Wright 2014; Breton 2019; Wright and Bloemraad 2012). Even historical “national” minorities are not always recognized in collective terms. State responses to the presence of historical ethnic minorities in Europe range from their almost complete disregard to a full-blown political system based on ethnic power sharing at the other end of the spectrum. Ultimately, there is no single

¹ In particular, the adoption of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* in 1994.

standard for managing ethnic diversity. Thus, assessing the effects of policies that recognize and empower ethnic identity across countries and ethnic groups, accounting for different historical conditions, extent of ethnic demands, and interethnic relations is difficult.

Managing diversity relies on several distinctive modes of ethnocultural recognition and empowerment. In practice, empowerment of ethnic identity can occur through (1) political representation, (2) self-government, or (3) cultural recognition. This distinction follows well-known typologies of political recognition of diversity (or, collective ethnic rights) that distinguish between ethnic political representation (usually through ethnic quotas), territorial self-government (through ethno-territorial autonomy), and a set of collective ethnocultural rights (Ghai 2002; Kymlicka 1995). Any serious attempt to understand the effects of ethnic empowerment requires accounting for nature of ethnic diversity and positions of ethnic groups, since those aspects condition ethnic mobilization and demands. Finally, to complicate things even further, we cannot forget that ethnic empowerment is inherently relational. In other words, it makes little sense to evaluate ethnic empowerment without referring to interaction between ethnic groups that share political and social space. Empirically, one has to decide which aspects of ethnic empowerment to focus on, keeping in mind comparability across widely different cases.

In this paper, I aim to develop a framework for assessing effects of ethnic empowerment in its different forms. I rely on typology of ethnic groups and different modes of ethnic empowerment. I assess the success of ethnic empowerment accounting for narrower political and broader societal effects. I aim to move beyond the institutional approach, which is commonly used in comparative literature on ethnic politics by expanding lenses through which we investigate ethnic diversity. This framework is a product of inductive approach, using the semi-

structured interviews with the variety of stakeholders and experts on ethnic politics in four widely different European countries. The conversations with different elite respondents revealed the inadequacy of narrow approach that focuses on relatively easily quantifiable aspects related to inclusion through political institutions, leaving out more amorphous societal aspects of ethnic empowerment, seen through broader interethnic relations. These aspects are often left out, and they provide an important counterpoint to the issues of ethnic empowerment.

I organize this paper in the following way. The literature review shows that the abundant work on ethnic empowerment tends to focus on specific types of empowerment, and specific types of ethnic groups (usually minorities). I then present the integrative framework that connects types of ethnic diversity to modes of their empowerment, providing guidelines for evaluating its effects. I provide empirical illustration using the cases with widely different configurations of ethnic diversity and the modes for its empowerment, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Sweden. I end the paper by summarizing the contributions, discussing the aspirations, and outlining the future work.

Literature Review

The literature on managing ethnic diversity is enormous. At the same time, this literature is fragmented, since different authors tend to narrow scope conditions and focus on ethnic politics for specific type of ethnic groups/minorities, conditions for ethnic mobilization, and forms of their empowerment. By presenting main research programs centered on questions of ethnic empowerment and managing ethnic diversity, I identify gaps, overlaps, and underlying assumptions, which help to clarify contributions of my project. Here I present the main studies in

comparative politics focused on institutional approach to managing ethnic diversity, immigrant integration, and more normatively driven literature on multiculturalism. I organize this review based on the scope of ethnic empowerment and preferred modes for such empowerment.

I start with the most comprehensive institutional recognition of ethnic identity, exemplified by the studies of consociationalism and ethnic power sharing. Discussion on how to design political institutions in diverse societies often starts with Arend Lijphart (1977), who first developed the concept of consociational democracy, focusing on protection and empowerment of collective identities by securing their political representation (using grand coalition and proportionality), self-government (though segmental autonomy), and cultural recognition (protected by means of mutual veto powers). Initially, this model was used to explain functioning of a limited number of smaller, diverse, and developed democracies, but later he adapted it as a prescription for any diverse or divided society, including post-conflict and democratizing contexts (Lijphart 2004; 2008). His work (and the increased use of consociational prescriptions in practice) inspired investigation of consociationalism, with studies analyzing the logic of institutional focus on groups rather than individuals, pointing at problems with reinforcing ethnic divisions by keeping them politically salient since politicians who act as exclusive representatives of individual ethnic groups benefit more from divisions than compromise (cf., Barry 1975; Horowitz 2014; Norris 2008; O’Flynn and Russell 2005; Reynolds 2002; Roeder and Rothchild 2005; Sisk 1996). The key point in the debate on consociationalism is how best to secure that political institutions are diverse but also consensus-oriented.² One should keep in mind that (at least in the European context) consociationalist political arrangements through

² See debate between Lijphart and Horowitz in Reynolds (2002). The analysis by Elkins and Sides (2007) points at difficulty in building unity in multiethnic states by institutional design choices.

ethnic power-sharing are rare (even though less demanding consensus model of democracy, that employs some consociationalist characteristics is more common; see Lijphart 2012).³ As a model, consociationalism relies on prioritizing ethnic categories and placing emphasis on collective ethnic rights, which are secured through formal institutional arrangements with elite actors functioning as representatives of their ethnic communities.

Scholars have also studied how to secure minority political voice and representation in the context of ethnic diversity. The most direct way of securing ethnic representation is through ethnic quotas (though in Europe they are rarely used). Empirically, ethnic quotas are usually studied together with gender quotas, examining their dissemination, modes of implementation, and effects on representation (Bird 2014; Htun 2004; Krook and O'Brien 2010). Another way to secure ethnic representation is through ethnic parties. They are studied in the context of ethnic political mobilization and electoral politics. Scholars have examined behavior of these parties (in particular, the issue of ethnic outbidding), and the effects that they have on representation, ethnic tensions, and democratic stability (cf., Birnir 2007; Chandra 2005; Flesken 2018; Huber 2012; Ishiyama 2001; 2011; Jenne 2004; Reilly 2006; Zuber and Szöcsik 2015). Here, one should keep in mind that political and academic debates on ethnic political representation have traditionally focused on historical ethnic minorities. This is gradually changing, since scholars like Dancygier (2017; Dancygier et al. 2015) started to investigate political underrepresentation of immigrant minorities in Europe. Aktürk and Katliarou (2020) describe formation of the first successful immigrant ethnic party (with seats in the Dutch parliament) illustrating the need to study emerging political mobilization and representation of immigrant ethnic minorities.

³ For ambiguities in uses of different typologies in works of Lijphart, see Bogaards 2000.

Another approach to ethnic empowerment examines ethnic self-government. Here, the focus is on decentralization along ethnic lines, with scholars examining its logic, practical implementation, and consequences. Some authors warn of centrifugal effects of such institutional solutions (cf., Bunce 1999; Cornell 2002; Roeder 2007), rejecting long-term viability of ethnic decentralization by arguing that ethnic federalism increases risks of dissolution of multiethnic states. Opposite to them, a number of scholars have approached the issue of ethnic decentralization through ethnic devolution and federalism (in its different forms) as a common democratic response to the existence of territorially concentrated ethnic minorities, looking into details of implementation of decentralization in practice to understand what determines success of such institutional arrangements (cf., Amoretti and Bermeo 2004; Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2012; Weller and Nobbs 2010). Naturally, ethnic self-government is only appropriate for geographically concentrated ethnic groups that numerically dominate specific area.

Ethnic empowerment though cultural recognition has received more attention in the studies centered on immigrant communities, especially among the scholars of multiculturalism.⁴ Multiculturalism is used both descriptively to refer to the empirical problems related to ethno-cultural diversity in contemporary states, and prescriptively, justifying such political agenda (as emphasized by Barry 2001, 22; Joppke 2004, 239). Keeping aside the normative part of the debate on the meaning of culture or the role that culture and cultural differences should play in politics, the scholars of multiculturalism also analyze concrete policies of cultural accommodation and their effects (Benhabib 2002; Joppke and Lukes 1999; Kymlicka 1995; 2007; Parekh 2000; Taylor 1994; Triandafyllidou, Modood, and Meer 2012). The critics of

⁴ I keep in mind that in the European context multiculturalism deals exclusively with immigrant minorities and their rights, while scholars of multiculturalism outside of Europe (e.g., Kymlicka) analyze both historical and immigrant groups.

multiculturalism focus on contentious examples where recognition of cultural difference is associated with minority separation and disengagement from the mainstream society, keeping illiberal practices alive, and brining accommodated groups in latent confrontation with the rest of population (Barry 2001; Okin 1999). The issues related to cultural recognition in Europe are commonly framed through the lens of immigration, disregarding that cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon, even if its formal acknowledgment often is.

This leads us to related research agenda in political science, which studies immigrant diversity with the focus on immigrant integration. Here, ethnocultural difference is studied in reference to formal political integration procedures related to citizenship acquisition, linking citizenship and nationhood (cf., Brubaker 1992; Goodman 2010; 2012; 2015; Howard 2009; Jacobs and Rea 2007; Joppke 2007; 2008; Koopmans et al. 2005). The empirical investigation shows that a certain degree of cultural homogeneity among citizens is usually assumed, leading the states to adopt policies requiring proof of immigrants' integration into host/majority culture through language and civic culture tests. This literature displays the other side of diversity management, emphasizing cultural acquisition and adaptation rather than empowerment of cultural difference.

To summarize, the literature on ethnic empowerment commonly sees historical and more recent immigrant diversity as two different phenomena that are rarely studied together (though see Hepburn 2011; Jeram 2013; Winter 2011 on responses of historical minorities to the presence of immigrants). The focus in the literature has been overwhelmingly on political institutions, formal procedures for ethnic empowerment, elite level, and political sphere. Study of immigrant ethnic accommodation and empowerment tends to be restricted to the cultural sphere, putting

empirical focus primarily on most distinctive immigrant communities. Therefore, different types of ethnic diversity are still mostly studied in isolation. There is a need to integrate these insights.

Framework for Evaluating Ethnic Empowerment

I have shown that ethnic empowerment is a multidimensional concept. Its goals are complex and dependent on the nature of ethnic diversity and the wider context that shapes ethnic mobilization and content of ethnic demands. The evaluation of the effects of ethnic empowerment should acknowledge this. For start, one should recognize that ethnic empowerment matters in political arena and that it is relevant for the wider society. In politics, one should pay attention to the issues of political inclusion/parity and evaluate whether political narratives around ethnic issues tend to be positive or confrontational. Outside of politics, one should assess the state of interethnic relations, referring to the presence of discrimination on ethnocultural grounds, inclusion of different groups in society on equal terms, and protection of ethnocultural diversity. While these broad goals can be taken as obvious benchmarks when thinking about the effects of ethnic empowerment, we have to start with a recognition that ethnic empowerment will mean different things for different ethnic groups and that their aspirations and demands will differ. I develop a framework for evaluating effects of ethnic empowerment in stages, accounting for (1) nature of ethnic diversity, (2) modes of ethnic empowerment, and (3) direct and symbolic aspects of such empowerment. Nature of ethnic diversity influences chosen modes of ethnic empowerment, which have direct and symbolic effects (figure 1).

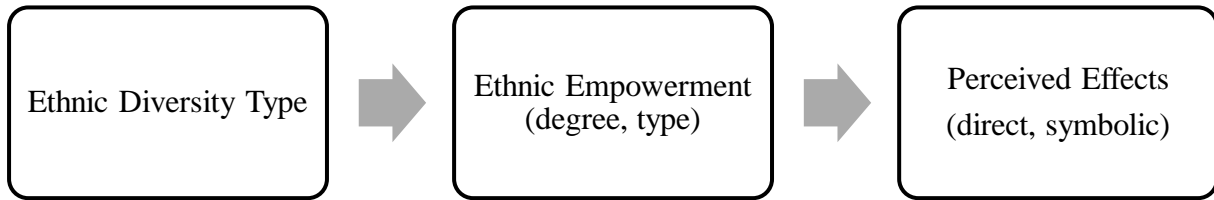


Figure 1. Framework to Study Effects of Ethnic Empowerment

Diversity of Ethnic Diversity

The scholars of ethnic politics recognize two broad patterns of ethnic diversity, the first predating modern state formation (state borders dividing pre-existing ethnic groups), and the second where people move across established state borders (migrate). While this distinction is important, I find it insufficient to fully capture the complexity of ethnic diversity and its management in contemporary states. Another important attribute to consider is an ethnic group's relative size. Related to the group size, the key distinction is whether a particular ethnic group is considered dominant in the state, being widely perceived as "ethnic owner" of the state, or a group has the status of minority.⁵ Ethnic mobilization and demands will be different for a group that sees itself as a constitutive part of the state, compared to minorities. The resulting typology of ethnic groups is based on these criteria, the origins of the ethnic group (historical or immigrant), and the relative position in the state (constitutive or minority), as shown in table 1.⁶

⁵ Empirically, I read the preambles of state constitutions, which usually make a reference to specific core ethnic group, or groups. In Europe, core ethnic group is usually associated with the state name.

⁶ I keep in mind that "historical" status of ethnic groups can be contested, or that immigrant status could be changed with the passing of time. Formal status is important since it indicates the appropriateness of ethnic empowerment. For example, Slovenia chooses to accommodate its small historical Hungarian and Italian minorities by means of ethnic quotas, while it denies any

Constitutive Group	Settler Group
Historical Minority	Immigrant Minority

Table 1. Types of Ethnic Groups

Constitutive Group is an ethnic group that is commonly perceived as a group that establishes and ethnoculturally defines the state. Most European states have a single constitutive group, easily identified by referring to the state name. This does not necessarily have to be the case, as shown by the examples of Belgium or Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the states with a single constitutive group, the issue of ethnic empowerment for such group is redundant since the group determines the ethnocultural profile of the state. In the states with several constitutive groups, the focus of ethnic politics is on parity among constitutive groups, preventing that one group dominates the state at the expense of other(s).

Settler Group marks the situation in which an immigrant group establishes and dominates the state, imposing its cultural norms to the pre-existing/native population. Looking at contemporary European states we cannot find an example of settler groups, which are more commonly associated with the colonial settler states outside of Europe.⁷ Similarly to the constitutive group, given its political domination, the ethnic empowerment of settler group is not an issue. The status of other groups is determined in reference to it.

collective accommodation to more numerous Serb, Croat, and Bosniak minorities, labeling them as newcomers (cf., Sasse 2005).

⁷ For detailed analysis see Pateman and Mills 2007.

Historical Minority is an ethnic group with historical presence in a state and relative minority status (even when such group numerically dominates a particular region of a larger state).

Historical minority is ethnoculturally distinct from the majority (constitutive group[s]), resulting in demands for official recognition of such distinctiveness. The scope and content of the demands may vary considerably, always including cultural recognition (due to its obvious cultural distinctiveness), possibly also self-government (in situations where historical minority claims historical dominance in a particular region), and political representation (where issue is usually framed as a matter of political voice and inclusion, rather than parity).

Immigrant Minority is an ethnic group formed by shared ethnocultural origin through migration in the same receiving state. Immigrant minorities preserve their ethnocultural distinctiveness in a new country, and do not assimilate in a new society. They tend to have lower scope of demands for ethnic empowerment, commonly centered on cultural recognition and (often) antidiscrimination.

Modes of Ethnic Empowerment

As explained before, ethnic empowerment can be achieved in three distinctive ways, by (1) securing ethnic political representation, (2) achieving ethnic self-government in a territory associated with specific ethnicity, and (3) officially recognizing and protecting ethnocultural difference (Ghai 2002; Kymlicka 1995). Broadly speaking, the empowerment concerns both political and societal sphere. In practice, one sphere tends to take a dominant position, and due to its visibility, that is commonly a political sphere. Of course, issues pertaining to political representation and self-government are inherently political. Furthermore, these issues can

relatively easily be framed as zero-sum game: increased representation of one group, *ceteris paribus*, implies decrease for another; political power delegated through ethnic devolution implies less power left to the center. In practice, protection of cultural difference gets more visibility when questions of cultural recognition are framed in confrontational terms, often by political actors (for example, claims of cultural incompatibility voiced by different anti-immigrant parties in Europe). However, one should be aware that ethnic diversity is meaningful for a society at large, not only political actors, and not only ethnic groups/minorities that are formally empowered. The view of ethnic empowerment by non-political actors is less researched.

I approach ethnic empowerment by looking at difference in kind (type of empowerment), and difference in scope (presence of different types at the same time). Table 2 depicts this logic, with shaded cells indicating presence of specific type of ethnic empowerment. Column 1 refers to the cases of ethnic power sharing with maximal level of ethnic empowerment, indicating that political system is centered on protecting ethnic identities, with high salience of ethnic politics, commonly referring to the states with several constitutive groups. Column 2 depicts ethnically decentralized polity, where specific minority achieves territorial and cultural autonomy. Column 3 describes the situation where ethnic group secures political representation, and formal collective recognition in the ethnocultural sphere. Finally, column 4 exemplifies the most common situation where minority benefits from some cultural recognition which does not extend beyond the ethnocultural sphere. One should keep in mind that ethnic empowerment always refers to specific ethnic group(s), and not to the states. The same state can adopt considerably different approaches to ethnic empowerment of different ethnic groups within its territory.

Type of Ethnic Empowerment	1	2	3	4
Political Representation				
Self-Government				
Cultural Recognition				

Table 2. Logic of Ethnic Empowerment

There are several interesting observations that can be made by looking at table 2. First, cultural recognition, or formal acknowledgment of ethnocultural difference, is a necessary part of ethnic empowerment: absent this acknowledgment, we cannot talk about ethnic empowerment.

However, its content depends on the nature of ethnocultural difference, so in practice focus can be on language, religion, or any other distinctive ethnocultural trait. Self-government also requires explicit state action on ethnic decentralization (which can be executed in different ways and to different degrees). This type of ethnic empowerment benefits only territorially concentrated ethnic groups that are large enough to dominate particular region and who live in that region. Finally, ethnic political representation can be achieved even without formal ethnic empowerment. Sometimes, this is promoted through the electoral system of proportional representation, which should aid representation of any smaller group, and implicitly should benefit ethnic minorities and their parties. Next, mainstream parties can include minority representatives, thus increasing descriptive political representation of minorities. Finally, the electoral success of an ethnic party (independently of electoral system used in the country) indicates existence of ethnic political representation, even when such representation occurs despite hostile political system (e.g., Turkish minority party *MRF* in Bulgaria is successful even though ethnic parties are officially banned). The attainment of political representation in practice

effectively removes this “ethnic” demand. For this reason, formal ethnic empowerment through political representation tends to be equated with reserved seats (ethnic quotas), since they require state policy of ethnic empowerment.

Ethnic Empowerment and Its Benefits

I approach ethnic empowerment by accounting for its more direct effects, typical for the political sphere, and indirect symbolic effects, which permeate society beyond politics. In the domain of political representation, direct measurable effects refer to number of seats given to specific ethnic groups, their relative political power, and possibility to influence political agenda. Symbolically, ethnic political representation signals that a group is a part of political system, having political voice, either through parity (among constitutive groups) or as a “place at the table” (for minorities); it also signals increased awareness of ethnic issues, which might also bring negative attention to these groups. Direct effect of ethnic self-government is ability to have some degree of ethnic political control over specific territory, shaping policy agenda and making political decisions relevant at the regional level. The key symbolic aspect of self-government is the sense of ethnic control over the territory which has special meaning for an ethnic group, been perceived as its “homeland.” One should keep in mind that the effects extend only on group members living in the self-governed territory, as ethnic empowerment is territorialized. Thus, ethnic self-government might inadvertently promote ethnic homogenization. Direct effects of cultural recognition should include cultural protection and preservation by making it easier to keep specific cultural practices/traits alive and transmit them intergenerationally. Symbolically, cultural recognition implies that the accommodating state respects and values cultural difference,

promotes toleration, and recognizes people (as members of specific ethnocultural groups) on equal terms. It is important that these values are communicated and appreciated beyond accommodated groups.

Before we examine how this framework functions in practice, it should be stressed that the evaluations of these effects are not unambiguous. It is often easier to measure negative aspects related to ethnic empowerment (e.g., changes in presence of hate speech, incidents of hostility targeting specific ethnic groups, extent of discrimination on ethnic grounds) than their absence. It is also important to recognize the relevance of who is evaluating the ethnic empowerment. Some vocal actors in the ethno-political sphere can have vested interests, which might influence how they perceive, frame, and assess ethnic issues. Some benefits from ethnic empowerment can be concentrated among elites (usually related to politics), while others get distributed more evenly (symbolic ethnic empowerment).

Empirical Illustration

Research Design

I used inductive approach to study effects of ethnic empowerment in its different forms in different European countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Sweden. This was a deliberate decision, since I wanted to explore comparability of ethnic empowerment in different contexts, and possibility to create a unified framework for evaluating its perceived effects. Being aware that meanings assigned to the key concepts (such as ethnic empowerment, or interethnic relations) can differ among the countries, ethnic groups, and

respondents, I chose to rely on semi-structured interviews with the key actors involved or/and with expertise in the domain of ethnic politics. Recognizing that the key concepts are multidimensional, my research design permitted the respondents to emphasize some dimensions or elements while disregarding (or dismissing) the others. My goal was to uncover patterns in how ethnic empowerment and its effects are perceived in specific contexts, and I asked respondents to explain their focus. While this approach does not produce clear quantitative measures, it indicates which aspects of ethnic empowerment are perceived positively or negatively and why, providing more detailed information on its effects. Using the semi-structured interviews, I allowed respondents to speak for themselves, focusing on large topic in the domain of ethnic politics and empowerment.

The cases were chosen to reflect my framework of ethnic empowerment in markedly different contexts. I included different types of ethnic groups in the analysis: constitutive groups, historical, and immigrant minorities. I also accounted for different degrees of ethnic empowerment (presence of ethnic empowerment in some form was a necessary condition for inclusion in the analysis). Three constitutive groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs) allowed me to examine a maximal degree of ethnic empowerment, while being aware of almost complete invisibility of ethnic minorities in the country. North Macedonian case shows that ethnic typologies are not necessarily settled, with contested status of Albanian ethnic group, seen either as a constitutive group or a minority, paired with relatively high extent of its ethnic empowerment. Historical Turkish minority in Bulgaria provides an example of a minimal formal ethnic empowerment restricted to the cultural sphere. Similar level of formal ethnic empowerment is present for immigrant minorities in Sweden (empirically, I focused on relatively large and established Iranian minority). These cases cover almost a full

spectrum of possible options for ethnic empowerment, from highly visible and politicized ethnic cleavage to those where ethnicity is minimally acknowledged.

I relied on the extensive fieldwork in four countries, conducted during 2016 and 2017.⁸ The central issue was the identification of key collective actors with vested interests and/or expertise in the domain of ethnic politics in each country (overview in table 3). These actors included representatives of political parties (with special attention given to ethnic and radical right-wing parties, since they give more prominence to ethnic issues), civil society organizations working on issues related to ethnic politics, state institutions working in the same domain, and local experts on ethnic politics.⁹ The diversity among respondents guarded against bias due to “respondents who see the world through the same lens” (Bleich and Pekkanen 2013, 87), despite some reliance on snowball sampling. The conducted interviews were semi-structured, with questions introducing broad themes and inviting respondents to give formal positions (of their political party, institution, or organization, if applicable) while explaining their grounding for them. This way I could identify the most salient aspects of ethnic empowerment, get the explanation for a specific focus, and overall assessment of their effects. I supplemented interview data with the policy statements, party programs, missions, reports, and similar documents produced by the actor (party, organization, institution), helping me to understand their overall orientation and frame of reference, and triangulating the evidence in different forms.¹⁰

⁸ The research received an IRB approval at the University of Florida. All respondents gave informed consent to be interviewed, speaking as representatives of specific actors (political parties, organizations, institutions), or being identified as local experts. I anonymized all the responses. In most cases, responses were recorded, transcribed, and stored without identifying information; rarely, I relied on interview notes.

⁹ Due to their engagement in ethnic politics, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia I interviewed respondents from key international actors as well.

¹⁰ In practice such data functioned to confirm the focus of an actor, corroborate, and extend interview data.

Type of Respondents	BA	MK	BG	SE
Political Parties	9	6	7	4
Civil Society Organizations	10	5	4	4
State Institutions	1	5	5	7
International Actors	3	2	-	-
Experts (independent, academia)	11	8	9	9
Total	34	26	25	24

Table 3. Overview of the Respondents, by Category and Country

During the fieldwork I was able to identify conflictive accounts and interpretations. This led me to explicitly recognize and account for interpretive elements in my research design, since different respondents frame and interpret effects of ethnic empowerment from their position in wider social and political system.¹¹ I found two main reasons for discrepancies in the answers. First, position and work focus of different actors led them to emphasize some aspects of ethnic empowerment, tied to their work and expertise. Conducting interviews on complex topics using multidimensional concepts means that different actors will not be equally disposed to discuss all aspects of complex and broad subjects, and they will usually focus on narrower issues of their interest/expertise. For example, actors from political parties usually discussed ethnic politics

¹¹ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, 4) stress that interpretive methodology rests on the notion of intersubjectively constructed “truths” about social, political, cultural, and other events, and interaction through interviews reveal how particular things are interpreted. While my project does not follow the interpretive design, I necessarily had to rely on it in dealing with conflictive interpretations of complex social and political reality of ethnic politics in particular country.

from the positions of political bargaining and elite politics conducted through political institutions and parties, while actors from civil society generally focused on issues pertaining to population at large (or some segments of it) rather than elite politics. Second, many actors also have vested interests related to management of ethnic affairs in the country. Their positions regarding specificities of ethnic empowerment emphasized both direct political and material benefits (and costs), and symbolic importance of ethnic empowerment. Again, this was most visible with the actors from the political sphere.

In the analysis of qualitative data for individual cases, I searched for similarities in answers across different cleavages, especially ethnic cleavage, and the cleavage identified by actors' position and vested interests. Across different cases, I examined whether the same issues achieve political saliency, and how respondents saw the connection between current mode of ethnic empowerment and effects like political inclusion, or interethnic relations.

Lessons from the Field

The aspirations of my study influenced the choice of the cases, which are meant to exemplify diversity in nature of ethnic diversity (types of ethnic groups) and differences in managing diversity (modes of ethnic empowerment). I did not a priori assume comparability between the cases. Instead, I examined functioning of adopted modes of ethnic empowerment, their positive and negative sides, and specific challenges tied to them. Table 4 maps the cases by ethnic group's types and formal presence of different modes of ethnic empowerment, noting that Albanians in North Macedonia and Turks in Bulgaria have effectively achieved ethnic political representation, without formalizing it through collective right of special representation.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina ethnic cleavage among three constitutive groups (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs) is highly politicized due to the rigid institutional design of ethnic power sharing, which frames most political issues through ethnic lens and prioritizes ethnic identities, especially when it comes to participation in politics. Ethnic empowerment of Albanians in Macedonia rests on similar institutional grounds of ethnic power sharing, but its implementation is less rigid (i.e., Albanian parties function without ethnic quotas, country is decentralized without ethnic federalization, and cultural recognition policies [like bilingualism] function without their explicit acknowledgment), while formal status of Albanian community is contested. Historical Turkish minority in Bulgaria confronts general hostility towards ethnic empowerment reflected in the constitution that bans ethnic parties and autonomous territories within the country and prescribes the use of Bulgarian language. Its formal political empowerment is minimal (Turkish language classes for minority students) and is symbolically closely tied to unofficial Turkish ethnic party, *MRF*.¹² Sweden allows immigrant communities to preserve their cultural specificities by providing mother tongue classes and funding cultural activities of immigrant associations. However, these policies are mostly disconnected from more contentious issues of immigrant integration, which is primarily addressed through the economic sphere, though there is some awareness of discrimination on ethnocultural grounds and the need to address it.

¹² This was confirmed indirectly by most respondents since discussion about ethnic empowerment for Turkish minority usually led to discussion about *MRF*.

Case Study	BA	MK	BG	SE
Political Representation		practically	practically	some
Self-Government				
Cultural Recognition				
Ethnic Group(s) Type	constitutive	contested	historical minority	immigrant minority

Table 4. Ethnic Empowerment in Practice: Mapping Case Studies

I expected that higher degree of ethnic empowerment is associated with higher salience given to ethnic politics, and more focus on political actors and political sphere. Looking across the cases, once more attention is given to the ethnic empowerment, there is a risk that other political issues will be framed through ethnic lens, squeezing out non-ethnic issues. Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina exemplifies this logic. During the interviews, all respondents talked about this phenomenon, either pointing that we cannot disregard ethnic issues and that continued focus on ethnicity is necessary (usually actors active in politics)¹³ or commenting how ethnic issues prevent us to see other issues shared across ethnic cleavage.¹⁴ On the opposite side, minimal ethnic empowerment risks to end with invisibility and dismissal of ethnic issues. The case of Bulgaria shows this dynamic in practice, where my interviews with state actors and mainstream political parties were mostly self-congratulatory, seeing ethnic empowerment as settled or

¹³ The situation with Bosniak political parties is interesting since they officially call for depoliticization of ethnicity, but in locations where their ethnic group is local numerical minority call for firmer ethnic politics protections (confirmed also in interviews).

¹⁴ One of the questions in the interview protocol concerned the most pressing problems in the country: almost everyone agreed that those were socioeconomic issues such as poverty or unemployment, and not issues of ethnic recognition, protection, and empowerment.

nonexistent issue, which should only be studied historically (as mentioned by several respondents). However, a similar level of ethnic empowerment in Sweden is signaling the awareness of ethnic diversity rather than its dismissal, so objectively similar level of ethnic empowerment can be perceived in very different ways depending on the context and type of ethnic group.

Political Representation

Among the analyzed cases, the ethnic quotas as a formalized mode to secure ethnic representation are used only in Bosnia. Their positive effects are contested, since forced parity among three constitutive groups excludes other voices. Several respondents mentioned a well-known court case *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* as an example of exclusion of ethnic “others” as a by-product of ethnic quota system, and the contested election of Željko Komšić (from non-ethnic Croat party) as a Croat representative in Bosnian presidency,¹⁵ raising the issues of ethnic authenticity and disruption of ethnic boundaries. In Macedonia, the issue of ethnic quotas for Albanian community is non-existent given the success of several ethnic Albanian parties, which guarantee ethnic representation in practice.¹⁶ Similarly, in Bulgaria ethnic quotas are not demanded by the Turkish minority, and interviewed representatives from ethnic parties (*MRF* and *DOST*) rejected the logic of ethnic quotas claiming that they give impression of political success due to positive discrimination rather than competition on equal footing. In Sweden, the interview with a representative of governing party revealed the

¹⁵ More examples were mentioned (referring to the lower levels of government), but Komšić was the most widely referenced case.

¹⁶ For failed attempt of smaller minorities to secure ethnic quotas see Ripiloski and Pendarovski 2013.

awareness that more needs to be done to achieve higher political representation among population with immigrant background. The interviews with the respondents with immigrant background showed that they are aware of symbolic importance of political inclusion through descriptive representation, since they used presence of co-ethnic representatives in the Swedish parliament to underline the success in integration for the whole community.

Clearly, the absence of formal ethnic quotas does not result in absence of “ethnic” voices.¹⁷ At the same time, it is visible that rigid adoption of ethnic quotas brings formal parity in descriptive representation without resolving other pressing issues tied to substantive representation, since many respondents in Bosnia stressed that political representation centers on ethnic issues and avoids serious discussion of anything else.

Self-Government

The key challenge in implementation of territorial ethnic self-government is balancing between acknowledgments of ethnic dimension in local governance while tying the “ethnic” territory to a larger multiethnic state. Extensive ethnic decentralization in Bosnia, together with general ethnicization of politics (including also post-war dynamics), has contributed to ethnic homogenization since one’s rights are best protected in locality where one is local numerical majority, which is something that was generally recognized among all my respondents. The obvious beneficiary of the existing system are political elites in Republika Srpska who usually act as nation-state, independently of their formal political leanings (as confirmed during the interviews with representatives of different political parties in RS). In response, most Bosniak (or

¹⁷ However, they are often underrepresented. See Aktürk and Katliarou (2020, 6) for more data related to Muslims in Europe.

formally non-ethnic) parties call for recentralization, with an ideal of majoritarian democracy in mind. This sounds unconvincing, given that Bosnian political system historically commonly acknowledged ethnicity, and high barriers for practical institutional change. Macedonia implemented mostly informal ethnic decentralization, where several communal rights (such as language use) are connected to the population threshold at the municipal level. This alternative does not remove ethnic confrontation among political elites: respondents from Albanian ethnic parties (*DUI, DPA*) criticized low public investments in Albanian-majority municipalities and regions, with *DPA* seeing informal bilingualism as especially thorny issue. Such views were not confirmed by the representatives of civil society, who see situation in more positive light. It seems clear that ethnic political elites have direct benefits from ethnic decentralization, materially and in terms of political power. The conversation with other respondents confirmed that population at large usually focuses on concrete benefits (such as ability to easily communicate with local government) and is appreciative of symbolic elements of ethnic self-government.

On the opposite side, the interviews with respondents in Bulgaria and Sweden showed that ethnic territorial connotations are always present in some form and degree. In Bulgaria, respondents commonly used phrases “Turkish regions” or “mixed regions” when talking about regions where Turkish minority has local majority, and its ethnic party has local political power, often claiming that things are better for Turks due to their dominant position in those territories. In Sweden, immigrant neighborhoods in major cities are also used as “ethnic” shortcut to signal exclusion of population living there from the mainstream society, and several respondents mentioned that moving out of these neighborhoods signals success in integration.

Cultural Recognition

Policies of cultural recognition are not necessarily political and could have more diffused effects. The fieldwork revealed several things: general politicization of ethnic issues can extend on supposedly non-political ethnocultural issues, these policies signal symbolic acceptance for accommodated groups, and (in case of minorities) these policies often remain invisible for ethnic majority. Cultural recognition can extend in different spheres. I focused on the language policies and the use of multiple languages, since this cleavage was relevant across the cases, allowing more direct comparison.

In Bosnia, highly politicized ethnicity spills in the cultural sphere. The obvious examples in public education reveal political battles over school curricula for “national subjects” and the use of different official languages. The public school system is designed to separate children from three major ethnic communities rather than to expose them to the idea of living in a multiethnic society.¹⁸ In Macedonia, multilingual education is available for all minorities passing the 20% threshold at the local level. In practice, it is most strictly implemented for Albanian community, with separate educational system where Macedonian language is taught only as the second foreign language. While Albanian community is overall satisfied with this level of cultural recognition, the policy ultimately furthers segregation due to the lack of a common language for communication. Bulgaria introduced voluntary Turkish language classes for Turkish minority students in 1991 as a gesture against previous cultural assimilation. Their symbolic importance was stressed by several respondents (especially those with minority background), but they also recognized that linguistic assimilation is necessary for overall success

¹⁸ Effective ethnic homogenization throughout the country helps to achieve this goal. Where the local communities are mixed, the solution is imposed ethnic segregation in education, using the system “two schools under one roof.”

in the Bulgarian school system, while school curriculum still presents nationalistic version of Bulgarian history, which promotes stereotypes against minorities. In Sweden, minority languages are taught in public schools since the 1960s, and this policy is promoted with pragmatic rationale that such knowledge helps Swedish language acquisition. The policy still exists and is most visible in the “multiculturalist” schools where majority of students are of immigrant background. The “older” minorities can still benefit from this policy (though its appeal diminishes over time), but they recognize its symbolic importance for inclusion.

While in most cases cultural recognition in the language sphere is not contentious (especially when it is framed in pragmatic sense), my respondents in different countries noted less visible aspects. First, these policies are often implemented with a segregationist bent: while minorities can benefit, the possibility to extend these benefits to other groups (including majority) is not even considered. For example, the respondent from the governing Albanian party *DUI* was surprised at a suggestion to teach Albanian language to non-Albanians in municipalities where that is de facto language of communication. Respondents in Bulgaria stressed that Turkish language classes are intended exclusively for Turkish students and that other students are not allowed to take them. In Sweden, several respondents working with immigrant minorities stressed that speaking languages common among immigrants is not perceived as an asset, even though knowing foreign language is generally seen positively.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to develop a framework which should allow a systematic assessment of the effects of ethnic empowerment, considering differences between ethnic groups, extent and

type of empowerment, and accounting for direct political and diffused symbolic effects. Using the inductive approach based on semi-structured cross-country elite interviews, I wanted to move discussion on ethnic politics from institutional design and formal politics, including broader realm of stakeholders. I aimed at theory building based on integration using the insights from variety of contexts where issues of ethnic politics and ethnic empowerment are discussed and evaluated. My suspicion was that political realm tends to present ethnic issues in more conflictive way, emphasizing problems related to managing diversity, but often without providing a constructive way forward. The broader view on ethnic empowerment was intended to capture voices that are less often heard and seriously considered in the debates on collective ethnic rights and management of diversity. The interviews confirmed this. In Bosnia, the most contentious statements were reserved to description of political competition and struggles over institutional (re)design, while examples from outside of political sphere painted more positive picture of cross-ethnic cooperation (even through this is increasingly rare as all territories become more homogenous). In Macedonia, the level of confrontational talk was consistently higher in politics; and respondents did not perceive significant problems outside of political bargaining. In Bulgaria, respondents often explicitly acknowledged that Turkish minority is not problematic per se, seeing the main problem with its political leadership.¹⁹ Similarly, in Sweden the problematic part was not recognition of cultural difference, but failure to integrate in economic terms, through employment (disregarding that new minorities are often coming into country as refugees and not migrating laborers, and require more time and resources to become employable).

¹⁹ It should be recognized that stereotypes against Roma minority (which is not culturally recognized or empowered in any meaningful sense) were much worse, often referring to the worst stereotypes about supposed Roma inferiority and laziness.

While contexts differ significantly across cases, there is one similarity: in all cases the respondents kept mentioning lack of interethnic contact as a missing prerequisite to build an integrated multiethnic society. In most cases this seem to be a deliberate decision in managing diversity rather than an unintended consequence. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is plausible to assume such intention since the current ethno-political system was implemented at the end of the ethnic civil war. More than 25 years later, the system based on physical ethnic separation is still in place, and any idea of its disruption is met by strong response from all ethnic political elites, independent of their ethnic identity (as confirmed, with different examples, by several of my respondents). North Macedonia historically lacked integrated multiethnic society, and the institutional changes after 2001 were used to promote visibility of diversity at the elite level (see Risteska 2013), while keeping ethnic communities separated and discouraging contact. In Bulgaria, the interethnic contact happens on terms set by ethnic majority and using majority language, and minorities are often reluctant to reveal their minority status.²⁰ Sweden is a rare exception of the country that does not require (Swedish) language test for citizenship acquisition, but it is necessary to speak the language in order to be employable (especially since most jobs require linguistic proficiency, as confirmed during the interview in the public employment agency). Leaving language issue aside, there are still problems related to interethnic contact and communication, which are most seriously exemplified by widely recognized issue of residential (and relatedly, school) segregation.²¹ Several respondents recognized this problem, but also

²⁰ Even more, all political activities are required to use exclusively Bulgarian language, including campaigning, leading to paradoxical situations where Turkish minority politician talking to all Turkish-speaking audience is still required to use Bulgarian language, with fines imposed in case of non-compliance (mentioned by several respondents, including one from Bulgarian *BSP* commenting that such a thing should not be seen as problematic in Bulgaria).

²¹ See reports from European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in Council of Europe (e.g., ECRI 2015).

recognized that fostering informal interethnic contact is difficult to sustain under condition of spatial segregation. The key issue across cases is lack of policies that aim not only to empower some ethnic groups (usually minorities) but also involve the whole society in a “new” state that recognizes multiethnicity as its defining characteristic.

Methodologically, I aimed to showcase the importance of fieldwork in cross-national context as a way for integrating and building new approaches to the issues in the domain of ethnic politics. For the future work on ethnic empowerment and evaluation of its effects, I propose moving away from institutional approach, seeing it as one dimension of a more complex concept rather than all of it. Further, more work should be done on assessing the presence of phenomena such as interethnic contact and communication among population at large as a different facet of ethnic empowerment, including the work on operationalization of such concept that could be used cross-nationally. This way we might move the focus of ethnic politics from more well-research empowerment of ethnic politicians (achieved through focus on formal politics) toward empowerment of people (including broader society in our analyses).

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