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You’ve got a friend in me: how international governmental organizations influence organizations’ participation in elections as ethnic parties in Eastern Europe

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}  
Which ethnopolitical organizations run for office? An extensive literature studies when ethnic parties emerge. We explore an understudied dimension that distinguishes various ethnopolitical organizations: the support of international governmental organizations (IGOs). IGOs can encourage ethnopolitical organizations to participate in elections by lowering an organization’s campaign costs or the price of internal restructuring. IGOs can also increase the expected benefits of running for office. Ties with an IGO communicate to voters that an organization will effectively represent the ethnic group domestically and internationally. We explore the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the international community’s hand is highly visible, to illustrate the mechanisms that link IGO support and organizations’ participation in elections. We then use a large-N cross-national analysis, relying on original data of hundreds of ethnopolitical organizations from 1991–2006 throughout Eastern Europe, to assess the theory’s generalizability. We use a recursive bivariate probit model to incorporate an estimate of which organizations IGOs are most likely to support into our analysis. Our results show that IGO support strongly correlates with an ethnopolitical organization running for office. This research contributes to our understanding of how ethnopolitical organizations with differing ideologies, competitive dynamics, and international ties come to represent an ethnic minority.

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\textbf{KEYWORDS} Ethnic parties; international governmental organization; IGOs; Eastern Europe; political parties

\textbf{Introduction}  
At the Cold War’s end, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia created new national minorities while democratic and semi-democratic political systems replaced autocratic ones. These dual processes produced a unique opportunity for ethnopolitical organizations to participate in elections in Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{1} An ethnopolitical organization with political goals and activities representing an ethnic minority group’s interests becomes an ethnic party when the organization
offers candidates for election. But many different organizations may represent an ethnic group, and only some of these organizations participate in elections. What determines whether an ethnopolitical organization becomes an ethnic party and runs for office? The answer is not determined solely by domestic politics; it is also shaped by the post-Cold War international context. We argue that support from international governmental organizations (IGOs) plays a meaningful and overlooked role in shaping which ethnopolitical organizations enter the electoral fray.

As the Cold War ended, international entities significantly expanded their interventions into national minority politics in Europe. This paper focuses on one aspect of those interventions: pressure for ethnopolitical organizations to participate in elections. We argue that ethnopolitical organizations which receive the support of IGOs – international organizations comprised of sovereign states or other IGOs, such as the UN, World Bank, and EU – run for office more often than other ethnopolitical organizations. IGO support both lowers an ethnopolitical organization’s cost and increases the expected benefit of participating in elections. IGO support can pay the bills for campaigning and internal restructuring. Furthermore, IGO support may increase the likelihood an organization wins their campaign. Voters may believe that organizations with IGO backing are more effective representatives both in the legislature and on the international stage.

It is critical to understand which ethnopolitical organizations run for office. Ethnopolitical organizations are diverse. Some advocate for inter-ethnic cooperation and minority rights within the existing political structures. Others peddle ethnic nationalism and incite violence. In some cases, ethnic parties encourage ethnic violence, in others they promote democratic stability. Scholarship seeking to measure these effects will be strengthened by understanding the selection process that does (and does not) guide organizations to become ethnic parties.

This article proceeds as follows: We describe the literature on ethnopolitical organizations’ strategic choices, highlighting the understudied influence of international actors. We then theorize how IGO support can increase the likelihood that an ethnopolitical organization runs for office. Theory development is this study’s primary objective. However, to strengthen the argument, we adopt a two-prong strategy to probe the theory’s validity. We first present a case study of IGO support for party development in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The Bosnian case, where the international community’s hand is highly visible, clarifies the different mechanisms that link IGO support and organizations’ participation in elections. We then use a large-N analysis of post-Cold War ethnopolitical organizations throughout Eastern Europe to assess the plausibility of the theory’s generalizability. We find evidence for our argument that IGO support strongly correlates with ethnopolitical organizations’ decisions to participate in elections. We conclude with areas for future research on the relationship between international actors and ethnopolitical organizations’ political strategies.

**Literature review**

Ethnopolitical organizations may deploy several possible strategies to achieve their goals. Organizations can use violence, nonviolent protest, or run for office to realize their political objectives. When an ethnic minority decides to adopt an electoral strategy, they face another choice: to join existing political parties or to form an ethnic
minority party. Several existing studies examine how organizations make this strategic choice. Organizations with self-determination objectives are less likely to field candidates for office when other pro-self-determination organizations already exist, especially if those organizations have already adopted conventional political tactics. Organizations are also more likely to adopt electoral participation over violence and nonviolent protest in capable democratic states. Authoritarian regimes, however, may encourage ethnopolitical organizations with regime-friendly goals to participate in elections. International actors play a critical role in shepherding rebel groups into post-conflict political parties. International actors’ recognition aids rebel organizations as they run for office by bestowing legitimacy. This paper expands this on literature to develop a theory of how IGOs can more generally steer ethnopolitical organizations towards electoral politics. As we theorize in the next section, international actors play a significant role in determining which ethnopolitical organizations run for office.

More broadly, scholarship on how international actors intervene in favor of ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe has focused on two fields: kin states’ support for ethnic groups and IGOs that pressure regimes in the interest of national minorities. Paradigmatic of the first field, Brubaker’s triadic nexus model brings kin states into the picture of ethnic minority politics. At the organizational level, Asal, Ayres, and Kubota examine what types of ethnopolitical organizations are supported by external states. Business elites and established political parties in kin states can provide valuable foreign investment and information to ethnopolitical organizations seeking to become ethnic parties. In the second field, scholars, including Kelley, Rechel, and Vachudova, have analyzed how IGOs can induce governments to exact liberal reforms regarding national minorities. The EU is particularly relevant. States that hope to join the EU may allow ethnic parties to form to demonstrate their alignment with the EU’s liberal values. Our research contributes a novel theory linking IGOs with organizations’ decisions to participate in the electoral process as ethnic parties.

Scholars are sharply divided on ethnic parties’ value to a political system. Many argue that ethnic parties incentivize extremism and ultimately lead to violence or democratic collapse. Others contend that when ethnic parties share political power in a consociational system, ethnic groups can direct demands through legal rather than violent channels. Ethnic parties that compete across multiple dimensions may strengthen democratic institutions. Additionally, ethnic parties can prevent regimes from adopting policies targeting ethnic minorities. The consequences of ethnopolitical organizations running for office can be profound. Given the potentially high stakes, it is essential for scholars to understand the conditions that encourage ethnopolitical organizations to become ethnic parties.

Moreover, it matters a great deal what types of ethnopolitical organizations participate in elections. Ethnopolitical organizations vary widely. Ethnic communities have dissimilar intragroup preferences and ethnic parties are incentivized to differentiate themselves from peer organizations. Their demands range widely, covering issues such as protectionist claims for the preservation of minority language and culture, demands for autonomy and power-sharing, and separatist claims. Some ethnopolitical organizations advocate violence and ethnic supremacy. Without understanding which organizations run for office, we lose sight of an important selection process that should inform the broader discussion on the consequences of emergent ethnic parties. The kind of party representing an ethnic group determines the degree of policy success the
ethnic group achieves. Additionally, which ethnopolitical organizations gain office communicates the ethnic group’s worldview and objectives to a country’s ethnic majority. Further work is therefore required to understand the processes through which ethnopolitical organizations with differing ideologies, competitive dynamics, and international ties come to represent an ethnic minority.

**IGO support and the costs and benefits of running for office**

We hypothesize that IGOs facilitate ethnopolitical organizations’ participation in elections. IGOs often have liberal agendas independent of member states’ objectives, and IGOs regularly function as autonomous actors within international politics. When ethnopolitical organizations weigh the expected costs and benefits of an electoral run, IGOs can push organizations toward running for office in two ways. First, IGOs can mitigate the cost of electoral participation by curtailing the price of campaigning and transitioning into a political party. Second, IGOs can increase the expected benefits of an electoral run by strengthening ethnopolitical organizations’ legislative capabilities and enhancing ethnopolitical organizations’ abilities to attract international attention to their constituent ethnic groups’ plight.

On the first point, the costs of political engagement may be daunting to some organizations. IGO support can address this concern in several ways. IGOs’ material commitments may mitigate campaign costs by providing expertise to develop organizational infrastructure and financing a campaign’s operational costs. IGOs may further ease costs by hosting rallies, producing informational material, buying advertisements, and financing ground operations to register group members. Additionally, participating in elections requires organizations to develop a specific set of political and administrative skills. IGOs can provide advice and training to help build the organizational infrastructure necessary for an ethnopolitical organization to successfully run for office.

Ethnopolitical organizations without experience participating in elections pay a cost to convert the organization into a political party. IGOs can also ease this transitional cost. An ethnopolitical organization seeking to become a political party may require difficult intra-organizational changes. Not every elite member of an organization will be able to transform into a political leader. IGO aid can provide offramps to ease the pain for those who lose out in the transition, placating elites that will drop in status as these organizations pivot towards electoral objectives and empower individuals whose skills more closely align with these new goals. To demonstrate, support from IGOs was integral to the successful conversion of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) into the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). By funding the creation of the Kosovo Protection Force, a civil emergency unit, the UN generated positions for KLA members who no longer had a viable role in the PDK. An ethnopolitical organization with IGO support may have an easier path to successfully transforming the organization’s internal structure into a political party.

In addition to lessening the cost of running for office, IGOs can also increase organizations’ expected benefits. Specifically, support from IGOs can improve an organization’s chance of winning seats if it runs for office. This mechanism comes in two forms. First, IGOs can enhance ethnopolitical organizations’ legislative abilities. Ethnic voters are more likely to support an organization that can obtain domestic policy concessions. IGO support can distinguish an ethnopolitical organization as
an effective advocate for its constituents at the national level. Instances of ethnopolitical organizations effectively leveraging their ties to IGOs to change policy include the Party of the Hungarian Community’s (SMK) threat to leave the Slovakian government in 2001. The governing coalition took these threats seriously due to the European Commission’s preference for the coalition to include the SMK, making the SMK’s inclusion a vital factor in Slovakia’s possible EU accession. Consequently, the governing coalition accepted several SMK conditions for its participation in the government, including blocking a set of regional reform laws. Similarly, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) has successfully leveraged its relationships with the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Parliament, the OSCE, the West European Union, and the Inter-parliamentarian Union. Where IGOs’ aid provides bargaining power, ethnic voters are more likely to support the electoral bid of an organization with ties to IGOs.

Second, IGOs can help ethnopolitical organizations win over voters by enhancing organizations’ ability to garner international attention. Voters may perceive an ethnopolitical organization favored by IGOs as an effective advocate for the national minority on the international stage. Marginalized groups face a fierce marketplace for international attention. An ethnic party can serve its constituents by attracting international awareness to the group’s plight. For instance, in Kosovo, the international community’s recognition of the PDK as legitimate and the international community’s willingness to work with the organization distinguished the PDK from other Albanian organizations. Ethnic voters may support organizations that already have a foot in the door with international actors. By aiding one ethnopolitical organization over another, IGOs increase the likelihood that an organization will have the popular support necessary to obtain office.

However, IGO support is not universally advantageous. In some environments, association with an international actor is a liability rather than a benefit. Ties between an organization and an IGO may tarnish an organization’s reputation where the IGO, or the international community more broadly, is unpopular. An ethnopolitical organization that receives financial support from IGOs seeing the organization as accountable to the international community rather than their domestic constituency. Nevertheless, we anticipate that in equilibrium ethnopolitical organizations will only accept the support of IGOs when they expect it to provide a net advantage to the organization vis-à-vis their co-ethnic competitors. Consequently, we theorize that IGO resources and political leverage will generally facilitate ethnopolitical organizations participating in elections. Further, where ethnopolitical organizations are already participating in elections, the support of IGOs can be crucial in ensuring they continue to do so.

Hypothesis: Ethnopolitical organizations that receive support from one or more IGOs are more likely to participate in elections than ethnopolitical organizations that do not.

Research Design

This research aims to present a novel theory of how IGOs influence the political strategies of ethnopolitical organizations. While our primary aim is theory-building, we adopt a two-pronged approach to test the theory. First, in a case study of BiH, we analyse the causal mechanisms that link IGO support with ethnopolitical organizations running for office. We trace the diverse ways that IGOs provided direct aid to
ethnopolitical organizations with moderate political platforms to facilitate these organizations’ electoral run. While the consequences of ethnopolitical organizations’ electoral runs are outside of the scope of this paper, the case of BiH demonstrates how IGO support can alter the domestic political landscape of a country.

Given the active role the international community played in post-conflict reconstruction, it would be reasonable to question whether the causal processes found in BiH are likely to occur in other contexts. Therefore, the second prong of our research design tests the plausibility of similar mechanisms working across a broad set of political environments. We use the Eastern European Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior (MAROB) dataset to identify if, broadly, IGO support is correlated with ethnopolitical organizations’ decisions to run for public office. Focusing on one region allows us to hold constant several historical and cultural factors that could mediate the relationship between IGO support and ethnopolitical organizations offering candidates for office.

The results of the quantitative analysis should be interpreted with caution. IGOs do not randomly determine which ethnopolitical organizations to support. Drawing on the existing literature, we control for several important variables that we anticipate influence which organizations IGOs choose to support. We rely on a recursive bivariate probit estimator to model two processes with binary outcomes for which the error terms are correlated. The model allows for the estimation of IGO support on ethnopolitical organizations’ electoral participation in the presence of unobserved factors that influence both which organizations IGO support and ethnopolitical organizations’ decision to run for office. Endogeneity concerns, however, continue to loom large, and the results should be interpreted with prudence. The quantitative analysis’s contribution is to test the plausibility of the theory in contexts beyond BiH.

**IGO support and ethnic party formation in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The civil conflict that engulfed BiH between 1992 and 1995 was defined by ethnic violence between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks. In the aftermath of the war, IGOs charged themselves as overseers of the project to establish a functioning, unified, democratic Bosnian state. BiH was divided into two political entities, each with a high degree of political autonomy: the Federation, home to the majority of the country’s Croats and Bosniaks, and the predominantly Serbian Republika Srpska. International actors envisioned a consociational government with political institutions that devolved power to ethnic groups and relied on elites to craft inter-ethnic consensuses. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), designated by the Peace Implementation Council’s (PIC) steering committee, was responsible for implementing the Dayton Peace Accords. The OSCE Mission to Bosnia was charged with overseeing elections for the new political entity. The heavy hand of the international community in the BiH case makes visible the variety of mechanisms that link IGO support and the decisions of ethnopolitical organizations to run for office.

The first post-war elections in 1996 were a failure in the eyes of the international community. Held only nine months after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the election brought to power the same ethnically exclusive nationalist parties that had perpetrated the war’s violence: the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), the Bosniak Party for Democratic Action (SDA), and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). The election winners included the politicians and parties that had inflamed social
tensions with hate speech and committed mass violence against civilians. As US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke succinctly stated, “the election strengthened the very separatists who had started the war”.37

In the wake of the 1996 elections, IGOs faced a choice: to encourage the moderation of these dominant parties or to support alternative ethnopolitical organizations. The behavior of the SDS, SDA, and HDZ after the elections confirmed that running for office had not tempered the parties as some had hope. It seemed unlikely that these parties would ever willingly implement the Dayton agreement.38 According to Head of OSCE Mission Ambassador Robert Barry, the choice was clear: “there was no hope” of convincing the existing nationalist parties to moderate their positions, which left the only path forward to support new parties.39 International actors determined to undermine the hegemony of extremist ethnic parties by providing support for more moderate ethnopolitical organizations. The OSCE’s democratisation work reflected this objective, shifting from a focus exclusively on executing elections to a broader program that included support for political parties.40 In the years before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, increasing political freedoms had spurred the growth of ethnopolitical organizations that operated outside the scope of existing parties.41 IGOs turned to these organizations as they searched for alternatives to the nationalist parties that had historically dominated Bosnian politics.42

IGOs recognized that nonethnic political parties would get little traction in the highly divided BiH. Rather than promote ethnically neutral organizations, the OSCE and other IGOs supported ethnopolitical organizations that advocated for more moderate political ideologies than those offered by the ruling ethnic parties.43 In particular, the OSCE Democratisation Department implemented a Political Party Development Programme aimed at supporting the Bosniak Social Democratic Party (SDP), the New Croatian Initiative (NHI), and the SLOGA (“Unity”) Coalition, which included the Socialist Party to the Republika Srpska (SNSD).44 These groups advocated for political platforms aligned with the OSCE’s objectives in BiH, specifically the implementation of the Dayton Accords.

The SNSD was founded in 1996. While the SNSD almost exclusively drew support from Serbs, its acceptance of the Dayton Accords and willingness to cooperate with the international community convinced international actors that the SNSD offered a preferable political platform compared to the SDS and other Serb parties.45 The NHI, a Croat organisation founded in 1998, also publicly committed itself to the reintegration of Bosnia as a multiethnic state with equal rights for each ethnic community.46 This contrasts with the HDZ’s exclusionary ethnic vision. The SDP was founded in 1992. Its ideology is multiethnic, but it primarily represents Bosniak citizens.47 The OSCE Democratisation Branch prioritized building up the SDP as a legitimate challenger to the SDA.48

Support for these organizations took explicit form after the 1997 Bonn conference, where the PIC called upon the OHR, the OSCE, and the CoE to revise the existing election regulations to foster more moderate political parties.49 Before 1996, the OSCE Provisional Election Commission had provided limited financial support to all political parties, regardless of their political platforms.50 Afterward, IGOs shifted their financial support towards new, alternative organizations with political ideologies more palatable to the international community.51 The OSCE altered its funding distribution by dividing electoral funds into two parcels – one distributed evenly across all political parties and another available only to pay for the campaigning and electoral activities of parties
judged to reflect the OSCE’s priorities. Over $750,000 in support was directed in this way, with the NHI, SDP, and SNSD being the primary beneficiaries.\(^{52}\)

Additionally, IGOs provided organizational aid to the NHI, SDP, and SNSD. The OSCE established 16 political party service centers throughout the country.\(^{53}\) The centers provided office space and supplies and hosted over 500 events for political parties – including public meetings, round tables, press conferences, and debates. These centers “primarily benefitted the alternative parties supporting multi-ethnic democracy, which tend to be smaller and lack sufficient resources to set up proper local offices or campaign efficiently around the country.”\(^{54}\) IGOs also supported organization professionalization. The OSCE developed a training program in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a political organization associated with Germany’s Social Democratic Party, which supported workshops for two hundred party officials in March 1999. The SDP, NHI, and SNSD were given priority status when determining which organizations would receive training “individually tailored to the needs of each party”.\(^{55}\) Each election after 1996 made visible the international community’s support for the entry and continued participation of newer, ideologically moderate ethnic parties.

IGOs also provided visible nonmaterial support. After 1996, the OSCE funded campaign posters urging citizens to “Vote for Change” – an unmistakable sign of support for newer parties challenging the hegemony of the HDZ, SDS, and SDA.\(^{56}\) Additionally, in 1999, the international community publicly backed the absorption of the Social Democrats of BiH (UBSD) into the SDP. The High Representative wrote a letter to the leaders of both parties, leaked to a Sarajevo newspaper, expressing his support for the union.\(^{57}\) In an unusual display of international support, representatives from the OHR, UN, OSCE, CoE, and EU attended the conference celebrating the merger.\(^{58}\) Similarly, in 1998, the assistant High Representative attended the founding conference of the NHI, communicating a clear signal of support from the OHR for the organization.\(^{59}\) This form of intangible aid to ethnopolitical organizations is not captured in the following statistical analysis. This may imply that the quantitative analysis underestimates the effect of IGO aid on ethnopolitical organizations’ strategic decisions.

Several of the theory’s mechanisms rely on voters’ absorbing which ethnopolitical organizations the international community supports. The nonmaterial support IGOs provided to the SDP and NHI served as clear visual signals of which organizations the international community backed. In line with the theory’s expectations, in the run-up to the 1998 elections, the President of the SNSD leveraged his ties to international actors and campaigned on a platform of delivering international aid to BiH.\(^{60}\) The SNSD’s explicit campaigning on the organization’s access to international actors demonstrates the value of these connections within the political landscape of BiH.

It is important to note the theory’s scope. While the downstream consequences of ethnic party formation matter a great deal – and illustrate the importance of this theory – we do not evaluate those effects here. However, it should be noted that in BiH, international actors’ support of moderate ethnic parties produced material, albeit limited, changes. Nationalist parties’ control over the levers of government began to fracture in November of 1997.\(^{61}\) Ambassador Barry declared that the results, while not revolutionary, were a success – given the “drastic drop” in votes received by the HDZ, SDA, and SDS.\(^{62}\)

The case of BiH is not representative of the level of international involvement in domestic political affairs in Eastern Europe. However, the case serves two functions.
First, the direct involvement of the international community demonstrates several types of relationships that may be less conspicuous in other political settings. Second, the Bosnian case may provide an upper bound that can serve as a reference point for future analysis of IGO interventions to support ethnopolitical organizations. IGOs financed rallies, campaign posters, press conferences, and coordinated training to introduce more ideologically moderate organizations into BiH’s political marketplace. It is uncertain whether these moderate organizations would have had the necessary resources to compete against established political parties without the significant support provided by IGOs.

**Cross-national analysis**

**Data & statistical methods**

We use the new Eastern European MAROB dataset to test the plausibility that mechanisms like those identified in the Bosnian case are at work in other political environments. The MAROB dataset is a novel organizational-based extension of the Minorities at Risk (MAR) data. It is the first and only collection of the electoral behavior and international ties of ethnopolitical organizations in the region at the organization-year level, which is necessary for analyzing how the introduction and withdrawal of IGO support shapes the strategic decision-making of organizations. Furthermore, the dataset covers ethnopolitical organizations in a region and period where a significant portion of the countries transitioned to democracy. As such, the data provides an ideal sample to study the characteristics that correlate with ethnopolitical organizations running for office.

All organizations in the dataset represent MAR ethnic groups. To enter the dataset, an organization must claim to represent an ethnic group or have members primarily from a specific ethnic minority, be political in its goals and activities, and be active at the national or regional level for three consecutive years. The data excludes umbrella organizations and government-created organizations, providing information on 271 ethnopolitical organizations representing 56 ethnic groups in 23 countries between 1991 and 2006. Across the period of study, ethnic groups have a mean of 4.8 organizations with a standard deviation of 5.4. Appendix Table A1 details how many organizations represent each national minority group. Chechens in Russia support the largest number of ethnopolitical organizations at 28 distinct organizations. Thirteen ethnic groups host only one ethnopolitical organization. Our unit of analysis is the organization-year.

The dependent variable of interest is *Electoral Participation*. Electoral Participation is coded as one if the organization has members running for office, including municipal and regional elections, in a election year. The variable is coded as a zero otherwise. Summary statistics for Electoral Participation are found in Table 1. As previously noted, ethnopolitical organizations choose from a diverse set of strategies to achieve their goals. Ethnopolitical organizations participate in elections in approximately half of our sample.

Our independent variable IGO Support takes a value of one if an ethnopolitical organization received financial or political support from an IGO in a given year and zero otherwise. Political support includes recognizing an organization as an ethnic group’s legitimate representative, fulfilling an organization’s request for election or
ceasefire monitoring, providing mediation between an organization and a regime, and sanctioning a regime in response to the regime’s policies towards the organization. It should be noted that the data does not specify which IGO(s) provided aid. This prevents us as researchers from narrowing the scope of our test to specific types of IGOs.

IGOs do not randomly distribute aid to ethnopolitical organizations. We anticipate that some organizations are more likely to receive assistance from international actors and participate in elections. We use a recursive bivariate probit model to first estimate the selection effect of which organizations are most likely to receive IGO support. The dependent variable of this first equation is then used as an endogenous regressor in modeling electoral participation. First, IGOs generally support the norm of state sovereignty and are unlikely to aid an organization that challenges a state’s territorial integrity. To capture this, Separatist is a dummy variable that indicates whether an organization’s primary goal is the creation of a separate state or a revanchist border change. Separatist groups are also less likely to participate in elections, as doing so affirms the lawfulness of the established political structures. Additionally, we anticipate that IGOs are more likely to support peaceful ethnopolitical organizations. We also expect that militant ethnopolitical organizations will be less likely to participate in elections. Militant groups often have centralized, hierarchical organizations, which poses a difficulty in transitioning to the more diffused and participatory decision-making structures of political parties. To account for this, our models include Militant, a binary variable that indicates whether an organization has a violent capability.

Moreover, we anticipate that IGOs are also more likely to aid organizations that advocate for democracy. These organizations are more likely to participate in elections, as doing so affirms the organization’s raison d’être. The control variable Democratic takes a value of 1 if an organization advocates for democratic forms of government and a zero otherwise. IGOs are unlikely to defy a sovereign host nation’s laws by providing support to an organization prohibited by law. Illegal ethnopolitical organizations also face unique barriers to entry. To control for this, Legal is a dummy variable that reflects whether an organization has not been outlawed or not been permitted to operate. Finally, IGOs may be most interested in supporting organizations in conflict and post-conflict environments. Periods of war and reconstruction may offer new opportunities for ethnopolitical organizations to participate in the electoral process. To account for this, Conflict is a binary indicator that marks all organization-years in country-years experiencing an armed conflict or the three years following an armed conflict. Appendix Table A2 lists the conflict and post-conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Participation</td>
<td>2,552</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGO Support</td>
<td>2,262</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatist</td>
<td>2,038</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militant</td>
<td>2,286</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.150</td>
<td>0.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>2,260</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>2,308</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td>0.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Competition</td>
<td>2,204</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>0.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>2,219</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td>0.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2,243</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>85.000</td>
<td>7.329</td>
<td>8.450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>48.000</td>
<td>12.862</td>
<td>13.468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
country-years. Out of concern for endogeneity, we lag all independent variables a year.\textsuperscript{74}

In the second equation, we model the likelihood that an ethnopolitical organization participates in elections. We include the above variables and three additional variables unique to predicting ethnopolitical organizations’ strategic choices. First, an existing ethnic political party may deter other co-ethnic parties from forming. Running against a co-ethnic party risks splitting a limited base of ethnic voters.\textsuperscript{75} To control for this, Ethnopolitical Competition is a dummy variable that indicates whether there are active co-ethnic political parties in a given year. Additionally, Age is the number of years an organization has been in existence to control how organizational maturity may affect political participation.\textsuperscript{76} Finally, organizations representing larger ethnic groups may be more likely to run for office, given the larger pool of potential supporters. To account for this, Population estimates an ethnic group’s share of the national population.\textsuperscript{77}

**Results**

The results are presented in Table 2. As anticipated, within the data, IGOs are more likely to support legal and democratic organizations. These organizations are also more likely to offer candidates for election. However, the case of BiH, where IGOs chose to aid moderate organizations rather than work to temper extreme organizations, may be unrepresentative. Counter to our expectations, militant organizations are more likely to receive IGO support than other organizations. However, these

| Table 2. Recursive Bivariate Probit Model |  |
| Dependent variable: |  |
| IGO Support | Electoral Participation |
| IGO Support | 1.669*** (0.355) |
| Separatist | 0.002 (0.101) |
| Militant | 0.590*** (0.125) |
| Democratic | 0.284*** (0.084) |
| Legal | 0.627*** (0.125) |
| Conflict | 0.544*** (0.088) |
| Ethnic Competition | 1.207*** (0.115) |
| Age | -0.025*** (0.005) |
| Population | 0.010*** (0.003) |
| Observations | 1,553 |
| Log Likelihood | -1422.823 (df=17) |
| Akaike Inf. Crit. | 2879.647 |
| Bayesian Inf. Crit. | 2970.562 |

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 2 shows the results of a recursive bivariate probit model. The first column shows the results of the first equation, a regression on IGO Support. The second column shows the results of the second equation, a regression on Electoral Participation.
organizations are not likely to participate in elections. IGOs may often aid militant organizations but cannot persuade organizations to exchange the bullet for the ballot. That organizations in conflict and post-conflict environments are more likely to receive IGO support, but less likely to participate in elections, aligns with this interpretation. Surprisingly, whether an organization espouses separatism has no significant effect on the likelihood of IGO support or electoral participation.

Our analysis shows that IGO support positively correlates with the likelihood that an ethnopolitical organization participates in elections and is statistically significant with a p-value less than <.0001. Figure 1 plots the odds ratios from the second equation in the model. Support from an IGO increases the odds that an ethnopolitical organization participates in an election the following year more than nine-fold. Additionally, *Ethnic Competition* is a strong predictor of whether an organization runs for office. The presence of an existing co-ethnic political party generally does not deter other organizations from running for office. *Ethnic Competition* may signal that political conditions favor ethnic parties, including the existence of sizeable ethnic minority populations. Finally, contrary to Van Cott, younger organizations more often run for office. This may be attributable to the unique nature of post-Cold War Eastern Europe.

The results of this analysis should be interpreted with caution. Cross-national large-N analyses of ethnic politics present many potential concerns, including omitted variable bias, multicollinearity, and uncaptured variation between cases. In the case study of BiH, we traced how and why IGOs supported different ethnopolitical organizations

![Figure 1](image-url)
and how IGO interventions influenced ethnopolitical organizations’ abilities to participate in elections. This case provided one clear confirmation of the theory, albeit in a particular context. But the quantitative analysis presented here suggests the theory may plausibly travel across various ethnic groups and political institutions. The theory presented is likely to require further theoretical calibration as additional cases are studied. The results of this analysis open the door to future work that will facilitate those refinements.

**Conclusions**

There is an unstudied international dimension to an ethnopolitical organization’s decision to participate in elections. A diverse set of organizations represent ethnic minorities. We develop a novel theory that outlines the international community’s role, specifically IGOs, in providing resources and political leverage to ethnopolitical organizations that would run for office or continue to do so. A close reading of the case of BiH reveals a diverse set of pathways by which IGOs support ethnopolitical organizations’ participation in elections. The large cross-national analysis of ethnopolitical organizations in Eastern Europe demonstrates that similar patterns may work across a broad set of political contexts.

We hope this research brings greater scholarly attention to the international interventions and how they influence the decision of ethnopolitical organizations to run for office. Additional research should investigate how the types of IGOs that intervene nuance this possible relationship. Furthermore, the patterns described by the theory may not extend to environments where the work of IGOs is unpopular with the public. Future research should refine our understanding of the relationship between international actors and organizations’ decisions to participate in elections, including how intra-organization competition influences these results.

**Funding**

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**Notes**

2. Following Sartori, we define a political party as “any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office.” *Parties and Party Systems*, 56.
7. Cunningham, ”Understanding Strategic Choice”; Cunningham, Dahl, and Frugé, ”Strategies of Resistance.”
11. Söderberg Kovacs, “From Rebellion to Politics.”
15. See Kelley, Ethnic Politics in Europe; Rechel, Minority Rights; Vachudova, Europe Undivided.
17. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict; Rabushka and Shepsle, Politics in Plural Societies.
20. Birnin, Ethnicity and Electoral Politics; Ishiyama, “Ethnopolitical Parties and Democratic Consolidation”; for work on why ethnic representatives within nonethnic parties may be insufficient, see Jensenius, Social Justice through Inclusion.
23. Bochsler, “When Two of the Same.”
26. Barnett and Finnemore, “Politics, Power, and Pathologies”; Pevehouse, Democracy from Above. Of course, not all IGOs have liberal agendas. This creates a significant scope condition on the theory’s generalizability. Specifically, we anticipate that IGOs comprised of largely democratic states will support ethnopolitical organizations’ democratic participation. We expect that global IGOs comprised of states with a diversity of democratic and non-democratic political institutions, such as the UN, or regional IGOs composed of primarily non-democratic states, such as the Arab League, are unlikely to play this role. Furthermore, regional IGOs mainly composed of democratic states are also unlikely to support ethnopolitical organizations in other regions. This limitation presents an opportunity for future research to theorize and test the relationship between different types of IGOs and the ethnopolitical organizations’ strategic choices.
27. We thank Reviewer 1 for their insights into the different mechanisms that tie IGO support to ethnic organizations’ electoral participation.
33. Manning, “Armed Opposition Groups,” 64.
34. This aligns with Söderberg Kovacs’s argument that recognition by international actors, including IGOs, enhances the likelihood that a rebel group will transform into a political party. “From Rebellion to Politics.”
36. Belloni, “Peacebuilding.”
38. ICG, “Doing Democracy a Disservice,” 5.
42. Hulsey, “Why Did They Vote.”
43. The OSCE considered a party to be “multiethnic” where the party upheld the right of refugees to return per the Dayton Accords and supported the joint institutions of the BiH. Thus the OSCE can support a “multiethnic” organization that is ethnically homogenously. OSCE, “Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections.”
46. ICG, “Changing Course?,” 1.
47. Hulsey, “Why Did They Vote,” 1135.
48. ICG, “Is Dayton Failing?”
49. SAFAX, “Union of Social Democrats.”
51. ICG, “Is Dayton Failing?”
53. Du Pont, “Levelling the Political Playing Field.”
54. Ibid., 307.
55. Ibid., 308.
56. Knaus and Martin, “Travails of the European Raj.”
58. Ibid., 15.
60. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, “From Humanitarianism to Reconstruction,” 91.
61. We define Eastern Europe as Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia.
62. Gurr, “Minorities at Risk.” To be included in the MAR dataset, ethnic groups must have at least 100,000 members or more than 1% of a national population and must be considered permanent residents by outside observers (i.e. not migrants or refugees).
63. In non-election years, an organization is coded as participating if the organization has members in office or has announced an electoral run.
64. We theorize that, without additional knowledge of the IGO(s) involved, the support of IGOs increases the overall likelihood that an ethnopolitical organization participates in elections. Future research should expand on this idea to analyse how different types of IGOs affect ethnopolitical organizations’ strategic decisions.
65. This logic conforms with research showing that militant separatist organizations are less likely to transition to political parties than other militant organizations. Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz, “Rebel-to-Party Transformations.”
66. The use of violence does not exclude participating in elections (Matanock and Dow, “Candidates and Combatants”) or other forms of regime co-option (Brandt, “Peace Agreements Counterinsurgency”).
67. de Zeeuw, “Understanding the Political Transformation.”
68. An organization continues to be considered militant until the organization renounces the use of violence.
70. Data is drawn from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility over government or territory where armed force between a government of a state and another party results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year. We limit our analysis to armed conflicts that since onset exceeded 1,000 battle-related deaths. Pettersson and Öberg, “Organized Violence, 1989–2019”; Gleditsch et al., “Armed Conflict 1946-2001.”
71. We run a variance inflation factor test to identify if we should be concerned about multicollinearity amongst our independent variables. To make Generalized Variance Inflation Factors (GVIFs) comparable across dimensions, we assess (GVIF^{1/(2×DF)})^{2} where DF is the number of coefficients in the subset. The highest value is 1.51, considerably below the standard threshold for concern. Fox and Monette, “Generalized Collinearity Diagnostics.”
73. We de define Eastern Europe as Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia.
74. Van Cott, From Movements to Parties.
75. Gurr, “Minorities at Risk”; data carried forward.
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Disclosure statement

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Bibliography


Smith, David J. “Framing the National Question in Central and Eastern Europe: A Quadratic Nexus?” 


### Appendix

**Table A1. Number of Ethnopolitical Organizations by Ethnic Group and Country.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number of Organizations</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number of Organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Greeks</td>
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<td>Moldova</td>
<td>Gagauz</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Armenians</td>
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<td>Slavs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Romania</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Avars</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hungarians</td>
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<td>Sandzak</td>
<td>9</td>
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**Table A2. Conflict and Post-Conflict Country-Years**

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<th>Country-Years</th>
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<td>Georgia (1993–2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia (1995–2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan (1992–2001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table shows conflict years as identified by the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict extended by three years Dataset, to capture post-conflict environments.