Social distance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus region of Russia: Inter and intra-ethnic attitudes and identities*

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ABSTRACT. This article examines attitudinal differences and similarities among ethnic groups in conflict-affected societies. Conventional wisdom tells us that societies that have experienced violent struggles in which individuals of different ethnic groups have (been) mobilized against each other are likely to become polarized along ethnic lines. Indeed, both policy-makers and scholars often assume that such divisions are some of the main challenges that must be overcome to restore peace after war. We comparatively examine this conventional wisdom by mapping dimensions of social distance among 4,000 survey respondents in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus region of Russia. The surveys were carried out in December 2005. Using multidimensional scaling methods, we do not find patterns of clear attitudinal cleavages among members of different ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nor do

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we find patterns of clear ethnic division in the North Caucasus, although our social distance matrices reveal a difference between Russians and ethnic minority groups.

KEYWORDS: Ethnic conflict; post-conflict societies; social distance; inter-ethnic attitudes; Bosnia-Herzegovina; North Caucasus

Russians and Chechens – we were one family. There weren’t any differences between us. (Chechen woman on life before the first Chechen war.)

Civil wars, like all wars, impose unimaginable suffering on the populations living through them. And after the wars end, the suffering often continues. Research has shown that civil wars kill people ‘long after the shooting stops’, through diseases and disabilities (Ghobarah, Huth and Russett 2003: 189). Moreover, post-civil war societies are generally physically scarred, characterised by destroyed or, at least, damaged social capital and infrastructure, depressed levels of income, and low levels of public spending on economic and social services (Collier 2006). Conventional wisdom also tells us that civil wars leave less visible scars. In particular, it tells us that wars in which individuals of different ethnic groups have (been) mobilised against each other are likely to create societies polarised along ethnic lines (for an example of Croatia during the wars of the early 1990s, see Malešević and Uzelac 1997). Indeed, both policy-makers and scholars often assume that such divides are one of the challenges that must be overcome in order to restore peace after war. In this study, we take a close look at this conventional wisdom from a social distance perspective.

Based on data from new surveys carried out in two societies affected by ethnic violence, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and the North Caucasus region of Russia, we comparatively assess the presence of ethnic divisions by mapping dimensions of social distance among 4,000 survey respondents. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, we do not find patterns of clear attitudinal differences among members of the various ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While we do not find strong patterns of ethnic divisions in the North Caucasus either, our social distance matrices reveal a general attitudinal difference between Russians and the region’s ethnic minority groups.

These empirical patterns have implications for the literature on ethnic conflict, suggesting that ethnic groups are not necessarily clearly bounded entities where the individual members of one ethnic group view ethnic-related questions distinctly differently from members of other ethnic groups. This is consistent with insights from theoretical work by Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004), who have questioned the use of ethnic groups as analytical categories. But while Brubaker and his coauthors maintain that ethnic groups are not ‘things in the world, but perspectives on the world’ (2004: 45), the empirical patterns revealed in this study suggest that even in societies where
people have (been) mobilised against each other along ethnic lines, ethnicity does not necessarily tell us much about ‘sameness’ in interpreting the world either. Similarly, Fearon and Laitin (2000), in examining numerous case studies of the construction of ethnic identities in conflict situations, accept that elites manipulate identities for their own benefit but puzzle why members of the targeted groups follow the elite-promoted strategies.

More generally, this study points to the advantage of taking seriously the spatial dimensions of social phenomena. The close relationship between spatial propinquity and social interaction has been well documented in numerous national contexts through both survey work (e.g. Johnston 1974) and analysis of aggregate census data (White, Kim and Glick 2005). While the concept of social distance draws broadly from Bogardus (1925), the measures do not always rely on his scale of distancing – from accepting individuals of other groups as members of one’s family to accepting them as residents in one’s country. Proximity is the main determinant of social interaction even when factors such as shared social-economic backgrounds, similar educational levels, family status and interests, and age are considered. For example, in a study of English cities, Prandy (1980) found a direct link between social and spatial distance using seven national groups and multidimensional scaling techniques. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, many communities were ethnically mixed prior to the wars of the early 1990s, but the dramatic separation of the three ethnicities after years of ethnic cleansing and refugee flight has significantly reduced the chances of social interaction, in turn rendering the prospects of post-war reconciliation more problematic (O’Loughlin and Ó Tuathail 2009). As such, our expectation was that an empirical examination of social distance in Bosnia-Herzegovina would reveal sharp differences among members of different ethnic groups.

Intra-state conflicts and ethnic divisions

Both policy-makers and scholars often assume that inter-ethnic divisions are one of the challenges that must be overcome in order to restore peace after intra-state conflicts – be they between the government and sub-state groups or among different sub-state groups, particularly ethnic groups. Researchers in the World Bank’s Post-Conflict Unit, for example, have highlighted the importance of social cohesion and integration in post-conflict societies, proposing strategies for bridging groups that have found themselves at odds with one another during violent conflicts (e.g. Colletta and Cullen 2000).

In the academic literature on post-conflict power-sharing, a central question concerns how to design institutions that can restore peace in societies that ‘are divided by deep communal distrust and uncertainty about the future’ (Rothchild and Roeder 2005: 5). While this kind of distrust, distance, and dislike among (ethnic) groups often is considered a cause of conflict in the first place – and is the subject of a large literature on ethnic conflicts – it is also
considered a contributing factor for enduring conflicts or even a step towards state failure (Rotberg 2004). A number of researchers writing about the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia have argued that the wars created communities sharply divided along ethnic lines. Based on interviews in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia in 2000, Corkalo et al. (2004: 145) report:

All of our informants reported positive, almost nostalgic, memories of a good quality of life before the war. Most participants said that relations among the different ethnic groups were harmonious during the pre-war years. It was irrelevant whether their neighbors, co-workers, and friends belonged to a different ethnic group. ‘We lived normally’, an informant said. ‘We did not even know who was who [meaning who was from which ethnic group]. We visited each other at our homes and celebrated each other’s religious holidays together.’ … Although the political and social collapse of the former Yugoslavia occurred gradually, our participants viewed it somewhat differently. They spoke of changes taking place ‘as if over night’, including the abrupt termination of relationships with old friends and neighbors, and the rapid formation of ethnically homogenous political and social groups.

Observers and scholars of the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–95) have emphasised how that conflict transformed BiH from an ethnically heterogeneous but intermixed society to a segregated state of three ethnically homogeneous territories (e.g. Woodward 1999), and a growing body of work has examined the role that the international community can play in overcoming this kind of segregation (e.g. Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Kumar 1997; Pickering 2006).

Key to many of the causal stories that underpin accounts linking conflict and ethnic divisions are (collective) memories of the war and the atrocities committed. Research in sociology, anthropology, political science, history, and social psychology has linked memory and ethnic conflict (for an overview, see Devine-Wright 2003). Often, so-called political entrepreneurs use selective memories to legitimise the goals, targets, and strategies of violence. Writing about ethnic conflicts in several post-communist countries, including the former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, Kaufman (2001) argues that while ethnic grievances may create tensions and hostility, ethnic wars are typically the result of political leaders using myths, symbols, and memories of the past to create fears that fuel these tensions and hostile relations. Likewise, Gagnon (1994/1995) sees elite manipulation of memories as a key force for the outbreak of wars in the former Yugoslavia. These arguments tend to assume the existence of long-standing ethnic hostilities that can be ignited (e.g. Kaplan 1993) or ethnic fears among the population that leaders can play on, so that ethnic groups resort to violence to protect their existence (e.g. Lake and Rothchild 1996; Posen 1993).

In social psychology, researchers have long linked identity groups to conflict. Social identity theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), views identity as central to conflicts and conflict resolution (for overviews, see Brown 2000; Hewstone and Greenland 2000). SIT assumes that people have both personal and social identities, and social identity comes from group membership. Because people seek to see themselves in a positive
light – have a positive social identity – they compare their own group (the in-group) with relevant other groups (out-groups). Backed-up by experiments, scholars have found that people tend to behaviorally favor their own group even if they are randomly assigned to a group with no substantive bonds holding the group members together. Thus, conflicts can arise out of inter-group relations where there are no apparent material conflicts of interest.

Similarly, in Ethnic Groups in Conflict (1985), Horowitz explains ethnic conflicts as non-instrumental competition. He points out that because ethnicity cannot easily be changed, inter-group comparisons become even more salient than when groups are randomly assembled. In contrast to SIT, Horowitz focuses on the difference between dominant and subordinate groups. He finds that so-called economically backward groups are most often the initiators in ethnic conflicts because they perceive that they are inferior to more advanced groups; hence, they seek to catch up in order to boost their own collective self-esteem and be recognised by the more advanced groups. Moreover, backward groups are also fearful that the advanced groups seek to extinguish them, which fuels hostility. This kind of competition described by Horowitz may create legacies of hostility that outlast the conflict itself.

If one accepts SIT as being applicable to ethnic conflicts, the recommendations for reducing inter-group conflicts fall largely into two categories. First, the contact hypothesis suggests that contact between individual members of different ethnic groups can improve the relations between these groups. Second, processes of re-categorisation, de-categorisation, or cross-categorisation of identities can reduce the salience of identities and thus the likelihood of conflict.

While much work on ethnic conflicts sees ethnicity as a cause or contributing factor to conflict, it is reasonable to expect that the dynamics described above are even more likely to take place after a war that has pitted different ethnic groups against one another. In fact, even if inter-ethnic hatreds or fears were not the cause of conflict in the first place, they are likely to be the result of conflict. Indeed, Snyder (2000) warns against introducing elections too early into societies recovering from ethnic violence as the only cleavages that may be available for mobilisation are ethnic ones. Such mobilisation may, in turn, lead to (renewed) ethnic conflict – although, we should note, evidence for the dangerous democracy notion is not without attendant controversy. The post-Dayton elections in Bosnia, including those of 2006, have confirmed the ossification of ethnic divisions and the failure of cross-ethnic party appeals.

Emerging from this literature is the notion that intra-state conflicts, particularly ethnic conflicts, are likely to deepen or create ethnic cleavages. While qualitative studies have illustrated this in the former Yugoslavia (e.g. Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006), we comparatively examine this claim by mapping the unobserved dimensions of social (ethnic) distance among 4,000 survey respondents in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia’s North Caucasus region. The article is a largely descriptive look at new data that can help shed light on widely held ideas about post-conflict societies. Empirically establishing the degree to which
post-conflict and conflict-affected societies are characterised by attitudinal
differences along ethnic lines is important both to the academic and policy-
oriented literatures on post-conflict challenges and developments.

Why compare Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus?

Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus region of Russia are both
ethnically diverse, post-communist societies, where the different ethnic groups
at times have coexisted peacefully and at other times have found themselves in
conflict with one another or their governments. While both societies have
experienced recent civil strife, their conflict histories vary. BiH is a post-conflict
society where the violence in 1992–95 was inter-ethnic in character, bringing
terms such as ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘genocide’ back into our everyday
vocabulary. In the North Caucasus, violence is still ongoing, though at a
much reduced level from its peak in 1999–2002. In the region, multiple local
conflicts with an ethnic element, such as that between the Ossetians and the
Ingush, have been overshadowed by the Chechen wars, which cumulatively
have taken up to 100,000 lives. On account of the rebel groups, the region has
been characterised by violence directed at Russian military targets, local police,
and government officials rather than civilians (Lyall 2006), although there
have been a considerable number of kidnappings of and high-profile attacks on
civilians, as in the tragic Beslan school hostage crisis of September 2004.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, now an independent country, was a republic in the
Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Belgrade government recog-
nised Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins as
nations with homelands in Yugoslavia. With the exception of the Muslims,
who were not recognised as a nation until 1968, each of these nations had its
own majority region in Yugoslavia – Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, and
Montenegro. The Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), in contrast, constituted the
plurality, forty-four per cent, of the population in Bosnia-Herzegovina, while
thirty-one per cent of the republic’s population identified as Serbs and
seventeen per cent as Croats (1991 census data). Not only did BiH stand
out from the other constituent republics of Yugoslavia in that it had no ethnic
majority population; its population was also ethnically intermixed. Indeed,
about one-quarter of the republic’s 109 opštine had no ethnic majorities; by
1996, after the war, only one opština had no ethnic majority. Hailed as a
society where people from different ethnic groups lived peacefully together for
centuries (Donia and Fine 1994), in the spring of 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina
descended into one of the post-Cold War era’s most bloody ethnic conflicts.

After the unraveling of Yugoslavia in 1991, BiH’s three major ethnic
groups – the Croats, Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims – failed to agree on the
political future of the republic (Woodward 1999). Were they to remain part of
Yugoslavia along with Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia? Were they to seek
independence as one, multinational state? Or were each of the different
ethnic groups to seek independent statehood? In a referendum in March 1992, the Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims voted overwhelmingly in favor of secession from Yugoslavia, and the chairman of the republic’s coalition government (who was the head of the main Bosnian Muslim party) declared the republic independent. However, the large Bosnian Serb minority, who favored remaining part of Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, boycotted the elections and staged protests and attacks against Muslim towns in eastern Bosnia. While the conflict initially pitted Croats and Muslims against the Serbs, it soon developed into a violent territorial struggle among these three ethnic groups. The Serbs, Croats, and Muslims each engaged in ethnic cleansing strategies, although the enormity of the Serb actions was notably larger and more extreme. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia estimates that more than 100,000 people lost their lives in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, and more than two million fled abroad. Even though most of these refugees are now believed to have returned, the internal displacement of ethnic groups is extensive and widespread. The Dayton accords in 1995 set up a process of military demobilisation and carved Bosnia-Herzegovina into a loose federation between the Muslim-Croat dominated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska. The agreements’ Annex Seven brought the war to an end and institutionalised the promise that all refugees had the right to return to their prewar homes. However, the returns process has been fraught with delays, obstructions from local authorities, and intimidation by members of other ethnicities (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006).

Much like Bosnia-Herzegovina, the North Caucasus is an ethnically diverse region in the post-communist world. Located within the Southern Federal District of the Russian Federation, the geographical and economic area known as the North Caucasus consists of eight political and administrative regions: the republics of Adygeya, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and North Ossetia, as well as Stavropol’ kray (territory). Like the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Russia is a layer-cake of autonomy. Of Russia’s eighty-three regions, nearly one-third are ethnically defined, which means that they are named after one (or two) ethnic group(s), even though, in several cases, that ethnic group does not make up the majority of the population in its designated region. For instance, the majority of the population in North Ossetia is Ossetians (sixty-three per cent), but Russians make up a significant minority (twenty-three per cent). In the North Caucasus as a whole, Russians make up the majority of the population and constitute the majority in Stavropol’ kray, as well as in the ethnically defined Republic of Adygeya. The most ethnically homogenous regions are Chechnya (ninety-four per cent Chechens) and Ingushetia (seventy-seven per cent Ingush), while Dagestan stands out as the most ethnically heterogeneous region, with twenty-five per cent Avars, seventeen per cent Dargins, fourteen per cent Kumyks, and thirteen per cent Lezgins, in addition to seven other ethnic groups that each constitutes less than five per cent of the republic’s
population. As this snapshot of census data indicates, the North Caucasus is a highly ethnically diverse region (see O’Loughlin et al. 2007).

The main conflict region of the North Caucasus is Chechnya, where civil war broke out in 1994 when Moscow responded to Chechen demands for independence with military force. In neighboring Ingushetia and North Ossetia, tensions led to violent conflict in the fall of 1992, when informal militias representing the Ingush population concentrated in North Ossetia’s Prigorodny district clashed with North Ossetian militias, both sides laying claim to the territory. The violent phase of the conflict, which was relatively short-lived, resulted in a large outflow of Ingush settlers from North Ossetia. While not resolved and still a politically hot topic, this conflict has not resulted in large-scale inter-ethnic violence since November 1992 (e.g. Fuller 2006) but was a central element in the tragic hostage-taking at Beslan, North Ossetia, in 2004. Following the August 2008 war between Georgia and the separatist republics South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the situation in North Ossetia is again destabilized due to the flow of South Ossetians across the border, although it is still too early to determine the long-term consequences.

Since the late 1990s, the major source of conflict in the North Caucasus has been the wars in Chechnya. By 1999 the Chechen conflict began to spill over into the neighboring regions, in particular Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, each of which also faces its own internal conflict(s). A number of observers claim that both Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus are increasingly outside the Kremlin’s control (e.g. Baev 2006; Dunlop and Menon 2006; Kramer 2005). According to one estimate, at least seventeen insurgent organisations of varying sizes were active in the Northern Caucasus in 2005 (Lyall 2006). Moscow’s former federal envoy in the region, Dmitry Kozak, has claimed that the conflicts in the North Caucasus are spurred by corruption, poverty, unemployment, and clan-based rivalries and power struggles, while observers of the region have also pointed to readily available weapons, radical Islamist forces, and religious discrimination as contributing factors (e.g. Bullough 2005; Matsuzato and Ibragimov 2005; Mayr 2005; Roshchin 2005; Smirnov 2005; Ware 2005).

These similarities in ethnic composition and political/administrative structure paired with differences in conflict and violence allow us to investigate if attitudinal differences among members of different ethnic groups correspond to differences in type of violence and timing. With respect to violence, all else being equal, we would expect to find sharper ethnic divisions in Bosnia-Herzegovina than in the North Caucasus: BiH has been the scene of violence that very directly pitted ethnic groups against one another, while the conflicts in the North Caucasus have had less of an organised inter-group character. With respect to time, however, our expectation is the opposite: Whereas BiH is a post-conflict society where the war officially ended in 1995, the North Caucasus region is still a society characterised by conflict. If it is the case that ‘time heals all wounds’ and memories of hostilities fade, we expect to find the sharpest ethnically based social distances among the respondents from the North Caucasus.
Data and methods

The main data for this paper consist of 4,000 responses to two large public opinion surveys conducted in the two regions in December 2005. The North Caucasus is typically not included in Russian national surveys, and while there have been some small, localised surveys in individual republics of the region, to our knowledge ours is the first large scientific public opinion survey of the whole area. Unfortunately, due to danger, Chechnya and Ingushetia were off-limits to our interviewers, which means that the survey does not include the most conflict-ridden region of the North Caucasus. The surveys include representative numbers of all the major nationalities. The goal is to measure and document the nature of attitudes and preferences towards the contemporary situation, social networks, socio-demographic and national characteristics, and the nature of cross-national relations in the light of experiences of conflict and the continued unsettled political environment of the region.

The survey questionnaire is based on a geographic design that includes all types of districts in the two study regions. We could not completely cover all the 115 rayoni and cities of Stavropol’ kray and the four ethnic republics of the North Caucasus included in our survey and the 109 opštine of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As such, we had to be selective in the choice of study sites to make sure we had enough respondents in each community, as well as ensure that we were sampling correctly for differences in the sizes of nationalities. Following the best practice of case selection, we selected observations to ensure variation in the explanatory variables that guide the larger project of which the survey is part (Dion 1998), such as the mix of nationalities, population change, environmental character as measured by land use and land cover, relative economic standing, and urban and rural regions.

The survey process included the following two steps: First, stratification of the sub-areas of the study sites for selection of survey sites, and second, survey of populations using a random procedure. We stratified the districts of the study areas according to the total of twenty-six variables using the approach employed by Taub, Taylor and Dunham (1984). The data that we employed in the stratification of the districts and cities originate from several sources and constitute four aggregate measures: ethnic diversity, material well-being, electoral measures, and environmental conditions (population density and urban–rural status).

While the norm in sociological studies of attitudes is to use samples that are random and not placed-based, in our cases such a strategy would not adequately allow us to examine the degree to which levels of post-conflict adjustment vary with respect to place of residence, conditional on national group membership, material well-being, or political attitudes. Therefore, a survey questionnaire was administered to a random sample of adults over the age of 18 (the voting-age population) in each of the thirty-five sampled rayoni/ cities in the North Caucasus. The distribution was roughly proportionate to the number of adults in each republic/kray and was composed as follows:
Dagestan 625, Kabardino-Balkaria 246, Karachay-Cherkessia 121, North Ossetia 198, and Stavropol 810, for a total of 2,000 persons. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the sample was distributed proportionately to the population in thirty-five opštine.\(^{15}\)

The surveys were administered by two reputable survey firms, the Levada Center of Moscow and Prism Research of Sarajevo. The average length of each survey interview was forty-five minutes. In the North Caucasus, the surveys were conducted in Russian by teams from Krasnodar, Moscow, and Stavropol\(^{1}\), and in BiH in Bosnian, Serb, or Croat by local interviewers in the respective regions. The reliability of the work of the interviewers was checked by a follow-up visit from supervisors to twenty-five per cent of the respondents.

In order to calculate the social distance among our survey respondents, we use a number of attitudinal questions that are intended to capture their views on matters related to ethnicity and religion and, as such, may be particularly likely to differ among members from different ethnic groups. Note that these questions measure the individual survey respondents’ attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups (out-groups) as well as attitudes towards their own ethnic group (in-group). These questions allow us to calculate a social distance matrix based on the respondents’ view on a wide range of questions regarding ethnicity. Our aim is not to test hypotheses about out-group vs. in-group attachments, but rather to detect whether members of different ethnic groups tend to congregate in clusters when it comes to attitudes towards ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations. In other words, we are interested in examining whether the distances among group members are smaller than between group members and members of other groups. We list the survey questions included in Table 1. The five questions listed first address the respondents’ attitudes towards their own group, while the five questions listed last address the respondents’ attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups.\(^{16}\)

Social distance, as opposed to locational distance, describes how close members of diverse social groups, such as different ethnic groups, are to one another in an unmeasured social metric (Bogardus 1925).\(^{17}\) Like most other researchers, we consider a person’s social distancing perceptions to be the result of a complexity of identities. For Jasso and Meyersson (2004) each identity, in turn, is a bundle of three elements, including (1) personal quantitative characteristics, such as competence, skill, holiness, or wealth; (2) personal qualitative characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, language, or religion; and (3) primordial socio-behavioral outcomes, such as status, self-esteem, or sense of justice. In their study of Palestinians, Jasso and Meyersson find that personal social distancing (from Israelis) is closely related to political attitudes to the various peace options mooted to resolve the intractable territorial conflict. Though we did not use a Bogardus-type scale for measuring social distance since we do not ask respondents to evaluate other specific groups, we asked numerous questions that probe intra-group solidarity as well as out-group interactions and preferences.
Table 1. *Attitudinal survey questions from Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus included in analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey question</th>
<th>Answer categories</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you changed how religious you are since 1990?</td>
<td>Much more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you please tell us how you feel as a member of your national group over the past 15 years?</td>
<td>Much stronger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only nationalist parties will ensure the vital interest of the people they represent.</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you feel proud to be a member of your national group?</td>
<td>Very proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about people who have moved into your locality from other parts of [BiH/North Caucasus]?</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to have more friends among people of different nationalities in this region.</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among national groups, it is possible to create cooperation but never to fully trust.</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s possible to trust only people of my nationality</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the schools it is important that children should learn the history and culture of all nationalities in [this region].</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic relations in my locality will improve when nationalities are separated into territories that belong only to them.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is a longstanding interest in the social sciences in calculating the social
distances among individuals based on some clustering of their multivariate
characteristics. One of the most widely used measures was developed in the
1960s by John Gower (1966, 1971) and assessed the similarity and dissimilarity
of a set of observations based on the latent structure of multivariate data that
describe these observations. The Gower distance is one of several distance
metrics of this sort that permit inferences about how close observations are on
an unmeasured, composite latent metric. These approaches are widely used
(e.g. King and Zeng 2007). In their study of residential segregation of
Toronto’s largest ethnicities, White, Kim and Glick (2005), for instance,
show how social distance can be mapped using multidimensional scaling
with numerous groups and across multiple geographic areas. Their graphs of
ethnic groups in social spaces are highly meaningful in the context of Toronto’s
immigration history, Canada’s context of assimilation and dominance of
English-speakers, and neighborhood selectivity by specific immigrant groups.
African/Caribbean groups and blacks are highly clustered, and the multi-
dimensional nature of social spaces is more evident through this approach than
in the usual binary comparisons of segregation (e.g. Italians compared to
English-Canadians) typically found in the literature.

The basic idea in our study is to provide a multidimensional comparison of
how similarly respondents answer a set of selected questions. Do members of
the same ethnic groups answer these questions in a comparable way? The
distance among the individuals in their answers to our survey questions serves
as a guide to the social space in which they are attitudinally located. That is,
calculating distances among the interviewees’ responses to the ten questions
listed in Table 1 and displaying them in a two-dimensional space give us a
sense of the underlying, unobserved distribution of these people in the social
space defined by the attitudinal answers to these questions. The calculation
itself requires computing the dissimilarity of each of the survey respondents to
one another, and the technique we use to decompose the social distances,
which here exist in ten dimensions, into coordinates in a two-dimensional
space is a simple application of multidimensional scaling (MDS).18

The basic idea of MDS is to decompose a distance/dissimilarity matrix of \( n \)
objects into \( k \) vectors of coordinates to locate each object so that their
distances in the \( k \)-dimensional space approximate those in the distance matrix.
A tricky aspect of multidimensional scaling is to determine how many
dimensions (\( k \)) to choose. Too many dimensions (more than three) are hard
to display in a two-dimensional setting, while too few dimensions might lose
important information carried by additional dimensions. We use a widely
employed empirical (and arbitrary) rule and display \( k \) dimensions so that they
cover about 80 per cent of the total variance (Everitt and Dunn 2001).

Our expectation is that the social distance matrices will display clear ethnic
groupings. Possibly, the inter-ethnic character of the conflict in Bosnia-
Herzegovina may have created sharper differences than in the North
Caucasus, where the conflicts to a larger extent have been directed at

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representatives of the local and federal governments. In contrast, if it is the case that ‘time heals all wounds’, the fact that the Bosnian conflict ended in 1995 may mean that the more recent violence in the North Caucasus will reveal sharper divisions there. The bottom line, however, is that both conventional wisdom and the (ethnic) conflict literature lead us to believe that we will identify ethnically based groupings in both of these societies.

Findings

Essentially, we are interested in whether ethnicity influences the distribution of respondents in the metric of social distance. Do different ethnicities congregate in social space in a manner as implied by many social science theories? Our main findings are presented graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1a demonstrates that in BiH, members of different ethnic groups are mixed in terms of their distribution in the social space. We observe no obvious pattern of clear ethnic divisions when it comes to the respondents’ views on questions of religion, nationality, trust, and separatism. This goes against existing studies’ emphasis on the sharp ethnic divisions resulting from the very bloody war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We should stress that we do not dispute the fact that settlement patterns in post-war BiH are ethnically segmented, nor do we say anything about how members of different ethnic groups view one another. What we do contend is that there is little evidence of marked ethnic divisions when it comes to the composite social distance among people of different ethnic backgrounds.19

In Figure 1b, we observe that in the North Caucasus, there is also significant overlap among members of different ethnic groups, but the pattern demonstrates that there are certain ethnic-specific tendencies in the respondents’ location in the social space: The Russian respondents ‘lean’ towards one side (to the left), and the respondents of the other major ethnic groups ‘lean’ towards the other side (to the right). While the pattern is not one of sharp social distances, it may suggest that the post-Soviet history of center–region or separatist conflicts in Russia, particularly in the North Caucasus, has created differences between Russians, who traditionally have dominated political and economic life, and the ethnic minority groups.20

In order to better illustrate the ethnic-specific patterns in the social space for the North Caucasus respondents, we display different major ethnic groups separately in Figure 2, which reveals more clearly than Figure 1b how members of the different ethnic groups are located in the social space. Again, the overall pattern is one of significant ethnic overlap between the scores on the MDS scales, though the Ossetians (a predominantly Orthodox people in the region) show the clearest expression of difference as they are almost all on the positive side of the second dimension.21 A possible explanation of the Ossetian social distancing positioning is a reaction to the Beslan hostage taking, which killed 188 Ossetian children – and more than 350 in total – a
year before the survey was conducted. Compared to an average of twenty-two per cent of North Caucasian respondents who said that they or a close family member had witnessed an ethnically motivated death or injury, the figure for Ossetians was eighty-nine per cent, a result of the close community attention and involvement with the Beslan tragedy and the 1992 conflict with the Ingush.

There are several possible explanations for the observed difference between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus. First, it may be the case that there is something in the saying that ‘time heals all wounds’, and that the more
recent – and still ongoing – violence in the North Caucasus drives the observed pattern. In contrast, the Bosnian conflict came more or less to a halt in 1995, although the war was incredibly destructive and hundreds of thousands of people are not yet back in their homes.\textsuperscript{22} The second option is that conflicts in states with an ethnic core group, such as the Russians in Russia, are more divisive than conflicts in states without such a core group. The Russians are far more dominant in Russia than are the Bosniaks in BiH, which could possibly explain the diverging pattern we observe. It may be, however, that there has always been more of a difference between Russians and Russia’s ethnic minorities than among ethnic groups in BiH, which is a proposition we cannot investigate based on our survey data, a snapshot of a single point in time.

Table 2 attaches numerical measures to the patterns portrayed in Figure 1, providing the social distance means for the major ethnic groups in BiH and the North Caucasus.\textsuperscript{23}

The average social distance among respondents in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus is about the same. The only ethnic group that really stands out is the Ossetians, who appear to be placed closer to one another in the social space than members of any other ethnic group. As noted above, the

\textbf{Figure 2.} North Caucasus: Social distance by MDS. Note: The vertical and horizontal dashed line refer to the same mean coordinates of all the people surveyed in the North Caucasus.
Ossetian respondents may have been influenced by the dramatic events in Beslan in 2004. Moreover, unlike the other major ethnic groups in the North Caucasus, the Ossetians have found themselves in a violent inter-ethnic conflict (with the Ingush, over the Prigorodny district in North Ossetia).24 However, while these are possible explanations for the Ossetian ‘exception’, based on the same rationales, we should have observed a similar tendency for each of the ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

If we compare the measures for between-group distance in the North Caucasus and Bosnia, as in Tables 3 and 4, we find that in general, the differences are slightly larger between the ethnic groups in the North Caucasus than in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We should note that we also examined whether our findings differed when we included only in-group questions (questions 1–5 in Table 1) and only out-group questions (questions 6–10 in Table 1) in calculating the distance among our respondents.25 We found no such evidence; the figures still displayed a highly mixed distribution in social space.

While Figures 1 and 2 present our survey respondents’ location in the social space as determined by the ten attitudinal questions in Table 1, Figures 3

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**Table 2. Social distance for major ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean social distance</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bosnia-Herzegovina</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serb</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croat</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosniak</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Caucasus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avar</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ossetian</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardin</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dargin</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Within-group distance is in the diagonals; between-group distance is in the off-diagonals.

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**Table 3. Within-group and between-group distances, Bosnia-Herzegovina**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Serb</th>
<th>Croat</th>
<th>Bosniak</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bosniak</td>
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and 4 portray the distribution in social space by the respondents’ answers to these ten questions. The figures aim to show which survey questions are more influential in explaining the distribution we observe – people might have similar views on some questions but quite different answers for others. In the figures, each category of answer is assigned a color: blue, green, grey, orange, and red generally correspond to a one-to-five scale ranging from low to high.

Figure 3 illustrates that in BiH, attitudes towards questions such as ethnic friends (Figure 3c), inter-ethnic trust and cooperation (Figure 3d), teaching of history and culture (Figure 3e), national trust (Figure 3f), and representation only by ethnic parties (Figure 3g) are important in determining the respondents’ positions in the social space, as colors based on answers to those questions have clear spatial clustering in the social space. These individual questions about inter-ethnic attitudes combine to suggest a composite dimension that is well defined. Figure 4 illustrates a similar tendency in the case of the North Caucasus, where the attitude towards newcomers (Figure 4i) also seems to be among the factors influential in determining the respondents’ positions in the social space. In the region, large in-migration from Chechnya into Ingushetia, western Dagestan, and southern Stavropol’ due to the Chechen wars; from Ossetia into Ingushetia after the 1992 Prigorodny conflict; from South Ossetia to North Ossetia; and a general ‘de-Russification’ of the entire southern part of the North Caucasus (Vendina, Belozerov and Gustafson 2007) have remained sources of ongoing tensions regarding housing, jobs, and control of retail activities. Efforts to promote returns have been uneven, although refugee numbers are down significantly from the peak of five years ago.

In sum, while both BiH and the North Caucasus region have experienced inter-ethnic and/or separatist conflicts, our findings, while descriptive, are contrary to the conventional wisdom’s expectation about ethnic divisions in such post-conflict or conflict-affected societies.

We also examine whether there are geographical patterns in the respondents’ attitudes. Several scholars on conflicts in the post-communist countries have paid attention to the ways in which institutions of territorial decentra-

<table>
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<th>Table 4. Within-group and between-group distances, North Caucasus</th>
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<td><strong>Russian</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
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Note: Within-group distance is in the diagonals; between-group distance is in the off-diagonals.
Figure 3. Bosnia-Herzegovina: Social distance by MDS, broken down per question.
Figure 4. North Caucasus: Social distance by MDS, broken down per question.
lisation, such as federalism, may create or reinforce ethnic identities or even prepare regions or provinces for independent statehood, thus paving the way for separatism (e.g. Bunce 1999; Roeder 1991; Tishkov 1997). Others, however, have argued that the very same institutions may function as ‘peace-preserving’ because they meet regional or ethnic demands for self-determination half-way by combining central rule with a certain degree of self-rule for the country’s sub-state units (e.g. Bermeo 2002; Hechter 2000). While this study is not directly participating in this debate, our data allow us to investigate the degree to which respondents from different regions are placed differently in a social distance matrix. In BiH, the second tier of government – that is, the level of government one step ‘below’ the national level – consists of two units: Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This division was the result of the Dayton peace agreement of 1995, more or less reflecting the territories held by the two main warring sides. While Republika Srpska is Serb-dominated and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is shared between Croats and Bosniaks, in 2000 the Brčko Federal District was carved out as a third, multi-ethnic entity under international supervision. In the North Caucasus region of Russia, the administrative divisions stem from Soviet times, and in our survey we include Stavropol’ and the titular republics of Karachay-Cherkessia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia. As noted earlier, however, in each of these regions, there are sizable minorities. In Figure 5, we illustrate the degree to which administrative divisions along ethnic lines coincide with inter-ethnic differences in a social distance matrix.

In Figure 5a, we see that the respondents from Brčko Federal District appear to cluster in a relatively small area of the social distance matrix, but the respondents from Republika Srpska and the Federation, the most populous entities, overlap. In the North Caucasus, the respondents from Stavropol’ krar stand apart from the other regions (Figure 5b). Stavropol’ is the only Russian-majority region included in our survey, which means that the pattern we see in Figure 5b is consistent with our discussion of Figure 2. In terms of the debate about the pros and cons of (ethno-)federalism, it is interesting to note that we do not observe sharp differences among the ethnically defined regions. Indeed, given the literature on the cons of ethno-federalism, we would have expected a clearer division among each of the ethnically defined regions, both in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus.

These empirical findings suggest that neither the legacy of regional conflicts nor institutionalisation along ethnic lines correspond to sharp attitudinal differences among respondents of different ethnic backgrounds. This is not to say that ethnicity plays no role in these societies. Our survey questions do not capture how members of different ethnic groups feel about members of specific other ethnic groups. But what our survey questions and the patterns revealed in the figures do capture is that members of different ethnic groups are not necessarily viewing the world all that differently when it comes to questions of religion and ethnicity.
Figure 5. Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus: Social distance by administrative regions.
Conclusion

In this article we have examined the common assumption that intra-state conflicts that pit ethnic groups against one another are likely to result in societies characterised by sharp ethnic divisions. We do so by employing a social distance perspective, mapping the unobserved dimensions of social distance among 4,000 survey respondents in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus region of Russia. While the study is descriptive, contrary to conventional wisdom we find no clear pattern of marked inter-ethnic divisions among our respondents’ views on attitudinal questions of religion, nationality, trust, and separatism. These findings may seem counter-intuitive at one level and obvious at another. We believe, however, that they illustrate that ethnicity cannot be used as a blunt instrument to classify widely varying and complicated beliefs and attitudes. Whether this is especially true in war-torn societies or is only true in war-torn societies is not really the point. These surveys pick up interesting variation in how individuals in BiH and the North Caucasus region of Russia perceive their situations, feel about their neighbors, and assess their prospects for the future, but our study shows that it is not the case that these attitudes are easily predicted on the basis of (self-selected) nominal ethnicity alone. The patterns presented in our figures are consistent with theoretical work by, for example, Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004), who argue that the entities typically referred to as ‘ethnic groups’ are not useful analytical categories because the notion of ‘groupness’ itself is questionable: Ethnic groups, they argue, are not necessarily sharply bounded and homogeneous entities. An implication is that many of the conflicts referred to as ethnic conflicts are not necessarily only about ethnicity – or even about ethnicity at all. While Brubaker suggests that groupness may be the consequence rather than the cause of violent conflict, our findings suggest that even the most gruesome acts of inter-ethnic violence may not create clearly bounded ethnic groups. These empirical findings are worth further exploration as they question the importance that both the policy-oriented and academic literatures give to efforts of bridging inter-ethnic divisions in post-conflict societies.

Notes

1 Recounted to one of the authors in Moscow, 21 June 2005.
2 We should note here that surveys carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia prior to the war show that the pre-war period, too, was characterised by a certain degree of ethnic intolerance (Kunovich and Hodson 2002; Sekulić, Massey and Hodson 2006).
3 See also Gurr’s (2000) work on minorities at risk, which suggests that the overlap of ethnicity and economic (or social, cultural, political) discrimination is likely to create conflict.
4 Note that the contact hypothesis has been dismissed by many social psychologists.
5 De-categorisation refers to the replacement of category or group-based information with information about the individuals in each group, which is hypothesised to reduce the salience of category-based identities. Re-categorisation focuses on fostering a common in-group identity.
across the various groups, which will putatively reduce the likelihood of conflict because notions of ‘we’ replace notions of ‘us versus them’. An even better strategy of re-categorisation, argues Hewstone and Greenland, may ‘involve a superordinate identity and distinctive subgroup identities’ (2000: 141). The implication is that ‘we’ does not take the place of ‘us’ and ‘them’, but rather that these labels coexist. This was precisely the point of trying to create a ‘Soviet man’ in the USSR and to replace ethnic identities with a civic Yugoslav identity in Tito’s Yugoslavia. Finally, cross-categorisation posits that the likelihood of conflict is reduced if different social categorisations, such as ethnicity, religion, and class, are cross-cutting (see Ahuja and Varshney 2005 on India).

6 See also Pugh and Cobble (2001) on the 1997 municipal elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
7 This is not to say that inter-ethnic tensions have been absent from the North Caucasus, but that many of the conflicts have had more of a separatist or irredentist nature (cf. Stepanov 2000).
8 Kidnappings have been at the hands of the Russian security forces and the militia under the control of Moscow’s hand-chosen president of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov. Violence in Chechnya has dwindled since 2005 and the scale of violence is presently lower than in the first Chechen war (1994–96).
9 In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the opština (sing. opština) are the fourth and third administrative level: The state consists of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into ten cantons, which, in turn, are divided into opštine (municipalities). Republika Srpska does not have the canton level; hence there the opštine are the third tier of government.
10 The United Nations’ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has formally ruled that Bosnian Serbs engaged in genocide in the Srebrenica massacre of July 1995, where more than 7000 Bosnian Muslim men were executed.
11 Both Colton and Hough (1998) and Colton (2000) make use of pre-election and/or post-election surveys for a large number of regions across Russia, but in none of these studies is the North Caucasus central.
12 With respect to the North Caucasus, we cannot be completely certain of the survey’s representative character because of migration and temporary residences, but comparison with Russia’s 2002 census data suggests that the ratios for each major group in our survey are appropriate, recognising that Chechens in Chechnya and refugee camps in Ingushetia were not sampled. In BiH, the last population census was carried out before the war, in 1991. While population estimates are available, enormous dislocations, ethnic cleansing, internal migration and emigration have made these numbers problematic.
13 King, Keohane and Verba (1994) caution against selection of cases on the basis of the dependent variable; such an error would be selection of the most conflictual and war-affected locales to study post-war outcomes.
14 The sources and types of data include aggregate socio-economic information from the Russian October 2002 census, as well as changes since the previous 1989 Soviet census. We employed data on ethnic population composition, occupation, agricultural ratio, industrial ratio, doctors per capita, birth and death rates, infant mortality, average salaries, phones per capita, crime rate, and pupils in school as a ratio of the population. The BiH census data had to come from the 1991 Yugoslav census, updated by numbers on refugee returns from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In terms of electoral data, data on Russian parliamentary election results in 2003 and 2004 included the vote percentages for the major national parties and for the presidential candidates and are from official statistics. For BiH, there have been numerous elections, and we used the data from the 2000 Parliamentary contest for our classification purposes. Because parties are so strongly aligned with ethnicities, these data provided a useful surrogate for population distributions. We used a grouping algorithm (Ward’s hierarchical method) in order to cluster types of rayoni/cities and opštine in terms of the socio-demographic indicators. At each stage of clustering, an error term was generated, and we picked the six-cluster solution as the best compromise between gross aggregation and cluster complexity. For each of the clusters, districts were sampled randomly except that the main cities were also included in the
sample rayoni. By strategically sampling a wide variety of counties and cities, we created a representative sample of districts.

In the North Caucasus, from one to thirteen primary sampling units (PSUs) were selected in each stratum, depending on the number of respondents falling into each cluster. The number of questionnaires falling into one stratum was then divided equally between selected PSUs. Eighty-two self-representative objects and PSUs were included in the sample. At the second stage of sampling, supervisors selected secondary sampling units (SSUs), which were streets in urban settlements and villages/counties in rural districts, yielding a total of 200. Selection of households in each SSU was carried out by means of a random route method (each seventeenth household in blocks with multistorey buildings; each fifth household in blocks with individual houses). If the household or respondent refused to take part in the survey or was not reached after three visits, the interviewer went to the next address. A total of 4,451 contacts were made for the completed 2,000 interviews – a response rate of 44.9 per cent. In BiH, a similar design was followed and a total of 2,234 contacts were made for the 2,000 completed interviews – a response rate of 85.9 per cent.

The question about newcomers is an in-group question in BiH but an out-group question in the North Caucasus survey. In the BiH survey, the question asks: ‘How do you feel about the members of your national group who have moved into your locality from other parts of Bosnia because of the war?’ In the North Caucasus, the question asks: ‘How do you feel about people representing different ethnic groups in the North Caucasus who are moving to live in your town/locality from other North Caucasus republics?’

These distances tend to be stable and cohesive, even over long periods of time. In a study of Lebanese students in 1974, Starr (1978) found that the overall mean scores did not change much compared to the Bogardus scores of 1925 and 1933. He concluded that the sweeping religious and political changes in the Middle East region over the previous four decades did not alter social distances very much.

We considered using singular value decomposition (SVD) as well, which is a related technique, but we decided against this, as the social distance among our respondents is (presumed to be) symmetrical, while SVD allows for asymmetrical social distances.

We should stress that because our survey results can only capture a snapshot in time (December 2005), we cannot say anything about differences in social distance over time.

We used pairwise deletion of cases with missing values on these questions.

In terms of minority returns (which is a technical term referring to persons who have returned to their pre-conflict municipalities, currently dominated by (an)other constituent people(s) of Bosnia) from 1996 to the end of September 2006 the total was 457,054 (UNHCR 2006).

Mean social distance of a region or group refers to the mean distance among respondents of that region or group, i.e. it says nothing about differences between regions or groups but differences within them. The higher the value, the greater the social distance.

North Ossetia also has a large number of Ossetians from Georgia present in the republic (about twenty-five per cent of our sample), who have left South Ossetia as well as other parts of Georgia after the Ossetian–Georgian war of 1991.

See note 16: The question about newcomers is an in-group question in BiH but an out-group question in the North Caucasus.

Though in effect it is Bosniak-dominated as Croats have fled BiH and now constitute less than fifteen per cent of the population there.

We calculated the within-region and between-region distance in both regions (as in Tables 3 and 4). In BiH, the largest number for the within-region distance is in Republika Srpska (4.19), and the smallest is in Brčko Federal District (2.62). The largest number for the between-region distance is between Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.25), while the smallest is between Brčko Federal District and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (3.88). In the North Caucasus, the largest number for the within-region distance is in North Ossetia (4.39), and the smallest is in Kabardino-Balkaria (3.65). The largest number for the
between-region distance is between North Ossetia and Karachay-Cherkessia (4.64), while the smallest is between Kabardino-Balkaria and Stavropol' (4.02).

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