

# **Tribal Politics in the Balkans: Elections and Nation-Building in Montenegro**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the electoral effect of revived tribal identity in contemporary Montenegro, while seeking to consolidate national identity. Using original data from the 2016 and 2020 elections, I show that contemporary tribalism in the Western Balkans is not merely a de-politicised folkloric occurrence, but a consequential political phenomenon. Voters actively use tribal membership to help determine their position on nationhood cleavage and inform vote choice. The findings confirm that the politicisation of tribal affiliations is detrimental to the predominant Democratic Party of Socialists, as it disproportionately fractionalises Montenegrin ethnicity, from which the party draws support for its nation-building agenda.

**Keywords:** nation-building, tribes, election, ethnicity, Balkans

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## Introduction

In many post-communist countries, the process of nation-building has remained a central political issue long after the formal introduction of democracy. For this reason, the classical literature on the democratic transition has carefully considered the effect of cultural homogenisation on political stability and democratisation (Huntington 1993; Linz, Linz & Stepan 1996). While the development of broad-based popular allegiance to state apparatus may be critical for avoiding the violent breakdown of societies, the excessive focus on nation-building has limited the theoretical discussion by treating national identity as ‘single and isolatable’ (Schatz 2000). As a result, in many post-communist countries research on identity politics misunderstood its underlying complexity and focused exclusively on layers of identities that can be more easily observed or officially categorised (Collins 2006). Ronald Suny (2000) has criticised such approaches, arguing that the repertoire of identities used to explain political behaviour has been too narrow, failing to recognise that group boundaries are continuously negotiated using the wide range of identities available in an individual’s repertoire (Nagel 1994; Chandra 2012).

The constructivist notion of identity leans on the idea of the multiplicity and malleability of identity which can be derived from various ethnic markers (e.g. ancestry, language, appearance). If sufficiently salient, they can be used to (re)define ethnic boundaries and distinguish between ethnic groups. Nation-building is a prime example of how groups divided along one identity can over time become unified along another. In that sense, the process of the political fusion of tribes into coherent nations is a clear example of the expansion of group boundaries. Boundary expansion through the politics of nation-building can take different forms – fusion, amalgamation or emphasis shifting - none of which assumes that lower-level identities are fixed or predetermined. For instance, one frequent variant of nation-building proceeds by emphasising a higher level of ethno-national differentiation, thus superposing existing tribal or regional divisions (Wimmer 2013). However, the lower-level identities in this process are not merely absorbed by the higher-level identities, but rather resume their independent life and continue to be shaped by social forces and political actors. For this reason, despite the fact that nation-building is typically seen as a natural process stemming from the modernising forces that transform small-scale solidarities into more inclusive collective consciousness of a higher order (Gellner 2008), unidirectionality should

not be assumed. In particular, the politicisation of any sufficiently salient sub-national affiliation can potentially reverse the process of nation-building by becoming a source of intragroup divisions (Oakes 1987). The latter possibility, however, have been often neglected as institutionalist theories have stubbornly denied the importance of tribes and clans in modern politics, as they should have been wiped by the modernisation forces and the rise of centralised state bureaucracies (Weber 1958).

Nonetheless, it is obvious that such traditional social organisations are not confined to the pre-modern era. The tribes and clans of Africa, Middle East and Central Asia (e.g. de Kadt & Larreguy 2018; Collins 2006; Khoury, Khoury & Kostiner 1991) have shown an incredible capacity to persist and adapt to modern political systems and institutions. While these regions share a number of structural conditions that guaranteed the resilience of pre-national identities, European cases are thought of as substantially different. Due to the fact that the process of nation formation started considerably earlier, tribal and clan organisation in Europe declined, and practically disappeared, well before the XX century. The empirical fact that tribal loyalties are almost extinct, paired with the democratic nature of the majority of European states, are likely reasons behind the complete lack of studies on tribal/clan politics in Europe (Baldwin & Holzinger 2019). Despite both the historical and contemporary relevance of tribes in Montenegro and Albania, two NATO members and EU candidate states, the complete absence of academic interest in the role of tribal affiliations in the Western Balkans can also be seen as a direct product of the widespread assumption that tribes have either been fully marginalised by the central authorities or fully absorbed by the national identity. As a result, while the literature on ethnopolitics clearly demonstrating that the strategic politicisation of different identities has profound electoral consequences (Mozaffar, Scarritt & Galaich 2003; Posner 2005), the effect of playing the tribal card in the electoral arena remains largely unknown even in places where this is regularly used by political parties/candidates.

This paper fills this gap by studying the contemporary political use of revived tribal identity in Montenegro amidst its struggle to consolidate its national identity. It argues that the resurgence of tribal life during the democratic transition should not be downplayed as largely de-politicised ‘folkloristic gatherings’ (Bieber 2003b), but as an important political phenomenon that has profound electoral consequences. I argue that tribal labels are used by voters as a ‘shortcut’ for determining both voters’ and candidates’ positions with respect to national/statehood cleavage,

which in turn strongly affects electoral behaviour. In terms of the direction, this paper argues that tribal identity is politicised by political forces opposing the nation-building process pushed by ruling political elites, with the purpose of fractionalising titular Montenegrin ethnicity along tribal lines and reducing electoral support for the predominant Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista*) (DPS) running on a strong nation-building agenda. After three decades of uninterrupted ruling, in the election of August 2020, the DPS was defeated by a coalition of pro-Serbian parties. The landmark election that put an end to the most durable regime in post-communist Europe was marked by an outright attempt to redefine the boundaries between the two largest ethnic groups – Montenegrins and Serbs. This paper focuses on the previously disregarded but strategic use of tribal affiliations against efforts to consolidate titular ethnicity.

Using original survey and experimental data on Montenegrin tribes in the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary election, this paper refutes widespread assumptions about tribal identity in contemporary Montenegro and demonstrates both its resilience and profound political importance. Both the survey and experimental data clearly demonstrate the political potency of tribal affiliations in Montenegro, both with respect to the nature of national identification and the likelihood of supporting the DPS. The contemporary inter-tribal variation is accurately predicted by historical accounts, suggesting that traditional loyalties are politically consequential even when formal tribal institutions are lacking. To the literature on ethnopolitics in the Balkan region, saturated with evidence on the importance of ethno-national grouping, these findings problematise the current tendency to study them in isolation, as detached from other layers of an individual's identity.

## **The Tribes of Montenegro**

Prior to the XIX century, Montenegro was a community of embattled tribes presided over by the Metropolitans of Cetinje. Its territory consisted of small districts (*nahiyas*) and was characterised by its segmentary social structure organised around blood-related groups called clans (*bratstvo*).<sup>2</sup> The clan represents the most solid and complete social unit, so densely tied that almost

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<sup>2</sup>In terms of size, the tribes of Old Montenegro were significantly smaller compared to those in the Hills and in New Montenegro. These smaller tribes were traditionally clustered in permanent confederations called *nahias*, with *nahias* being structurally similar to Hill tribes (Boehm 1983, p.53).

the entire individual reputation was shared by the rest of the clan. Clans merged into larger units, tribes (*pleme*), which represented both military and corporate units: they occupied naturally defined territory, collectively owned mountain pastures and forests, and defended resources against other tribes or foreign invaders (Boehm 1983). While these tribes maintained a close relationship with the central authorities in the royal capital of Cetinje, they had prerogatives with respect to economic and military affairs.<sup>3</sup>

In total, there were approximately 40 tribes associated with three tribal groups/confederations: Old Montenegro (*Stara Crna Gora*), the Hills (*Brda*) and New Montenegro (*Nova Crna Gora*) (A full list of tribes available in Appendix).<sup>4</sup> With the constant struggle against the Ottoman invader, the idea of a unified state was always present in their minds. While formal integration into a common state was more or less a smooth process occurring naturally as each subsequent tribal territory was liberated from the Ottoman Empire, many tribes reluctantly complied with the demands to transfer sovereignty and legitimacy to the centralised state. It should be noted that the historical process of state formation in the XIX and early XX centuries in Montenegro are of great relevance to the contemporary divisions and distribution of national identification across previously tribal territories. Notably, the territories of Old Montenegro served as a nucleus to which other tribal territories were attached over time. Out of the seven Hills tribes, majority of them (the *Piperi*, *Kuči*, *Bratonožići* and *Bjelopavlići*) were incorporated into Montenegro in 1796, with the *Rovci* and *Morača* tribes being incorporate only after the defeat of Turkish army at the *Morača River* in 1820. The *Vasojevići* tribe became part of Montenegro even later, in 1858. At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Montenegro significantly expanded territory and integrated a group of eight tribes from New Montenegro, located in the Nikšić region (Morrison 2009).

The most decisive actions against tribal particularism was taken during the rule of *Danilo I* (1851-1860), who sought to break Montenegro from the claws of traditionalism and defend its unity by erasing the last traces of tribal disobedience. To that end, he disbanded the most important

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<sup>3</sup> The Tribal Council was the main decision-making body within a tribe that decided on all important questions for the life of their members: military strategies against the Turks, potential alliances with other tribes, as well as mediating conflict within the tribe (Boehm 1983).

<sup>4</sup> While this tribal group does not have official title, I use designation of 'New Montenegro' instead of 'Old Herzegovina' for two reasons. First, it clearly communicates that this territory was integrated into the common Montenegrin state later. Second, it serves as a reminder of the dominant desire among tribesmen to become part of the Montenegrin state once more.

inter-tribal political institution, imposed a draconian tax regime, and replaced theocracy with modern secularism (Roberts 2007). However, these centralising efforts provoked a strong reaction from certain clans among the Hill tribes, whose defiance was met by a fearsome reaction from the authorities in Cetinje against those who refused to obey, or who sought help from the Ottomans. *Danilo I* ordered 'punitive expeditions' in tribes of *Bjelopavlići*, *Piperi* and *Kuči* which resisted centralisation and have been occasionally instrumentalised by the Ottomans to destabilise Montenegro. Effective suppression of the uprising in the Hills tribes made it known that in Montenegro a functional state system has been established (Batrićević 2018). In the process, however, the central authorities made many enemies among the alienated tribes. During the reign of *Danilo's* successor, *King Nikola* (1860-1918), the tribes uniformly lost their social and clan integrity, as well as the power to decide their own fate.

Despite the fact that the tribes of modern Montenegro are not organised as traditionally as they are in post-colonial Africa or in the Middle East, tribal loyalties as informal structures have re-emerged frequently and played an important role in the political turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While this manifestation varied depending on the social, political or military conditions at hand, their function remained strongly tied to the ability to generate strong feelings of solidarity among tribesmen. For instance, an underlying tribal divide resurfaced at the beginning of the XX century, when a large group of conspirators p among the Hill tribes of *Vasojevići*, *Bratonožići* and *Kuči* planned an uprising against the Montenegrin dynasty (Banac 1984, p.279). This episode, and many others that followed, demonstrate an important shift that occurred with respect to the tribal structure in Montenegro at the turn of the two centuries - the conflicts between tribes, that were traditionally driven by a desire to increase resources and a tribe's economic presence, now gained strongly political and ideological dimensions and became intrinsically tied to a diverging understanding of Montenegrin nationhood.

### *Tribes and Nation-Building in Montenegro*

The collapse of the great empires of the Central and Eastern Europe after World War I resulted in the creation of a number of new states which, despite the efforts to redraw borders along national lines, were often just as multinational as the former empires. Plebiscites organized after 1918 revealed that the 'national idea', as understood by elites, did not necessarily coincide with

national identification at a mass level, which often preferred membership of rival nation-states (Hobsbawm 1992, p. 133-134). This was definitely true of Montenegro in 1918, which turned into a political and military battlefield between proponents of unconditional unification with Serbia (the Whites) and proponents of a union of equal sovereign members (the Greens).<sup>5</sup> In the end, the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (*Kraljevina Srba Hrvata i Slovenaca*) (KSHS) was carried out in a fashion that was destined to affect generations to come. Proponents of unconditional unification held the illegitimate Podgorica Assembly, whose main decisions were the abolishment of the Montenegrin state and the removal of the Montenegrin *Petrović-Njegoš* dynasty.<sup>6</sup> The magnitude of this event for group boundaries at the time, and intergroup relations in the following century, is best depicted by the Vice-president's famous remark, ending the Assembly in a dramatic fashion: 'I urge you, gentleman, to set aside the history of Montenegro. Its political history, however, is divided in two parts: until yesterday, and since today. We are no longer Montenegrins, but Serbs' (Popović 2010, p. 145).

Despite the growing sense of national solidarity in the Kingdom of Montenegro, and the later Kingdom of Yugoslavia, group loyalties were still significantly determined at the micro level. Their resilience was maintained, at least partially, by the fact that the collective designations of Montenegrin and Serb were rarely mutually exclusive categories of identification. When a particular Montenegrin tribesman described himself as a Serb this did not necessitate that he show any actual cultural resemblance or sense of attachment to a peasant in Serbia (Pavlović, 2003). Instead, the co-existence of this native, intensely Montenegrin tradition of self-centeredness on the one hand, and the tradition allowing reciprocity with the Serbs on the other, was permitted by the

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<sup>5</sup> The Green-White divide refers to the Podgorica Assembly, where a vast majority of delegates supporting its decisions printed their agendas on white paper, while the few who opposed them printed theirs on green paper.

<sup>6</sup> While the Podgorica Assembly remains a highly controversial topic for contemporary historians with respect to the interpretation of its political consequences and the extent to which its conclusions reflected the will of the people, its procedural legitimacy represents a much less contested issue. Specifically, the legality and legitimacy of the Podgorica Assembly is objectively undermined in at least three ways. First, under the Montenegrin Constitution of 1905, decisions of this kind could have only been made by the elected representatives and existing political institutions. Second, the selection of delegates for the Podgorica Assembly was intentionally designed to disproportionately represent pro-Serbian sentiment. For this reason, the vast majority of delegates were selected from outside of Old Montenegro. In addition, the Assembly was organised outside of the royal capital of Cetinje, which represented the stronghold of Montenegrin loyalists and the home of the official state institutions. Third, delegates voted not in secrecy but by public acclamation, with a strong military presence (Vujović 1989; Banac 1984; Šuković & Pavićević 2006).

identification of general order, typically attributed to shared language and religion (Banac 1984, p. 274).

Although both orientations had their supporters in every tribe, Montenegrin national consciousness developed unevenly among the different tribal areas, as expected by the classical literature on nation formation (Hobsbawn 1992; Weber 1976). When Montenegrin loyalists rose to armed revolt against decisions of the Podgorica Assembly, this geographic-tribal imbalance was evident. *Marko Daković*, the leader of Montenegro's Serbophile youth, vividly described the political atmosphere in the aftermath of the unification as a 'stage of bloody conflicts, rebellions, protests, bombs, executions, chains, persecutions, of explicit collision between Serbdom and Montenegritude' (Daković 1926). While the Greens in Old Montenegro, holding their strong and unambiguously Montenegrin national identity, 'nursed revenge against a burning shame', the proponents of the unification in the Hills and in New Montenegro celebrated Pan-Serbianism. The conflict between the two sides soon moved into the electoral arena. In the 1920 election, more than half of the eligible voters in two out of three electoral districts in Old Montenegro did not even participate. Electoral absenteeism was highest among the *Cetinje* tribe (50.38%), the *Ćeklići* and *Bjelice* (48.18%), and the *Cuce* (45.64%), which were the most active base of the Green insurgency throughout the interwar period (Banac 1984).

During World War II, the Partisan and Chetnik movements in Montenegro drew their support disproportionately from certain tribal areas. Both movements in Montenegro were initially organised along tribal membership, in order to foster a sense of solidarity and cohesion within the units. For instance, approximately three quarters of the Chetnik movement in Montenegro was predominantly comprised on tribesmen from the Hills and New Montenegro, holding strongly pro-Serbian national sentiments (Pajović 1977). The Partisan battalions were formed based on clans and tribes, thus allowing the Communists to capitalise upon the attachment of individuals to their tribes. They invoked tribal honour, military achievements and intentionally pointed to their already mobilised neighbouring tribes. By recruiting tribal units, the Partisans in Montenegro also absorbed the internal tribal hierarchy (Ilić 2019). However, due to their dependence on home supplies and a desire to remain in close proximity to tribal areas, this organisational principle was abandoned by the Partisans in 1942, in order to foster greater geographic mobility among their units.



With the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia, which recognized Montenegro as a constitutive republic, the tribal structure of Montenegrin society went through a dramatic transformation. Before the Yugoslav Constitution of 1946, Montenegro was a traditionalist and agrarian society, lacking the necessary institutional underpinnings for nationalism as a mass phenomenon (Malešević & Uzelac 2007). Institutional theories of nationalism postulate that state institutions directly empower nationalist constituencies by re-shaping social networks, especially when those institutions are designed without regard to the traditional patterns of social interactions and loyalties (e.g. Gellner 2008; Anderson 1991; Roeder 1991; Suny 1993; Gorenburg 2001). Modernization, as a necessary condition for the conversion of kinship-based clans into successful nationalist movement, was provided in Montenegro by the Communist regime. Major cultural and educational institutions were established, including the Institute of History (1948), the National Theatre (1953), the Montenegrin Academy of Arts and Sciences (1973), and the first fully-fledged university (1974) (Rastoder 2003). Literacy increased dramatically, while the industrial sector grew from 6% to 35%, and the process of urbanisation moved the majority of Montenegro's population to the industrialised centres.

Even so, the trajectory of nation formation in Montenegro took a different path from what is envisioned by the classical literature. Although, in this view, Montenegrin national institutions should have consolidated Montenegrin national identity, we see a steady decline in Montenegrin national identification over the same period (Jenne & Beiber 2013; Vuković 2015a). The fact that the stability of national identification decreased during a period of increased institutional autonomy represents a theoretical puzzle, which can, at least partially, be explained by the Communists' deliberate attempt at transcending traditional political splits by keeping the ethno-national categories of Serb and Montenegrin as ambiguous as possible. Morrison (2009) notes that Montenegrin communists, being the most ardent protagonist of the class struggle, were less nationally oriented than any other. They held equidistance from the 'Montenegrin' and 'Serb' nationalities and 'imperatively searched for symmetry in the emergence of nationalism' (2009, p. 81). Accordingly, Montenegrin nationhood remained a vague and volatile concept which failed to fully transform the tribesmen into nationals. Instead of one, two competing forms of nationhood developed in Montenegro and remain relevant to this date (Malešević & Uzelac 2007).

Therefore, if one is to provide a short overview of the dynamic processes of nationhood in the Montenegrin XX century, it would have to depart from the significant ambiguity between

Montenegrin and Serbian nationhood during the rule of King Nikola I, largely stemming from their shared language and religion. However, Montenegrin grievances with respect to the manner in which their Kingdom has been dissolved at the Podgorica Assembly, as well as the violence that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the unconditional unification, highlighted lines of division between the two. In that sense, the decline of identification with Montenegrin nationhood during the Communist era can also be interpreted as a natural continuation of the process by which two national identities became more consolidated and mutually exclusive. This process of consolidation, however, could not be completed under the Communist elite which, for the most part, had a political stake in the blurred boundaries between the two identities. Therefore, it was the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia followed by an intra-elite split in the communist successor-party, the DPS, that finally provided favourable conditions for the consolidation of these two nationhoods as mutually exclusive categories of identification.

## **The Political Consequences of Tribal Identity in Contemporary Montenegro**

### *The Role of Tribes in Ethno-National Identification and Categorization*

Despite being deeply stigmatised during the Communist era, tribal loyalties were largely preserved. Christopher Boehm, an anthropologist who studied the tribe of Upper Morača in the mid-1960s, stressed that the influence of tribal society remained alive in rural Montenegro where ‘the tribe – rather than the village, or settlement, or even the Yugoslav national legal system – remained the chief moral reference point, the social unit in which man’s or woman’s reputation as a good person was maintained or lost’ (1983, p. 46). However, during this time, adherence to tribal identity was largely depoliticised and typically manifested in clientelist networks through which fellow tribesmen secured access to the scarce resources of the socialist state. While the surprising resilience of tribal identity can be explained by late state-formation, delayed nation-building and the absence of a market economy (Collins 2006), these fail to illuminate why tribalism gained political prominence during the democratic transition and why its resurgence in Montenegro had such a specific manifestation. Specifically, the ‘modernity of tradition’, as coined by Rudolph & Rudolph (1967), became pervasive only after the collapse of Yugoslavia produced the widespread

politicisation of ethnicity and when the political atmosphere pressed political elites towards reducing the ambiguity of national attachments.

From 1990 to 2020, Montenegro was continuously ruled by the communist successor party – the Democratic Party of Socialists – whose longevity was often attributed to their successful management of identity politics (e.g. Bieber 2013; Komar 2013; Vuković 2015b; Komar & Živković 2018; Krašovec & Batrićević 2020; Stankov 2020). In the early years of the transition, the DPS fully embraced a policy of ‘national ambiguity’ and left national question effectively unresolved. However, the party split in the ruling DPS in 1997 marked the beginning of Montenegro’s ‘second transition’, which dramatically restructured both the party system and the nature of intergroup relations in Montenegro (Pavićević *et al.* 2007). Open conflict escalated between the President and *Milošević*-loyalist, *Momir Bulatović*, and the ‘pro-Western reformist’ Vice-president, *Milo Đukanović*. Once a faction loyal to Belgrade formed a new political party, political unity within the Orthodox population was a matter of the past and open clashes between Montenegrin and Serb nationhood began to emerge again. Still, the conflict properly intensified only after the ruling DPS declared the renewal of Montenegro’s statehood as their main political objective. This shift towards adopting a nationalising agenda, however, coincided with the decline of identification with titular ethnicity in Montenegro, as the number of self-declared Montenegrins fell a staggering 19% between 1991 and 2003, in favour of Serbian ethnicity.

The extreme polarisation, which greatly resembled that of 1918 when the unification of Montenegro with Serbia was the central political issue (Pavlović 2003), created a window of opportunity for elites to fix ethno-national attachments ‘once and for all’ by tying them directly to faith in the Montenegrin state (Džankić 2013; Džankić 2014). Attempts at redefining the very meaning of the volatile collective designations of ‘Montenegrin’ and ‘Serb’ opened space for other ethnic markers to play an increasingly important role. Among them, despite being consistently overlooked by the academic literature, tribal affiliation played a significant role. The main comparative advantage of tribal identity lay in its stability. Tribal organization and social structure are rooted in kinship bonds that are perceived as permanent and provide meaning and cultural context for the members of a particular tribe (Collins 2006). For this reason, unlike national membership, tribal affiliations provide a steady basis for group solidarity while simultaneously offering rich identity substance suitable for navigating the complex relations between ethno-national groups. Indeed, Džankić (2013) notes that during the last years of the XX century, tribes

became reinvented as an emblem of folk culture to generate a feeling of national belonging. Historically, through the ascription of individuals to a particular tribe, and tribes to a particular political movement, ‘the history and tradition of Montenegro became tools through which a political idea reached the population’ (2013, p. 422).

While lacking formal leadership and decision-making powers, tribal labels continue to represent valuable cues in informing one’s sense of group membership. Not only are tribesmen unevenly distributed among national groups (self-categorization), but they also use tribal labels to determine others’ ethno-national membership (others-categorization). It is fairly common for individuals in Montenegro to ‘solve’ their historically ambiguous national identity by assigning different probabilities of membership of a specific national group to tribal groups. In loose terms, we can say that there is an informal hierarchy of tribes within national groups, where individuals determine the extent to which one is more or less credibly Montenegrin or Serb, purely based on tribal origin. Although usually unspoken, the existence of such a hierarchy creates a situation where some individual feel required to legitimize their membership of an ethno-national group beyond what is asked of others. For instance, it is rather typical that once you learn that particular person identifies as Montenegrin, to follow up with - ‘Where from’? Outside of mere curiosity, the answer to this question helps determine to what extent the history of a particular tribe ‘legitimises’ the individual as a stereotypical representative of their national group.

Given the fact that this is the first empirical study on contemporary Montenegrin politics that focuses on tribal identity, the initial goal of this study is to identify the existence of inter-tribal variation with respect to national identification and voting preferences (H1), as well as to show that voters use tribal affiliation to determine the credibility of a candidate’s reported ethno-national membership (H2).

### *The Electoral Effect of Tribal Membership*

The second part of the theory involving the interaction between tribal and national identity concerns its effect on voting behaviour. That this is a more demanding task than is commonly assumed is evident from the fact that, even in places where tribal histories are extensively utilised by political elites, the electoral consequences its politicisation often remain unexplored (Sarsembayev 1999). Based on the literature on nation-formation, achieving state independence

usually serves as an initial step towards dramatic changes in the dynamics of intergroup relations. More often than not, previously subordinate groups suddenly turn into a state-bearing nation, while former titular ethnicities (such as Russians in Kazakhstan, Hungarians in Romania, or Serbs in Montenegro) rapidly become ‘objects’ of the nationalising policies (Suny 2001). Roger Brubaker (1996) coins these two concepts a ‘nationalising’ and ‘homeland’ nationalisms. While the latter claims an obligation to protect the interests of their ethno-national kin outside of the homeland against such policies, the former is focused on strengthening its cultural, economic and demographic position within the state. With this goal, since the renewal of independence in 2006, the ruling DPS took on the role of the guardian of Montenegrin nationhood and actively pursued nation-building policies: adopting ‘new’ state symbols, proclaiming Montenegrin as the country’s official language and attempting to re-establish the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (Vuković & Batrićević 2019).

The effectiveness of these policies, however, was rather limited. While the nominal total of self-identified Montenegrins in the 2011 census increased for the first time since 1948, approximately a quarter of respondents still hold ambiguous (pan-Serbian) national identities (CSES, 2016). In such a situation, where the decline of dual national consciousness is seen as a necessary condition for the consolidation of national identity, the tribal layer of identity is likely to gain more prominence. One way of reducing perceived levels of similarity between opposing groups is a strategic revival of identities that predate the development of this dual identity and, thus, represent ‘authentic’ expressions of nationhood. For this reason, the new flags of the Central Asian states often contain carefully selected tribal symbols which precede the establishment of shared cultural markers of the Soviet era (Smith *et al.* 1998). The rationale is clear, the nested structure between national and tribal categories is expected to bring mutual reinforcement, as the former is seen as a natural continuation of the latter. When the manifestation of tribal affiliation implies the simultaneous enactment of nationhood, it complements the government’s nation-building project and brings electoral benefits to parties running heavily on that platform (Schatz 2000; Gullette 2007).

However, the Montenegrin case shows theoretically valuable irregularity with respect to the pattern observed in other regions. Specifically, despite the fact that the DPS’s ability to hold onto political power was causally linked to their ability to pursue unambiguous national policies, the politicisation of tribal affiliation has been predominantly directed against them. Despite being

aware that tribal identities can be used to ‘mobilize thousands and thousands of people’ (Calhoun 2000, p. 37), the government remained hesitant to use it and continuously criticised the reinterpretation of tribal history as an attempt to distort that history to achieving political goals (Džankić 2013). That tribal identity too is a shifting element that can also be reshaped, merged or reinvented (Roy, 2000), became evident when a shift in the national narrative of tribes was effectively utilised by *Milošević*’s supporters in Montenegro who, after two consecutive electoral defeats, cultivated the re-birth of tribes in order to ‘build some new, alternative, however false, source of legitimacy’ (Popović 2002, p. 23). Far from acting spontaneously, in the resurgence of tribalism at the end of the XX century, Montenegrin tribes were refabricated to serve a particular national ideology pushed by *Milošević*’s regime. The most telling characteristic of revived tribal gatherings was their mono-nationality, which was secured by the selective inclusion of tribesmen of predominantly pro-Serbian persuasion (Popović 2002).

Based on the new roles Montenegrin tribes gained, each significant nation-building policy since the renewal of Montenegrin statehood has warranted a political reaction that had its recognisable tribal dimension. For instance, immediately after the referendum vote, the *Vasojevići Association*’s released a statement requesting autonomy from the government in Podgorica and asking for Serbian consular representation on their territory.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, members of the *Kuči* tribe attempted to prevent the re-building of a monument to a member of the Montenegrin *Petrović-Njegoš* dynasty, due to his involvement in alleged cruelties against their fellow tribesmen, arguing that such a monument would be more appropriately located in Cetinje than ‘on the territory of the Kuči tribe’. Following their Party Congress in 2019, the DPS proclaimed their desire to pursue the last missing piece of the national identity puzzle – restoring the status of the once autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church (*Crnogorska pravoslavna crkva*) (CPC). The CPC was dissolved by the Serbian Orthodox Church (*Srpska pravoslavna crkva*) (SPC) in the 1920, following the Podgorica Assembly (Jovanović, 2014). Since then, the SPC has controlled almost all shrines and churches on Montenegrin territory. Due to the fact that the SPC does not recognize the CPC as a legitimate religious institution, the CPC’s leaders are not allowed even to enter most churches or provide religious services to their believers. In an attempt to tackle this issue, the government passed the Law on Religious Freedoms, which among other things requires the SPC to register in Montenegro, requires them to start paying taxes, and returns control over religious buildings

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<sup>7</sup> Mina News Agency, Podgorica, 26 June, 2006

owned by state prior to 1918 to the Montenegrin state. This would effectively allow both the CPC and the SPC to simultaneously use religious buildings under the control of the Montenegrin state. Unsurprisingly, the passing of the Law on Religious Freedoms was met by mass protests, organized by the SPC, that were clearly structured along tribal lines. Protest gatherings would begin in a particular tribe's territory, from where supporters would take 'protest-walks' to a central rally, carrying banners with the tribe's name written over the Serbian flag. Once there, each tribe would be called for separately, thus projecting a false unity of the tribes in celebration of Serbian nationality. Most recently, in the midst of the campaign for the 2020 election, hundreds of members of the *Kuči* tribe signed a petition declaring that the DPS's leader, *Milo Đukanović*, was not welcome in their tribal region.<sup>8</sup>

Why do we observe such a different use of tribal affiliations in Montenegro compared to, for example, Central Asian cases? The answer may lie in the different structural relationship between tribal and national identity in the two regions. The perfectly nested structure between the two layers of identity in Central Asia means that, for example, the Russian minority in Kazakhstan is unable to make reference to tribal/clan belonging. As a result, any appeal to tribal confederations (*zhuz*) or clans (*ru*) would directly imply membership of the Kazakh national group (Suny 2001). By contrast, the two layers of identity are not perfectly nested in Montenegro, in the sense that Montenegrins and Serbs in Montenegro can refer to their tribe (*pleme*) and the clan (*bratstvo*). Given the fact that both competing ethnicities can reference tribal belonging, their politicisation, in theory, can reinforce one national idea and cut-across the other. There seem to be at least three reasons why tribal appeal in Montenegro is exclusively used against nationalising elites and their efforts to consolidate titular Montenegrin ethnicity.

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<sup>8</sup>Although one could easily conclude that such actions are indication of the re-institutionalization of tribes in contemporary Montenegro, I maintain these organizations are more tribe-related than tribal as such. Specifically, tribal associations formally exist as NGOs and they do not claim direct ties to traditional tribal leadership. They are substantively different in ways that are highly relevant to the study of their political consequence. Their leaders are self-proclaimed and not elected. Membership of these association is not assumed by birth nor is it exclusive. Furthermore, these organization do not have formal bodies that seek to represent all fellow tribesmen. They are merely organization dedicated to the preservation and celebration of tribal culture and history, as seen by their self-proclaimed leaders. This has strong repercussions for their political use. While they provide a valuable source of solidarity among fellow tribesmen, which is particularly useful for the dissemination of national ideology, the structure and organization needed for political action is provided by the creators of those national ideologies – the Church and the political parties. Hence, the revival of tribal gatherings and organizations can be best understood as a form of 'neo-patriarchy' (Popović 2000), perfectly suited to reinforcing a particularly conservative notion of national ideology.

First, Montenegrin nationhood is significantly more divided across tribal groups than Serbian. Although data on tribal affiliation is not collected during the census, data obtained for this study shows that if we were to randomly draw two individuals of Serbian nationality, the likelihood of them being from the same tribal group is double that of two self-declared Montenegrins. This makes the politicisation of tribe a significantly safer option for political parties opposing nationalising policies. On the other hand, if the pro-Montenegrin DPS decides to play the tribal card it runs into the danger of breaking down national solidarity and reducing its electoral chances. Second, since the party split in 1997, the pro-Serbian opposition was effectively cut from the state resources needed to implement programmes to promote ethnicity. As a result, in a manner visible in post-Soviet states (Roeder 1991), instrumental mobilisation within the pro-Serbian opposition in Montenegro was substituted by primordial mobilisation much earlier, which is the reason why tribal gatherings were especially frequent and massive in the Hills and New Montenegro regions that became strongholds for the pro-Serbian opposition. Third, although supporters of an independent Montenegro organized tribal congregations in reaction to pro-Serbian tribal gatherings, unlike their northern counterparts they did not have a central association or clear political purpose, but usually took the shape of more informal folklore and sports gatherings (Džankić 2013). The apolitical and folkloric nature of revived tribal gatherings in Old Montenegro, as well as their limited electoral effect, can be easily explained by the lack of organizational coherence and mobilization among the Old Montenegrin tribes. However, the question remains as to why the DPS failed to play the tribal card among those who might clearly serve as a ‘vehicle’ for its national-building agenda. I argue that one additional reason why the DPS shunned using its strong party organisation to politicise tribal gatherings lies in the fact that the nation-building policies of the DPS, aimed at reducing ambiguity between Montenegrin and Serb nationhood, were practiced with the political support of ethnic minorities who were an integral part of their coalition government (Albanians, Bosniaks, Muslims and Croats). Given that these ethno-religious groups predominantly inhabit regions lacking a tribal social structure, tying process of nation-building to tribal expressions might have significantly reduced the coalition capacities of the DPS and potentially hurt Montenegro’s status as a civic state.

Based on the historical and theoretical considerations outlined above, I hypothesise that the politicisation of tribal identity in contemporary Montenegro has a negative effect on the probability of voter’s casting a ballot for the nationalising Democratic Party of Socialists (H3).



## Methods

In order to test these hypotheses, two separate studies were conducted. Study I forms a nationally representative cross-sectional survey study designed to identify inter-tribal variation both with respect to national identity (H1) and voting patterns (H3). Study II, on the other hand, employs an experimental design to manipulate the identity characteristics of hypothetical candidates in order to causally estimate the effect of tribal labels on voting preferences (H3) and ethnic categorization (H2).

### *Study I: Cross-sectional Survey Data Following the 2016 Election*

#### *Sample*

Original survey data on a large and nationally representative sample (N=1213) was collected after the 2016 Montenegrin parliamentary election, as an addition to the cross-national Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The survey was complemented by a range of country-specific items. The study was conducted as a face-to-face survey, representative of eligible Montenegrin citizens, aged 18 and or older, who were registered to vote. The sampling was conceptualized as a stratified multistage random sample. There were three stages in total, with regions (North, Centre and South) being the primary sampling unit. Inside the regions, polling stations were identified, as the second level of stratification divided based on their size. In the third and final stage, a random procedure based on ‘step-and-go’ was employed to choose the relevant household. The last person to have their birthday within the household was interviewed. The survey was conducted from December 8, 2016, to January 16, 2017.

In the analysis, from the initial sample, I excluded individuals who did not provide information on their origin or who reported a foreign origin. This resulted in 742 observations in the final sample, with practically all tribes represented in the sample (39). The most widely represented tribe in the sample is the *Vasojevići* (100) while the least number of observations being collected for the *Podgor* tribe (3). The size of the tribal groups in the sample largely corresponds to the sizes reported in other ethnographical studies, with the Hills being the largest tribal group in

the sample (333), followed by Old Montenegro (242), and the group tribes from New Montenegro (172). The spatial distribution of the sample across tribal groups is provided in Appendix B.

### *Individual-Level Measurements*

The dependent variable, electoral support for nationalising elites, was measured using a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent voted for the ruling DPS in the 2016 election or not. With respect to national identity, given its ambiguous nature in Montenegro, I opted for an interval indicator measuring the respondent's position on a scale ranging from completely pro-Serbian (1) to completely pro-Montenegrin (10). In reference to tribal belonging, respondents were asked to select the tribe their family belongs to. As a follow up question, they were asked to name the village in Montenegro from which their father's family came. Together, these items served the purpose of tying respondents' origin to a specific tribal territory.

Attitudes towards statehood, as one of the main controlling variables, was measured via an item asking whether the respondent would vote for an independent Montenegro or not if a referendum was organized tomorrow. Due to the fact that Orthodoxy is one of the most frequently cited sources of national ambiguity, this analysis includes a variable indicating whether a person belongs to the Serbian Orthodox Church or not. I also controlled for overall satisfaction with democracy (on a 7-points scale), the perceived economic state of the country (on a 7-point scale), and the level of political interest (dichotomous). All models controlled for the following demographic variables: age (interval), sex (dichotomous), education (interval: 9-point scale), type of settlement (dichotomous), as well as the municipality the individual voter comes from.

### *Tribe-Level Measurements*

The main explanatory variable at the tribal level is the tribal group to which an individual belongs. In accordance with historical accounts, this variable was introduced into the analysis as a dichotomous measurement indicating whether a voter belongs to the Old Montenegrin group of tribes or not. In addition, as numerous authors have indicated, differences with respect to political agendas and identity have been maintained across a the geographical dimension (Calhoun 2000,

p. 35), I also controlled for the geographic proximity to Cetinje, in order to account for potential variation within tribal groups. Here specifically, John Allcock (1994) argued that, just like a half-focused photo, ‘Montenegro proper’ shades off from Cetinje into its subsequent territorial accretions, which have had a weaker identification with Montenegro than with Serbia. Clearly, depending on the direction, increasing the distance from Cetinje could also mean closer proximity to Serbia. For this reason, the analysis also includes the distance from the Serbian border as a controlling variable. Lastly, I controlled for the distance between an individual’s place of residence and their reported tribal origin as a proxy measure of the density (salience) of the tribal network.

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### *Study II: Experimental Data Following the 2020 Election*

Although an extensive list of controlling variables included in the survey study produce robust results, based on them alone, we should not claim any causal effect of tribal affiliations on the dependent variable. While it is not reasonable to attempt to manipulate one’s tribal origin due to its fixed nature, the manipulation of candidates’ identity attributes can effectively exclude other, unobserved, but potentially confounding factors.

To avoid the causality issues inherent in the survey data, a original conjoint experiment was conducted, with each respondent being presented with five separate pairs of candidates’ profiles. The candidates’ profiles were composed of five randomly assigned identity attributes, covering all the important layers of identity in Montenegro: national, religious, tribal, gender and generational. Table 1. shows the possible values for each of the five identity attributes. With respect to tribal identity, each of the potential values represent one of the tribal groups, with the label ‘no tribal belonging’ serving as a reference category. The experiment was randomised, with the single exception of candidates of Serbian ethnicity belonging to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. This combination of attributes was restricted as prior research has shown that such candidates are deemed unrealistic. Following this (Orme 2002) such a minor intervention in the experimental design has no effect on the reliability of the estimates. The order of the candidates’ characteristics was also randomized across each respondent but kept constant over all five tasks. Concerning the dependent variable, respondents expressed their vote choice by choosing one of the two candidates and by evaluated each candidate on a national identity scale, from 1 (‘completely pro-

Montenegrin’) to 7 (‘completely pro-Serbian’). The final sample included 707 respondents, who in total evaluated 7070 candidate profiles (3535 pairs). A visual representation of the conjoint experiment is available in the Appendix.

TABLE 1  
ATTRIBUTES OF CANDIDATES PROFILES

Attributes	Values
Nationality	Montenegrin Serb
Religion	Atheist Montenegrin Orthodox Church Serbian Orthodox Church
Tribe	No tribal belonging Njeguši tribe Kuči tribe Drobnjaci tribe
Gender	Male Female
Age	32 45 57 64

To obtain accurate estimates, standard errors were clustered within the respondent, as choice outcomes were not independent across the profiles rated by a single respondent. In this way, the estimation of the relative effect of each attribute is enabled, both independently and in interaction (Hainmueller *et al.* 2014). The estimation of the treatment effect is straightforward on account of the randomisation of each attribute with respect to every other one. The relative importance of a candidate’s attribute is estimated via average marginal component effects (AMCE), which represent the average difference in the probability of being voted for when comparing two different attribute values.

The experiment was inserted in a survey representative of the population of the capital, Podgorica, six weeks following the 2020 parliamentary election. The survey was conducted face-to-face. The sampling was conceptualized as a stratified multistage random sample, with only two stages. In the primary sampling unit, all polling stations were identified, and divided into proportional groups based on their size. In the second stage, a ‘random walk’ procedure was employed to choose the household and the ‘last birthday’ method to determine the individual respondent was used. Podgorica represents an appropriate setting to conduct this experiment for a number of reasons. First, given that almost a third of Montenegro’s population lives in the capital, Podgorica holds a diverse population with respect to tribal origin and national identification.

Second, the municipality of Podgorica geographically spans a range of tribal territory in Old Montenegro, the Hills and areas that lack a tribal social structure. Third, testing the hypotheses in the most urbanized part of Montenegro represents a more conservative approach, compared to studying more traditional, rural settlements.

## Results

### *Study I: Survey Data*

I proceed by presenting the descriptive statistics, which provide the first empirical evidence on the resilience of traditional loyalties in contemporary Montenegro and inter-tribal variation with respect to national identification and political preferences. From there, I move towards a more formal test of the hypotheses tacking the role tribal loyalties play in voting for the nationalising party. In a multivariate analysis of the survey data, I apply a hierarchical regression model with individuals nested within the tribes. This allows for the simultaneous test of both an individual's and a tribe's characteristics on identity ambivalence, while recognizing the tribal clustering suggested by the existing historical and ethnographical literature.

### *Identifying inter-tribal variation*

In terms of the general importance of tribes in Montenegro, the survey data show that 70% of the respondents in the sample find tribal identity important for their self-image. While, expectedly, national identity takes primacy, it is obvious that for the largest part of the Montenegrin population tribal identity is still relevant. Figure 1. shows the variation between tribal groups with respect to the nature of national identification and support for the DPS. Survey data confirms that in 2016, the variation between tribal groups largely corresponds to the accounts presented in the historical overview. Respondents belonging to the tribes of Old Montenegro, on average, strongly lean towards holding a distinct Montenegrin national identity, while the Hills tribes and the tribes of New Montenegro either hold a dual national identity or fully embraced a Serbian national identity. In term of the strength of the effect, the bivariate regression of the average position on

national identity scale onto the tribe's distance from Cetinje shows that with each additional 10 kilometres of distance, Montenegrin national identity is reduced by 0.36 points.

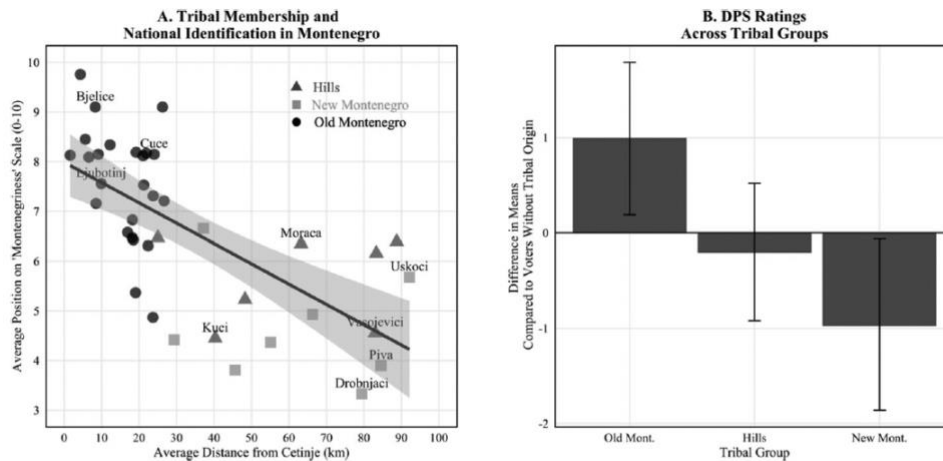


FIGURE 1. EFFECT OF TRIBAL MEMBERSHIP ON NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND DPS RATINGS

Similarly, with respect to party preferences, the data shows that the rating of the DPS varies according to tribal membership. Compared to voters without a tribal background, voters originating from the Old Montenegrin tribes evaluate the nationalising party significantly better, while members of the New Montenegro tribes show significantly lower levels of support. In the middle, the Hills tribes, although leaning in a negative direction, are not statistically different from voters without tribal membership. Together, the descriptive evidence undoubtedly shows that, despite being stripped of political agency for a long time, strong political content still remains at the heart of tribal networks. Still, in order to show that party preferences are indeed affected by tribal affiliation, and not by some other confounding variable, we must account for a robust list of controlling variables.

### *The Electoral Effect of Tribal Membership*

The central hypothesis of this paper focuses on the role of tribal identity and revived tribal councils in the nation-building process in Montenegro. The first step towards showing that these variables affect the nature of national identification is making sure that there is enough variation between the tribes. The degree of clustering of observation within the tribe was estimated using

the interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) (Luke 2004), which measures the proportion of variation in ambiguity that can be explained at the higher level. In this particular case, 10% of the variance in likelihood of casting a ballot for the DPS can be explained at the level of the tribe. Accordingly, a formal hypothesis test was conducted using the Generalized Linear Mixed-Effect Model (GLMM).

Table 2. presents three models. Model 1 tests the relationship between individual level variables and the dichotomous outcome. Model 2. adds variables measured at the tribal level, while Model 3 expands this list by introducing two-way interaction between tribal and national identity. The model fit was evaluated in relative terms, based on the value of the AIC (Burham, Anderson & Huyvaert 2004). The third model was chosen for both theoretical and statistical reasons, as the value of AIC drops significantly with additional set of variables (regression diagnostics available in Appendix B.

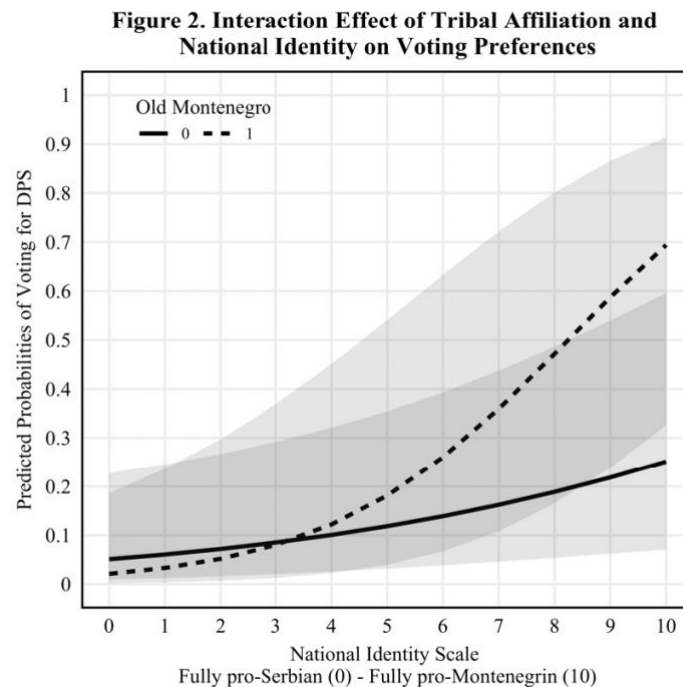
TABLE 2  
GENERALISED LINEAR MIXED-EFFECT MODEL WITH VARYING INTERCEPTS

	Dependent variable: voted for Democratic Party of Socialists		
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)
Intercept	−4.98*** (0.68)	−6.27*** (1.22)	−5.85*** (1.04)
National identity	0.33*** (0.06)	0.28*** (0.06)	0.18* (0.08)
Statehood	1.98*** (0.48)	2.09*** (0.44)	1.98*** (0.48)
Tribal salience	−0.18 (0.15)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Serbian Orthodox Church	0.27 (0.50)	0.24 (0.49)	0.24 (0.50)
Tribal origin		1.28* (0.56)	−0.91 (1.17)
Tribal size		−0.32(0.18)	−0.28 (0.18)
Tribal proximity to Cetinje		0.01 (0.80)	−0.20 (0.80)
Tribal proximity to Serbia		−1.11(0.79)	−1.34 (0.80)
National identity×tribal origin			0.28* (0.13)
Political interest	0.38* (0.18)	0.40* (0.18)	0.42 (0.18)
Satisfaction with Democracy	1.93*** (0.29)	2.04*** (0.30)	2.04*** (0.31)
Economic conditions	0.78*** (0.18)	0.84*** (0.19)	0.83*** (0.19)
Demography	✓	✓	✓
Municipality	✓	✓	✓
<i>n</i>	623	594	594
<i>J</i>	40	40	40
Log Lik.	−205.5	−195.3	−192.9
AIC	471.0	458.7	455.8
BIC	604	607.8	609.3

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

The results confirm the well-documented dominance of the statehood/nationhood cleavage in Montenegrin politics. In each model, each individuals' position on the national identity scale significantly affected the likelihood of voting for the DPS. This confirms that the dominance of

the DPS was maintained primarily through that party's successful representation as the sole defender of the state's sovereignty and the nation's right to self-determination. However, the data clearly shows that national identity did not fully absorb tribal solidarities. Specifically, Model 2 shows the significant effect of tribal origin on the probability of voting for the DPS, after national identity and attitudes towards statehood have been accounted for. Other things being equal, individuals whose tribal origin is in Old Montenegro are, on average, three and a half times more likely to vote for the DPS compared to others.



Nonetheless, based on the results in Model 3, we can see that the tribal origin effectively moderates the relationship between national identity and vote choice. The interaction between the two identities is significant after we control for an extensive list of controlling variables. As is visible from Figure 2, regardless of tribal affiliation, individuals holding a strong Serbian national identity maintain an extremely low chance of supporting the DPS. On the other hand, the probability of voting for the DPS among Montenegrin voters' is clearly diminished for those originating from outside Old Montenegrin tribal territories. They are 32% more likely to cast a ballot for the DPS compared to their fellow nationals from the Hills and New Montenegrin tribes. Together, the findings of both bivariate and multivariate analysis are consistent with the theoretical expectations laid down in H1 and H3, claiming that inter-tribal variation exists and that the



politicisation of tribal affiliations in Montenegro is used not in support of, but to detriment of, the nationalising elites and nation-building agenda.

### *Study II: Experimental Data*

#### *Ethno-national Categorization*

With respect to ethnic categorisation, the results in Figure 3 show that irrespective of one's nationality or religion, the tribal label significantly affect each voter and their chance of categorising candidates into national groups. As is expected, national and religious labels have a stronger effect, as they also hold the name of the ethnic groups. However, finding that voters use the tribal origin of a candidate to categorise them into Montenegrin or Serbian ethnicity, represents a valuable and novel discovery. As is consistent with the results obtained in the survey-based study, voters are more likely to categorise candidates belonging to the New Montenegro and Hill tribes as members of Serbian ethnicity, compared to candidates without obvious tribal ethnicity. On the other hand, candidates holding a tribal origin from the Old Montenegrin tribe are significantly more likely to be evaluated as Montenegrin. Finding that this effect exists independently of the fact that each candidate's nationality was already given, shows that voters actively use tribal affiliation to determine the credibility of a candidate's reported membership of national groups. Moreover, and consistent with results regarding voting, Figure 3B again shows ethnic categorisation based on tribal belonging is a shortcut used by voters of the pro-Serbian opposition, while DPS voter perception of an individual identity seems unchanged by the applicable tribal label.

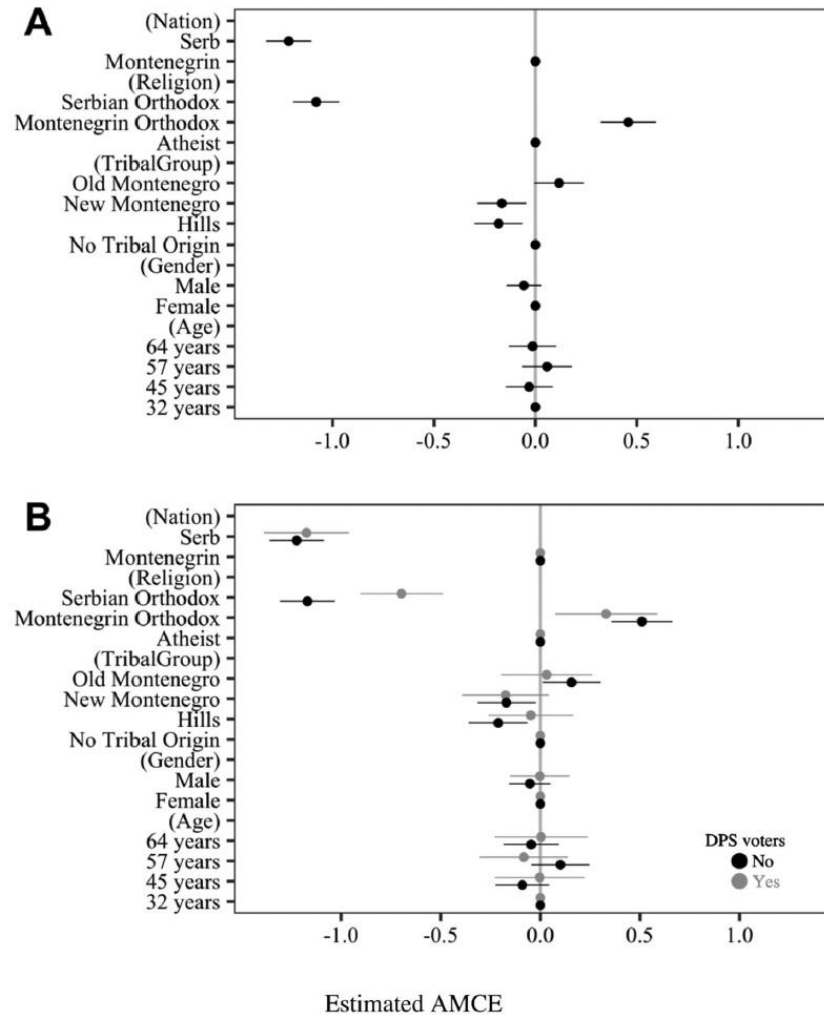


FIGURE 3. EFFECT OF CANDIDATE ATTRIBUTES ON PERCEIVED ETHNICITY

### *The Electoral Effect of Tribal Labels*

To further corroborate the evidence collected in the survey-based study, Figure 4. presents the AMCE estimates for each value for all identity attributes obtained in the conjoint analysis. The results confirm the importance of tribes in determining voting preferences. Not only is it clear that voters' tribal affiliation affects their voting behaviour, as shown in the previous study, but a candidate's tribal label also plays a significant role in determining whether individual voters choose to support him/her. Figure 4A shows the estimates obtained on the whole sample. It shows that membership of any tribal group gives a candidate a statistically higher chances of being voted for compared to candidates without tribal affiliation. In terms of the effect's size, it appears that

certain tribal labels are equally as valuable for vote choice as nationality or religious categories. As was expected, the tribal label, as a cue, is especially valuable when the relevant national group is not available. As such, the results presented in Figure 4B suggest that the effect of the tribal label increases significantly in situations when the national category is the same for both candidates, and thus, cancel each other as a potential basis for choosing.

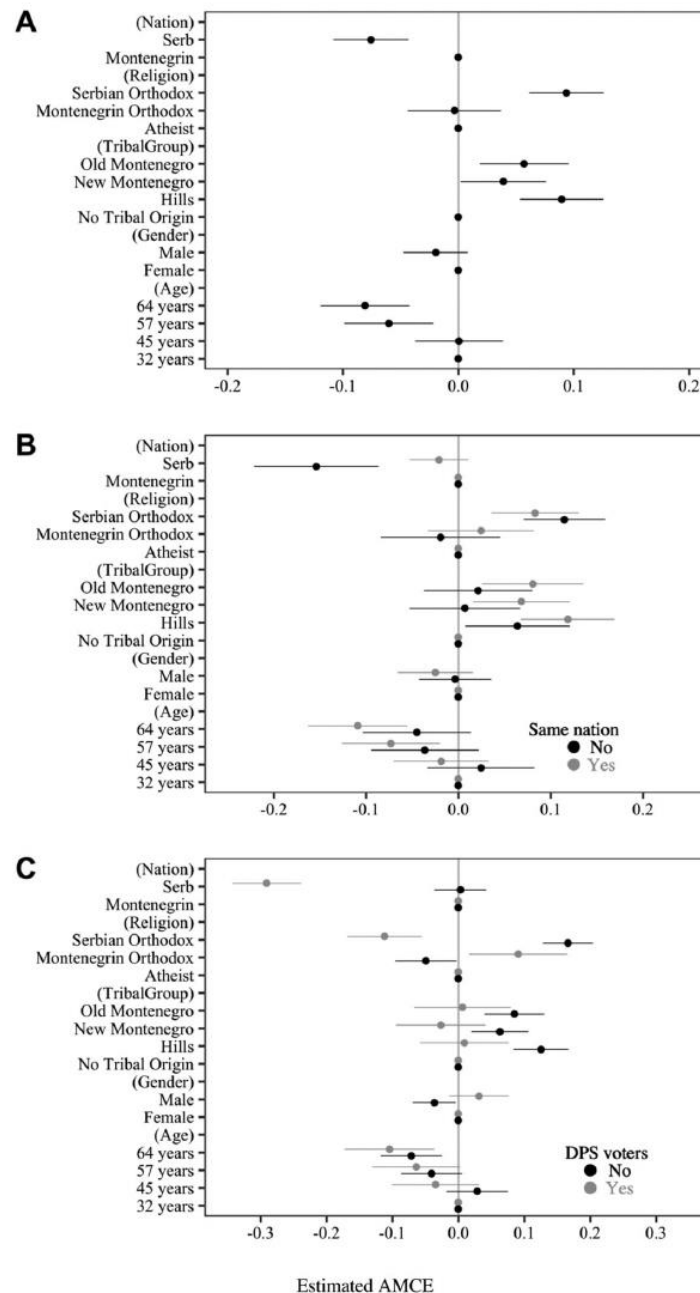


FIGURE 4. EFFECT OF CANDIDATE ATTRIBUTES ON PROBABILITY OF BEING A PREFERRED VOTER CHOICE

While this undoubtedly demonstrates the electoral importance of tribal membership, it does not yet prove that tribal card is mobilized predominantly against the DPS, as argued by this paper. Although the conjoint experiment was designed for respondents to cast a vote for hypothetical candidates that lack any party identification, this hypothesis can be indirectly tested by showing the average effect of tribal labels among voters who reported voting for DPS in recent parliamentary elections, and those who did not. The subgroup analysis in Figure 4C shows a clear separation between two groups of voters. Specifically, DPS voters clearly do not differentiate between candidates based on any tribal label. Instead, they continue to base their vote choice on ethno-national and, to a lesser extent, ethno-religious identities. By contrast, the effect of tribal grouping among voters opposing the DPS is significant for all tribal groups. The fact that voters opposing the DPS prefer candidates even from the Old Montenegrin tribes, typically seen as a vehicle for the DPS's nation-building project, represents an interesting finding. We should remember that the reference category is a candidate without clear tribal origin. As voters eager to use tribal labels tend to have, by default, more nativist view of society and identity, it is reasonable to expect that any candidate with any tribal origin is preferred as a more stereotypical representative of both Montenegrin and Serb ethnicity. Together, evidence from the conjoint study provides additional support for the findings shown in Study I, supporting H3 which assumes that the politicisation of the tribal layer of identity is significantly stronger among opposition voters and that, in turn, this hurts the electoral prospects of the nationalising party.

## **Discussion & Conclusion**

The literature on the Western Balkans has become increasingly saturated with studies looking at the role of ethno-nation identity in the electoral behaviour of voters. While the turbulent history of the region since the collapse of Yugoslavia validates such an emphasis, the extreme ambiguity of national identification in Montenegro suggests that the ability of voters to use national categories as a cue in a political arena is more limited than is typically thought. In such a context, both political elites and voters are likely to seek ways to complement this process with additional, more stable, layers of identity available in their repertoire. Certainly, tribal or clan structures in Europe have adapted differently to modern states compared to other regions. This is

evident from the fact that they did not persist until the XX century even in the vast majority of places where they had strong roots, due to the intense transformation pushed by the centralised state and rampant economic development (Collins 2006). The empirical fact that traditionally organised groups are almost extinct in modern Europe, as well as that such institutions are more prevalent in non-democracies, has led to the implicit assumption that tribes are inconsequential for the contemporary politics of Europe. However, the networks of kinship persisted in at least two Western Balkan societies, where industrialisation and the development of centralised states was significantly delayed. While the formal organisation of tribes in Montenegro and Northern Albania disappeared, their usage in everyday life continues to be politically consequential, as they are informative of wider ethnic cleavages.

This study is the first attempt at providing empirical evidence that, more than a century and a half since they lost political agency, tribal solidarities significantly affect voting behaviour in Montenegro. The politicisation of tribal identity in Montenegro seems to have achieved its full electoral potential in 2020, when the predominant party, the DPS, experienced its first electoral defeat. Given the findings of this paper, as well as the fact that nation-building was never more openly at the centre of electoral campaign, we might argue that the effect was strong enough to produce real-life electoral consequences and help shift minimal electoral advantages in favour of opponents of the nation-building process in Montenegro. These results debunk a number of assumptions made by the literature about nation-building in Montenegro, that typically study ethno-national mobilisation independently from other dimensions of voter identity. However, these findings seem to be perfectly aligned with the wider literature on traditional authorities, pushing the idea that traditional political institutions are much more persistent and compatible with democracy than initially thought (e.g. Logan 2013; De Kadt and Larreguy 2018). Specifically, it has been shown that in many developing countries traditional and state authorities coexist and enjoy overlapping influence, as traditional authorities and leaders are found to exercise great influence in important domains (Baldwin & Holzinger 2019). This paper contributes to this research agenda by showing that traditional loyalties are resilient and have a profound political effect even without traditional leadership and long after the political structure has been fully substituted by legal-rational authority (Weber 1958).

In terms of direction, the role of tribal affiliations in nation-building have often been studied with the implicit assumption that the effect is unidirectional - reinforcing nation-building

agendas (Gellner 2008). While the shift in ethnic boundaries produced by processes of nation-building offer wider ranges of possibilities, it is typically understood as a process marked by a tendency to smooth off rough edges in the behaviour of subgroups. Horowitz (1975) uses the term ‘amalgamation’ to describe the superimposition of a new layer of identity (nation) on the old (tribe) without necessarily displacing the old levels. However, the case of Montenegro represents a valuable departure from these expectations. There, opponents of the nationalising policies have been eager to play the tribal card in order to fight the nationalising policies of the ruling party, which traditionally shied away from it. Consequently, I have argued that voters use tribal membership as a cue for determining positions on the nationhood-statehood divide and, through this, inform their vote choice. Both survey and experimental data show that the direction of inter-tribal variation with regards to national identity and voting behaviour is accurately predicted by the historical divide between tribal groups. Furthermore, the results clearly demonstrate that playing the tribal card in the electoral arena fractionalises titular Montenegrin ethnicity, reduces electoral support for the DPS and, thus, inhibits the further consolidation of Montenegrin national identity. Clearly, future research on this topic should take into account the effect of the government change in August 2020, which created a significant shift in the relationship between groups and political elites. Most notably, with the uncertain trajectory of nation-building in Montenegro in the near future, we might envision a different role for tribal identities. Under the (unlikely) assumption that the distance between Montenegrin and Serbian identity is reduced with the DPS out of power, and that tribesmen outside of Old Montenegro become more accepting of the Montenegrin state, tribal identity might indeed be seized to undermine national identity. However, if the polarisation between the two nationhoods continues, or even increases, under the new pro-Serbian government, tribal affiliations are likely to remain a valuable component of political life in Montenegro.

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