

# How Border Change Impacts Language Use: Evidence from Europe 1816–1938\*

Roberto Valli<sup>†</sup>      Carl Müller-Crepon<sup>‡</sup>

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## Abstract

Ethnic and national identities are closely tied to the governance states carry out within their borders. However, a question mostly overlooked in the nation-building literature is how border change affects identities. Focusing on the introduction and removal of international borders, this paper investigates how historical border change affected the ethno-linguistic geography of Europe. We argue that individuals, in particular minority members, subjected to a change in ruling state are incentivized to assimilate into the conquering state, or to emigrate. Using spatio-temporally disaggregated proxies of language use from print publications around 120 border changes between 1815 and 1938, we find that language use diverges around newly introduced borders and converges where interstate borders are removed. Our findings highlight how geopolitics contributed to the formation of homogeneous linguistic communities within state territories.

**Keywords:** Language, Ethnicity, Nation-Building, Nationalism, Empire, Border change, War legacies.

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<sup>†</sup>European University Institute

<sup>‡</sup>London School of Economics and Political Science