

Beyond outbidding? Ethnic party strategies in Serbia

Party Politics
19(5) 758–777
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1354068811410368
ppq.sagepub.com



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Abstract

The outbidding model of ethnic party competition predicts that ethnic parties adopt radical strategies to maximize support among voters of an ethnic group. In contrast, this article argues that ethnic parties have a wider range of strategies at their disposal. Integrating recent findings, ethnic party strategies are defined by the criteria of appeal and policy position as ‘static bidding’, ‘ethnic underbidding’, ‘ethnic outbidding’, ‘lateral bidding’, ‘lateral underbidding’ and ‘lateral outbidding’. Empirically, a comparison of strategies adopted by ethnic parties competing for votes of the Hungarian and Bosniak minorities in Serbia shows variance of strategies within and across groups despite an environment conducive to outbidding and while holding institutional context factors constant. Factors causing this variance are explored through content analysis of 18 semi-structured interviews with ethnic party elites. An explanation that links strategies to parties’ goals and the incentives of the structure of intra- and inter-ethnic competition is suggested for further research.

Keywords

Elite respondents, ethnic parties, party change/adaptation

Paper submitted 23 November 2010; accepted for publication 11 April 2011

Introduction

The conventional outbidding model of ethnic party competition predicts that ethnic parties adopt radical strategies to maximize support among voters belonging to an ethnic group¹ (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972: 83). The prediction hinges crucially on assuming

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intransigent preferences on the side of the voters. Relatedly, Horowitz, the second prominent representative of the outbidding model, assumes that ethnic parties are driven by the incompatibility of the interests of the groups that support them, 'and quite often their fundamental incompatibility' (1985: 297). If this holds, 'moderation on the ethnic issue is a viable strategy only if ethnicity is not salient' (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972: 86) and outbidding ethnic parties pose a severe challenge for the survival of democracy.

Newer research in the field of social psychology no longer warrants the assumption of ethnic voters with unified, intransigent preferences. Based on a thorough overview of this research, Hale (2008) argues convincingly that whereas ethnic politics is about interests, ethnic identification is about uncertainty reduction. As a powerful information cue it helps situate the individual in relation to a complex social world. Ethnic identification is conceptually prior to manifest interests, rational choice and action, that only become possible after uncertainty is reduced and transformed into calculable risk. Therefore, 'there is no such thing as an inherently ethnic interest or ethnic preference' (p. 52). If the assumption of intransigent group preferences is dropped, outbidding need not be the superior strategy for ethnic parties in all constellations.

Whereas on the whole scholars of ethnic politics are only just beginning to disaggregate the study of ethnic mobilization into analyses of individual ethnic parties (Chandra, forthcoming: 19), some recent case studies have indeed shown that new ethnic parties present themselves as the more moderate, rather than the more radical alternative (Bochsler and Szöcsik, 2010; Coakley, 2008); that established ethnic parties gain from moderating in a power-sharing framework (Mitchell et al., 2009); change their appeal and emphasize cross-cutting cleavages (Chandra, 2005); or choose to cooperate rather than contest each other (Stroschein, 2001).

In line with these advances, but seeking to put them on firmer, common theoretical ground, this article argues that ethnic parties have more strategic options at their disposal than predicted by the conventional outbidding model. It seeks to modify the dominant existing theoretical explanation of ethnic parties' choice of strategy by comparing failed most likely cases of outbidding classified with the help of a new typology of ethnic party strategies. The typology integrates ethnic party strategies discussed in recent case studies into a coherent analytical framework that can be applied to both within-case analysis and cross-case research. Empirically, I choose most likely cases for strategic choice in line with the outbidding model to ensure that findings can be generalized to all cases where outbidding is equally or less likely.

The first section of the article defines ethnic party strategies according to the criteria of *appeal* and *policy position* on the ethnic dimension of competition as 'static bidding', 'ethnic underbidding', 'ethnic outbidding', 'lateral bidding', 'lateral underbidding' and 'lateral outbidding'. The second section justifies case selection, discusses methodological issues and gives an introduction to Serbian ethnic politics. The third section presents the results of a comparison of strategies adopted by ethnic parties competing for votes of the Hungarian and Bosniak national minorities in Serbia. Descriptive inference shows variance of party strategies both within and across groups despite an environment conducive to outbidding and while holding institutional context factors constant. Factors causing this variance are further explored through content analysis of 18 semi-structured interviews with ethnic party elites, triangulated with document and media

analysis. The article concludes with a suggestion to modify the outbidding model based on pure vote maximization, paying attention (1) to the fact whether an ethnic party is an office or a policy-seeker, and (2) to the structure of competition in the intra- and the inter-ethnic arena where ethnic parties choose their positions in strategic interaction with their competitors.

Conceptualizing ethnic party strategies

According to Chandra, 'an *ethnic party* appeals to voters as the champion of the interests of one ethnic category or set of categories to the exclusion of others, and makes such an appeal central to its mobilizing strategy. The key aspect of this definition is *exclusion*' (2005: 236, original italics). Following this definition, all ethnic parties appeal exclusively to an ethnic category at the outset. They can then change their strategy (1) by widening their appeal and (2) by shifting their policy position on the ethnic dimension of competition. Whereas recent advances have either focused on changes in the cleavages appealed to (Chandra, 2005; Coakley, 2008) or the policy positions adopted (Mitchell et al., 2009), this article argues in the following that we need both an appeal and a positional criterion to be able to classify ethnic party strategies unambiguously in cross-case analysis as well as track strategy changes over time at the within-case level.

First, ethnic parties can choose to modify their appeal. Coakley (2008) defined three possibilities for new parties² to challenge established parties in an ethnically based party system: (1) ethnic outbidding, whereby a party emphasizes the ethnic cleavage alone and sells itself as the 'most effective defender of bloc interests' (p. 769); (2) ethnic underbidding where parties emphasize the moderate middle ground between the groups; and (3) non-ethnic counterbidding, where parties emphasize an additional, different cleavage that cross-cuts the ethnic divide. But, strictly speaking, the middle ground between the groups (the focus of Coakley's underbidders) also cross-cuts the ethnic divide (the focus of his counterbidders): it brings together moderates from both groups. It therefore comes as no surprise that Coakley himself re-unites the conceptually distinguished possibilities during empirical analysis and describes 'the political centre' as 'the terrain not just of underbidders but also of counterbidders' (p. 784). Strategic choice of appeal is therefore defined here dichotomously as exclusive versus non-exclusive.

Second, ethnic parties can shift their position. If there are no inherently ethnic preferences (Hale, 2008), ethnic parties can occupy *different* policy positions while appealing to the *same* ethnic category. Consider two parties, A1 and A2, that both appeal exclusively to group a, yet in its programme A1 demands cultural autonomy whereas A2 calls for secession. Obviously, A2 is outbidding A1, yet with a mere focus on appeal this difference would be obscured. For the outbidding model to take-off it is, however, crucial that parties in all intra-ethnic arenas of competition do not only appeal exclusively to ethnic categories but also adopt more radical policy positions than their competitors, otherwise the centrifugal effect will not obtain (Stroschein, 2001: 66).

The appeal criterion is absolute. The positional criterion is relational and captures parties' dynamic positioning in party competition. What constitutes a more radical or a more moderate policy position on the ethnic dimension can be defined with reference to the former strategy when an established party shifts. To classify also the strategies of new

Table 1. Conceptualizing ethnic party strategies.

	Positional criterion		
	More moderate	No shift	More radical
Appeal criterion			
Exclusive	Ethnic underbidding	Static bidding	Ethnic outbidding
Non-exclusive	Lateral underbidding	Lateral bidding	Lateral outbidding

Source: Author's development.

parties, their positions can be compared to the position of the main competitor, defined as the established party with the largest vote-share among the ethnic group a new party seeks to appeal to.

The following disclaimer applies: the conceptualization of ethnic party strategies presented in Table 1 is aimed to capture *ethnic* parties' choice of strategy and consequently starts from parties with exclusive appeal that have a policy position on the ethnic dimension. If parties widen their appeal, they begin to adopt positions on other, cross-cutting, dimensions of competition. Since the nature of these alternative dimensions is contingent upon the structure of the political space in a given context, they are not considered in the matrix.

Of course an ethnic party can choose not to change its strategy at all, maintaining both exclusive appeal and its policy position over time, a strategy that can be referred to as *static bidding*.

Ethnic outbidding obtains if the party appeals exclusively to voters of the group and makes more radical group-specific demands on the ethnic dimension than either its main intra-ethnic opponent in the case of a new party or with regard to its own former strategy in the case of an established party (e.g. demands territorial instead of cultural autonomy).³

A party that continues appealing exclusively to the group but chooses a more moderate position adopts an *ethnic underbidding* strategy (to stick to the example, if the largest ethnic party demands territorial, an underbidding newcomer could demand cultural autonomy). This integrates a finding by Mitchell et al. (2009). In their case study of Northern Ireland, the authors observe that parties that appeal exclusively to ethnic categories but choose pragmatic positions nonetheless are most successful in gaining voters' support.

A party that begins to appeal to a wider electorate but maintains its original position on the ethnic dimension chooses a strategy of *lateral bidding*.

Lateral underbidding obtains if a party widens its appeal beyond the ethnic group and shifts towards more moderate policy positions on the ethnic dimension.

In principle, it would be possible to combine lateral bidding also with more radical demands on the ethnic dimension, a strategy referred to as *lateral outbidding* in Table 1. In practice, however, it would be hard to sell a party to a new, cross-cutting, electorate while toughening the stance regarding the interests of one of the groups.

Any form of *lateral bidding* constitutes the last strategic choice of a party as an ethnic party in Chandra's (2005) sense, because by widening its appeal it loses one of the defining attributes (cf. definition above). It is nonetheless important to include these concepts to analyse ethnic parties' strategic choices over time that tend to be neglected if parties are a priori divided into moderate multi-ethnic and radical ethnic parties.

Case selection, introduction to Serbia and method

To buttress the argument that the outbidding model is too simplistic to account for ethnic parties' strategic choices, most likely cases for strategy choice according to the outbidding model are needed. In post-communist Eastern Europe, representation of minority interests is predominantly realized through ethnic parties (Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino, 2007: 246). Chandra (2005: 246) argues that the institutionally privileged mono-dimensional race aspect of ethnic identity in former Yugoslavia went at the expense of other cross-cutting dimensions of identity, thereby making outbidding more likely than in contexts like India, where institutions allow for multiple identity dimensions to be mobilized. To buttress the argument that differences in strategies are neither purely a consequence of inherently ethnic preferences nor careful institutional design, a sub-national, cross-ethnic group comparison is preferable to a cross-national design. Comparing ethnic party strategies not only within, but also across, groups serves to establish whether strategies vary systematically beyond outbidding despite changes in the substance of the ethnic identity categories appealed to.

Ethnic parties in the Republic of Serbia fulfil all of these adequacy conditions. Within a general environment of politically mobilized ethnicity which pertains in all states that formerly constituted the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a large number of ethnic minorities participate in political life through ethnic parties (Bochsler, 2010; Orlović, 2007). The nationalist regime of Slobodan Milošević, highly repressive against minorities, came to an end only in October 2000 and Serbian nationalism continued to be a powerful tool to mobilize the majority electorate in the 2008 parliamentary elections, making a minority response in the form of ethnic outbidding most likely.

Serbia has a closed-list proportional electoral system with a single nationwide electoral district. The d'Hondt method is applied to transform votes into seats. A party has to win a minimum of 5 percent of the total number of votes to enter parliament. This nationwide threshold does not apply to parties or electoral coalitions of parties representing national minorities (article 13, *Zakon o izmenama i dopunama*). To register a minority party, only 1000 instead of 10,000 signatures are needed (article 9, *Zakon o političkim strankama*). The electoral commission decides on the basis of the appeal the party makes in its founding act, programme and statute whether to classify a party as a minority party (article 3, *ibid.*).

These eased conditions of contestability constitute a decisive incentive for forming minority parties: 42 out of 73 parties are currently registered as parties of national minorities (Danas, 20 May 2010). However, only the largest, territorially concentrated minority groups, the Hungarians in Vojvodina (3.91 percent of the population, *Republički zavod za statistiku*, 2003)⁴ and the Bosniaks in Sandžak (1.81 percent, *ibid.*)⁵ are demographically strong and politically organized enough for their parties to play a role as parliamentary parties at the national level (Bašić, 2004: 89). As they do not a priori rely on a multi-ethnic list to get into parliament, they are – in principle – free to adopt also more radical positions. Bias of restricting possibilities for variance of strategy choice is therefore avoided.⁶

Five ethnic minority parties compete for votes of the Hungarian national minority: the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM), the Democratic Community of Hungarians in

Vojvodina (DZVM), the Democratic Party of Hungarians in Vojvodina (DSVM), the Civic Union of Hungarians (GSM) and the newest party that was registered in January 2010: the Movement of Hungarian Hope (PMN). Table 2 gives the Serbian and Hungarian names; the Serbian acronyms are used hereafter. For the 2008 parliamentary elections, three of the Hungarian parties, SVM, DSVM and DZVM formed an electoral alliance, the Hungarian Coalition that competed as a minority list and won four mandates that all went to SVM. The four MPs of SVM support the current governing coalition headed by Boris Tadić's Democratic Party. The Hungarian Coalition came under strain soon after the elections and was considered to have failed by elites from all three parties by June 2010 (Ágoston, 07/06/10, Temerin; Elvegyi, 10/06/10, Sombor; Kovács, 12/05/10, Belgrade).

Ten parties are currently registered as parties of the Bosniak minority (see Table 2). Out of these, the *Party of Democratic Action of Sandžak* (SDA) and the *Sandžak Democratic Party* (SDP) that split-off from SDA in 1995 are the two largest parties.⁷ SDA is leading a permanent electoral coalition of Bosniak parties, the *Bosniak List for a European Sandžak*, composed of SDA, the *Bosniak Democratic Party of Sandžak* (BDSS) and the *Reformists of Sandžak* (RS). The newest entrant is the *Sandžak National Party* (SNP) founded by former Novi Pazar mayor and former SDP member Mirsad Đerlek in October 2009. For the 2008 elections, SDP joined the multi-ethnic *For a European Serbia* electoral coalition headed by the *Democratic Party* and holds four of the list's 102 mandates in the Serbian parliament. The *Bosniak List* competed as a minority list and gained two mandates. Both SDA and SDP support the governing coalition and each party has one minister in the Tadić government. The remaining Bosniak parties are confined to narrow local appeal and were described as organizations of 'one man one party' by a Member of Serbian parliament of Bosniak ethnicity from the non-ethnic *Liberal Democratic Party* (Hajdarević, 28/04/10, Belgrade).

During field research in Serbia (15 April to 15 June 2010), 18 semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with Hungarian and Bosniak elites. Interviews with Bosniak elites were focused on the key players (*Bosniak List* and SDP) and the newcomer (SNP) as well as BKZ, a civic organization that turned out to be important in the field (see section on outbidding below). In the Hungarian case, interviews and analysis cover all five parties. The interview guideline relied on open-ended questions not directly burdened with the strategy concepts to minimize researcher-induced bias (Roulston, 2010: 205).⁸ Time of observation was the time span from the elections to the Serbian parliament of May 2008 until the end of field research. The 2008 elections serve as a reference point to compare accounts given in the elite interviews with positions maintained during the last elections. Field research coincided with the campaign for the elections to the national minority councils that were held on 6 June 2010. The national minority councils have competencies in the fields of culture, education, information in the minority language and official use of the minority language and script. The law on national minority councils of August 2009 introduced the possibility to directly elect the council members for a four-year term if more than 50 percent of all members of a minority group register in advance on a special minority list (article 29, *Zakon o nacionalnim savetima*). Though not political in purpose, the elections were highly politicized in practice and constituted a window of opportunity for both existing and new ethnic

Table 2. Hungarian and Bosniak minority parties in Serbia.

Hungarian parties	Party leader	Headquarter	Elections to Serbian parliament 2008
Građanski savez Mađara (GSM) – Magyar Polgári Szövetség	László Rác Szabó	Senta	<i>Did not stand for elections</i>
Pokret mađarske nade (PMN) – Magyar Remény Mozgalom	Bálint László	Subotica	<i>Founded after elections</i>
Savez vojvođanskih Mađara (SVM) Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség	István Pásztor	Subotica	
Demokratska zajednica vojvođanskih Mađara (DZVM) – Vajdasági Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége	Páll Sándor ^a	Bečej	'Hungarian Coalition', 1.81%, four mandates (all four to SVM)
Demokratska stranka vojvođanskih Mađara (DSVM) – Vajdasági Magyar Demokrata Párt	Andras Ágoston	Temerin	
Bosniak parties	Party leader	Headquarters	Elections to Serbian parliament 2008
Stranka demokratske akcije Sandžaka (SDA)	Sulejman Ugljanin	Novi Pazar	
Bošnjačka demokratska stranka Sandžaka (BDSS)	Esad Džudžević	Tutin	'Bosniak List for a European Sandžak', 0.92%, two mandates (one to BDSS, one to SLPS ^b)
Reformisti Sandžaka (RS)	Zekirija Dugopoljac	Novi Pazar	
Sandžačka demokratska partija (SDP)	Resad Hodžić	Novi Pazar	'For a European Serbia', 38.4%, 102 mandates (four to SDP)
Sandžačka alternativa (SA)	Tarik Imamović	Novi Pazar	<i>Founded after elections</i>
Sandžačka narodna partija (SNP)	Mirsad Đerlek	Novi Pazar	
Stranka za Sandžak (SZS)	Fevzija Murić	Novi Pazar	<i>Did not stand for elections</i>
Narodni pokret Sandžaka (NPS)	Džemail Suljević	Novi Pazar	
Demokratska partija Sandžaka (DPS)	Zulkefil Sadović	Prijepolje	
Sandžačko Raška Partija (SRP)	Ismet Avdulović	Belgrade	

^aPáll Sándor died in July 2010 and was succeeded by Áron Csonka.

^bSLPS, the Social Liberal Party of Sandžak, had been a member of the 'Bosniak List for a European Sandžak' but did not succeed in being re-registered under the more restrictive conditions of the new law on party registration of May 2009 and is therefore not listed in the left column.

Source: Author's compilation on the basis of the official list of parties registered in Serbia (Ministarstvo za državnu upravu 2010) and the results of the parliamentary elections 2008 (Republički zavod za statistiku 2008).

parties to present themselves to their minority electorate by officially fielding or supporting a minority list.⁹

Strategic choices of Bosniak and Hungarian parties in Serbia

Following the cross-sectional ‘code and retrieve’ method, the categories of appeal and policy position were applied manually across interview transcripts (Spencer et al., 2009: 203). Wherever possible, elite accounts were triangulated with data from additional sources to classify party strategies. No instance of ethnic underbidding was observed, i.e. no party in either group chose to moderate its policy position while maintaining exclusive appeal during the time of observation and no new party that entered intra-ethnic competition combined exclusive appeal with more moderate positions than the established party with the largest vote-share among the group. All other strategies are discussed hereafter. In an effort to build hypotheses for further research on ethnic party competition, each sub-section explores factors causing strategy selection.¹⁰

Static bidding

Some of the ethnic parties under observation did not change their strategy during the time of observation. In the Hungarian arena, DZVM, DSVM and GSM presented their positions as well defined and non-negotiable. In the Bosniak arena, static bidding was exemplified by BDSS and SDA.

BDSS elites emphasized that the main emphasis of the electoral coalition lies on the rights and interests of the Bosniak community (Hadžisalihović, 18/05/10, Novi Pazar). BDSS does not seek to extend its vote base by appealing to any other group but Bosniaks in Serbia (Džudžević, 06/05/10, Belgrade; Hadžisalihović and Fijuljanin, 18/05/10, Novi Pazar). The coalition’s exclusive appeal to Bosniaks as a group was underlined when elites rhetorically adopted the perspective of the group: ‘Bosniaks want Sandžak to be a regional self-government’, ‘Bosniaks want integration they want neither assimilation nor gettoisation they want integration but with their full identity as a minority’ (Džudžević, 06/05/10, Belgrade). Voters are seen as a block and representation in government is to be achieved on purely ethnic grounds (Imamović, 20/05/10, Novi Pazar).

Among the Hungarian parties, DZVM can be considered an all-time static bidder. According to elites from the party, neither general appeal exclusively to Hungarians, nor concrete demands regarding the concept of tripartite autonomy have changed at all since the first launch of the autonomy programme in 1992 (Horváth Ódry and Elvegyi, 10/06/10; DGUW, 1992). DSVM also appeals exclusively to Hungarian identity categories and has maintained its key positions defined in 1997 when DSVM and DZVM separated: dual citizenship for Hungarians in Serbia, personal autonomy, and proportional representation in parliament through guaranteed seats (Ágoston, 07/06/10, Temerin).

GSM leader Rác Szabó underlined his party’s exclusive appeal to Hungarians when he explained the criteria for becoming a member: ‘[Y]ou have to commit yourself to the Hungarian nation, that you will do everything to the aim that this Hungarian nation and the Hungarian culture here in this region continue to exist’ (Rác Szabó, 03/06/10, Subotica). During the time of observation, GSM replaced SVM in the local governing

coalition with DS in the municipality of Senta (RTV, 17 February 2010). In the interview with the author, however, Rác Szabó gave no indication that this would now lead to a change of position but maintained that the coalition was not firmly connected and that the interests of Hungarians were not up for negotiation (Rác Szabó, 03/06/10, Subotica).

A closer look at the Hungarian parties that did not change their strategies supports the argument that exclusive appeal does not imply that ethnic parties cannot have different positions. Like DZVM, GSM defends a three-step approach to Hungarian autonomy: territorial autonomy for the municipalities with Hungarian majority in Northern Bačka (the northern part of Vojvodina bordering Hungary); personal autonomy for Hungarians living dispersed; and 'island autonomy' (GSM, 2010; Rác Szabó, 03/06/10, Subotica) for homogeneous Hungarian communities outside the territory of Northern Bačka. DSVM, on the other hand, extracted only personal autonomy from the 1992 autonomy concept of DZVM (Ágoston, 07/06/10, Temerin). The Bosniak static bidders participate in a firm electoral coalition, united in 'shared love for the national identity of Bosniaks' (Hadžisalihović 18/05/10, Novi Pazar). Hence, their positions do not differ significantly.

Reasons elites gave for maintaining exclusive appeal were that parties trying to widen their appeal by addressing cross-cutting topics such as European integration lose their identity as minority parties (Ágoston, 07/06/10, Temerin). Elites argued, furthermore, that concrete policy positions have not changed because they were never realized: '[T]his is still the same programme, unfortunately, because all problems from the 90ties when we founded the party still exist today' (Horváth Ódry, 10/06/10, Sombor). This indicates that just like Strøm and Müller (1999) have seminally done for parties more generally, it can be fruitful to differentiate between the different goals of ethnic parties (Mitchell et al., 2009: 417). Hungarian static bidders seem to be pure policy-seekers, treating their demands as non-negotiable. This does not hold for the Bosniaks, however. Even though they did not take office at any cost and preferred to compete the 2008 elections as a minority list, they see representation in the capital as central to realizing policy aims (Imamović, 20/05/10, Novi Pazar). A reason not explicitly mentioned in the interviews that holds across all five instances of static bidding is continuity in party leadership since the founding day.

Ethnic outbidding

None of the already established ethnic parties in either group shifted towards more radical positions during the time of observation. However, new forces in both intra-ethnic arenas chose to outbid established players.

The new entrant to the Hungarian arena, PMN, bases its programme on territorial autonomy, with the aim that Hungarians in Serbia 'live like Catalonians in Spain' (Setyerov, 03/06/10, Subotica). This differentiates them from SVM, the party with the largest Hungarian vote-share that advocates cultural autonomy realized through self-government in the non-territorial minority councils. PMN appeals exclusively to Hungarians and includes only ethnic positions in its programme:

In what regard are we different from SVM, this is very important they have one aim and this aim – and they declared this openly – their main aim is that Serbia enters the European

Union because they think that this way also Hungarians here will be better off. Now we deeply disagree. If this is their main aim then this is very sad in no way can this be the main aim. We have nothing against Serbia entering neither will we stand in their way but we believe that in no way can this be the main aim of a Hungarian party. (Setyerov, 03/06/10, Subotica)

This strategy is not matched directly by SNP, the new party in the Bosniak arena, where evidence is mixed (see below). It is matched, however, by a civic organization that contested the elections for the Bosniak minority council – the Bosniak Cultural Community (Bošnjačka Kulturna Zajednica, BKZ). The BKZ list for the Bosniak minority council elections was headed by Muamer Zukorlić, religious leader of the Muslim community in Serbia¹¹ and considered to be the most influential political figure in Sandžak (Biserko, 05/05/10, Belgrade). Not strictly speaking a political party, the political influence and campaign qualifies BKZ as worthy of analysis. BKZ tries to present itself as the authentic defender of Bosniak interests, in contrast to the two largest Bosniak parties (SDA and SDP), and blames them for selling out the Bosniak interest: ‘What have we as the Bosniak people received from two ministers [Ugljanin, SDA and Ljajić, SDP, author’s note] we received absolutely nothing (...) but this is the reality of our people the reality of a people that currently does not have its authentic political representative who would fight for their rights’ (Tandir, 17/05/10, Novi Pazar). Whereas the other Bosniak parties refer to the Bosniaks as a national minority during the interviews and in their official documents, the Islamic Community and BKZ emphasize the status of Bosniaks as a ‘constituent people in Serbia’ (Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji, 2010: Paragraph 1). The political scene is reduced to ‘the regime in Belgrade’, accused of leading ‘a silent war against Bosniaks’ (Zukorlić in an interview with Danas, 29 April 2010).

Both PMN and BKZ elites emphasized that they chose to adopt more radical positions because established ethnic parties in both groups participate in the multi-ethnic government of Boris Tadić, selling out the group’s interests for office gains (Setyerov, 03/06/10, Subotica; Tandir, 17/05/10, Novi Pazar). Participation in government coalitions is excluded outright, as it would require compromises. PMN seeks to represent the interests of Hungarians, in an ‘imposing’ way, ‘and not like you offer us some function more and then we will drop our positions, no’ (Setyerov, 03/06/10, Subotica). For those actual instances of outbidding, the conventional model of ethnic parties as vote-maximizers that challenge competitors engaged in multi-ethnic coalitions from the radical end can therefore be confirmed.

Lateral underbidding

However, some ethnic parties chose to escape the narrow confines of ethnic appeal and one-dimensional competition. In the Hungarian arena, SVM widened its appeal beyond the group *and* shifted toward a more moderate position regarding autonomy for Hungarians on the ethnic dimension. The shared concept of autonomy of the Hungarian Coalition for the 2008 elections had included ethno-territorial autonomy (part II, Zajednički koncept autonomije). However, MP Elvira Kovács stated in 2010 that SVM considers Hungarian autonomy to be realized in virtue of the Law on National Minority Councils, which provides for cultural autonomy:

[W]ell let's say Ágoston [the leader of DSVM] and Páll Sándor [the leader of DZVM, author's note] do not see it this way, but the concept of Hungarian autonomy was firstly concretised in virtue of the new law on election, financing and functioning of the national councils of national minorities. (Kovács, 12/05/10, Belgrade)

Parties that widen their appeal need to include positions on a new dimension of competition. SVM elites emphasized that the main potential of the party lies in emphasizing not only ethnic, but also regional politics addressing the interests of all citizens of Vojvodina:

[O]ne has to open up and from the party we have to deal not only with national questions we have to deal with questions of citizens' everyday life, that means the material existence of citizens, we have to deal with communal problems that concern citizens, we have to deal with economic topics. All this a serious party has to work on in the future and all this for a wider region, not only for one national community in one part of this region. (Jenő, 06/06/10, Subotica)

Regional appeal is wider than appeal to Hungarians because the centre-periphery cleavage between Belgrade and Vojvodina does not overlap with, but cross-cuts, the Hungarian–Serbian ethnic divide. Hungarians constitute a minority also in Vojvodina. Similar lines of reasoning in favour of a regionalist strategy were brought forward by Elvira Kovács (12/05/10, Belgrade) and Ottó Bús (13/05/10, Novi Sad). In line with this strategy, and despite being part of the governing coalition, the four MPs of SVM refused to approve the Serbian budget in 2009 (Danas, 17 December 2009). Under the proposed budget, Vojvodina would not have received the constitutionally prescribed share of 7 percent (Jenő, 06/06/10, Subotica).¹²

To explain their strategic choice, SVM pointed to the fact that they aimed to differentiate themselves clearly from competitors with unrealistic aims like DSVM and DZVM who call for territorial autonomy (Kovács, 12/05/10, Belgrade) or from outbidding newcomer PMN, considered to be dangerously radical (Jenő, 06/06/10, Subotica). Focusing on office in Belgrade instead of orienting towards Budapest, of which they accused DZVM and DSVM (Kovács), is seen as the key to realizing the demands of the party (Jenő). The party's elite seems to be well aware of the positions of competitors and offers a distinctly more inclusive and more moderate programme. Different to parties that follow an outbidding strategy, the party that launched a lateral underbid sees office as a necessary means to realizing policy goals, accepting that the latter become subject to negotiation.

Lateral bidding

The self-portrayal of SDP as a more inclusive alternative compared to the other Bosniak parties came to the fore in all three interviews with elites from the party (Fakić, 19/05/10, Sjenica; Jusufović, 17/05/10, Novi Pazar; Poturak, 04/05/10, Belgrade) and is reflected also in the evaluation of their competitors. BDSS leader Džudžević defined SDP as the option that in the longer run seeks integration of Bosniaks into the state as equal citizens, without special reference to their minority status (Džudžević, 06/05/10, Belgrade).

Widening the appeal was in this case achieved through the development of a social-democratic profile. However, SDP did not simply add social-democratic to ethnic positions. SDP went one step further and split the party into two parts during the time of observation: the original 'Sandžak Democratic Party', now under the leadership of Resad Hodžić remains in charge of appealing to voters in Sandžak. The new party, the 'Social Democratic Party of Serbia' founded by former SDP leader Rasim Ljajić in October 2009, now presents a non-ethnic, social-democratic offer.

The parties are going to compete in elections as an electoral coalition and share the same acronym for the strategic purpose of combining the regional with a social-democratic electorate according to Jusufović (17/05/10, Novi Pazar). Fakić interpreted the party's strategy in a slightly different way. She agreed that one reason was to appeal to citizens independently of ethnicity in programmatic terms, but saw a second reason in giving Bosniaks beyond Sandžak a possibility to affiliate with the party (Fakić, 19/05/10, Sjenica). Only the first logic corresponds to non-exclusive appeal, the latter simply decouples the ethnic from the regional Sandžak identity category, but maintains exclusive appeal to Bosniaks.

SDP has not explicitly changed its position on the ethnic dimension of competition since 2008. Fakić, however, already gave an indication that in the future positions on the ethnic dimension might be abandoned altogether:

We once had one aim, i.e. to introduce the Bosniak language, flag and some national holidays. We have achieved everything. The only aim of SDP in the upcoming period has to be the economy and – in virtue of the economy – that the whole nation develops itself, not only the Serbs, not only the Moslems (Fakić, 19/05/10, Sjenica).

Reasons for lateral bidding mirror the reasons for lateral underbidding as both constitute decisions to appeal beyond the ethnic category. SDP is seeking to differentiate itself from mono-appeal outbidders and the radical rhetoric employed in the past by SDA and currently by Zukorlić (Jusufović, 17/05/10, Novi Pazar). The party sees office in Belgrade not only as important in realizing policy, but even as conducive to winning votes (Poturak, 04/05/10, Belgrade). A personality factor was, however, described as most decisive for exiting the narrow frame of Bosniak intra-ethnic competition – party leader Rasim Ljajić is extremely popular across ethnic divides (Fakić, 19/05/10, Sjenica; Jusufović, 17/05/10, Novi Pazar). Additional reasons were that members of the party leadership had social-democratic orientation anyway (Fakić) and that losers of the transition process constituted available voters (Jusufović).

Mixed evidence

Not only established parties widened their appeal. The leader of the SNP, the newcomer in the Bosniak arena, already envisages a strategy of lateral bidding for the future and argues that he only registered the party as a Bosniak party because of the eased conditions of contestability:

For national minorities you need 1000 votes and for a party on state level you need 10 000 (...) and in this moment I will be a national party, a party of a national minority but later

I plan to build a party on the state level because I also have support of Serbians. (Đerlek, 18/05/10, Novi Pazar)

He also prepares in the longer run to cooperate closely with other parties in favour of Serbian regionalization to combine the support of regional electorates in Vojvodina, Šumadija and Sandžak (Đerlek, 18/05/10, Novi Pazar). But the strategy of the party is not entirely clear-cut when triangulating the interview with other sources. The party statute shows a more exclusively Bosniak appeal. The first aim to be realized by the party is 'unity of all members of the Bosniak national minority as far as the realisation of national interests is concerned' (article 4, SNP Statute). This could be merely strategic to be able to register as a minority party, but additionally SNP chose to support the list of outbidder BKZ for the minority council elections (Politika, 14 June 2010). Due to mixed evidence, the party is not classified under either strategy in Table 3 summarizing the results.

Conclusion

Descriptive inference from the paired comparison shows that ethnic party strategies vary beyond outbidding and that they do so (a) in an overall context that induces outbidding; (b) under one and the same set of institutions defining the opportunity structure for minority parties; and (c) not by groups (primordial explanation) but by individual parties within groups. With intra-group variance of party strategies being as high as cross-group variance, we can conclude that ethnic parties are still primarily *parties*, with *ethnic* being just the prefix that does not determine a special strategic behaviour.

This finding can be interpreted as an application of Hale's (2008) more general argument about ethnic politics to the specific topic of ethnic party competition: just as no manifest interests flow from ethnic identification itself, no manifest party strategy flows from the prefix ethnic. Even in an environment where until recently ethnic politics was characterized by heated nationalist rhetoric and actions, ethnic elites offer different visions for minority participation within the state and flexibly appeal to different cleavages. A strategy that combines exclusive appeal with more radical positions remains attractive in particular for new participants of intra-ethnic party competition.¹³ However, just like non-ethnic parties do not all converge towards the median (Schofield and Sened, 2005), ethnic parties do not all seek the extreme, and the comparative case study shows that having strategy concepts beyond outbidding available is worthwhile.

If outbidding can no longer be taken as a theoretical default assumption, future research will need to specify more precisely under which conditions ethnic parties really pose a threat to democratic stability. This article suggests some explorative insights to inspire systematic research on the causal determinants of ethnic parties' strategy choice. Besides case-specific factors, the *goals* of parties and the *structure of competition* in the intra- and the inter-ethnic arena constituted more general determinants.

Rabushka and Shepsle assumed voter preferences in divided societies to be uniform across, and intransigent between, groups. A party that seeks to maximize votes among the ethnic group is therefore expected to adopt a radical position (1972: 83). For those instances of outbidding that occurred, this logic can be confirmed. Outbidders appear as vote-seeking,

Table 3. Summary of results.

Strategy	Parties	Factors mentioned as causing choice of strategy		
		Factors connected to party goals and competition	Other factors	
ethnic underbidding static bidding	None	–	–	
	DZVM	Policy-seeking		
	DSVM	Maintain profile of ethnic party		
		Policy-seeking		
	GSM	Maintain profile of ethnic party		
ethnic outbidding		Recently: office-seeking		Continuity in party leadership since founding day (not mentioned explicitly)
	BDSS	Maintain profile of ethnic party		
	SDA	Office-seeking		
	PMN			
		Differentiate from moderate parties in government		Special grievances of Hungarians
lateral underbidding		Vote-seeking		Build Hungarian party free of communist legacy
	BKZ			Special grievances of Bosniaks
	SVM			
		Differentiate from parties that engage in static bidding and outbidding		
		Voters available on cross-cutting centre/periphery cleavage		Modernization process
lateral bidding		Office-seeking		
	SDP			
		Differentiate from parties that engage in static bidding and outbidding		Popularity of party leader among Serbian population
		Voters available on cross-cutting transition loser/winner cleavage		Time of national politics is over
		Office-seeking		
mixed evidence	SNP	–	–	–

often excluding office at the central level of politics entirely because it would force them to moderate their positions. However, different goals of parties emphasized in the general party literature play a role when explaining choices beyond outbidding. Some of the parties that did not adapt their strategies were intrinsically policy motivated. Strategic adaptation towards lateral (under)bidding on the other hand was connected to office-seeking.¹⁴

What parties want, however, is only one part of the equation; the second factor is the structure of competition where parties choose their strategies in interaction with their competitors (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). Elites from parties that shifted their strategy over time were all emphasizing the wish to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Furthermore, it matters who these competitors are. Whereas parties that engage in ethnic outbidding compete only on the dimension of offers made to address group-specific preferences and differentiate themselves from more moderate intra-ethnic competitors, parties that launch lateral bids compete with mono-appeal ethnic parties over the best offer on the ethnic dimension *and* with majority parties on whichever additional dimension they choose to emphasize in their programme. This pulls them further towards more moderate positions on the ethnic dimension. A refined theory of ethnic party competition should therefore connect the *logic* of strategy *selection* analysed here in detail to the *logic of situation* defined by varying structures of competition in the intra- and inter-ethnic arenas while acknowledging the different *goals* of ethnic parties.

Elite and expert interviews

Ágoston, András, Leader of DSVM, 7 June 2010, Temerin.

Biserko, Sonja, Director of the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights in Serbia, 5 May 2010, Belgrade.

Bús, Ottó, Member of SVM presidency, 13 May 2010, Novi Sad.

Derlek, Mirsad, Leader of SNP, 18 May 2010, Novi Pazar.

Džudžević, Esad, Leader of BDSS, 6 May 2010, Belgrade.

Elvegyi, Ákos, Member of DZVM presidency, 10 June 2010, Sombor.

Fakić, Senada, Head of Mayor's Cabinet in Sjenica for SDP, 19 May 2010, Sjenica.

Fijuljanin, Muhedin, Vice-president of BDSS, 18 May 2010, Novi Pazar.

Hadžisalihović, Zaim, General Secretary of BDSS, 18 May 2010, Novi Pazar.

Hajdarević, Kenan, Member of Serbian Parliament for LDP, 28 April 2010, Belgrade.

Horváth Ódry, Márta, Vice-president of DZVM, 10 June 2010, Sombor.

Imamović, Enis, Vice-president of SDA, 20 May 2010, Novi Pazar.

Jenő, Maglai, Member of SVM presidency, 6 June 2010, Subotica.

Jusufović, Mirsad, General Secretary of SDP, 17 May 2010, Novi Pazar.

Kovács, Elvira, Member of Serbian Parliament for SVM, 12 May 2010, Belgrade.

Marton, Attila, Journalist, 2 June 2010, Novi Sad.

Poturak, Munir, Vice-president of SDP, 4 May 2010, Belgrade.

Rác Szabó, László, Leader of GSM, 3 June 2010, Subotica.

Setyerov, Zorán. Vice-president of PMN, 3 June 2010, Subotica.

Tandir, Samir, spokesperson of the Islamic community in Serbia and candidate for the Bosniak minority council for BKZ, 17 May 2010, Novi Pazar.

Appendix:

Interview guideline, English translation

Topic of interest	Guiding question
General party strategy	On the political scene of Serbia there are several parties competing for votes. Could you tell me what distinguishes _____ from its competitors?
Position on autonomy	In December last year, Vojvodina received its autonomy statute. Until now other parts of Serbia are lacking similar powers. What does the concept of 'autonomy' mean for your party?
Intra-ethnic arena	Besides _____ there are several other Hungarian/Bosniak parties in Serbia. What can you tell me about this phenomenon?
Inter-ethnic arena	As a representative of a small party, you may need to cooperate with majority parties to achieve your political goals. What can you tell me about your relationship with the national parties?
Voters	Let us move to the topic of electoral support – what can you say about your voters?
Intra-party	We have already talked about your party's goals. How do I have to imagine the process leading to their formulation within the party?
Majority–minority relations	With the break-up of multinational Yugoslavia, minorities in Serbia now live in a state with a Serbian majority. How would you describe the development of majority–minority relations in Serbia since October 2000?
External dimension	How would you describe your party's relationship with neighbouring states and in particular with actors in your 'motherland' (matica)?

Funding

The field research in Serbia was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Notes

Field research in Serbia was financially supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Of the numerous people who were ready to support my project in the field, I am particularly indebted to Žaklina Veselinović and Lidija Prokić. I also thank all my interview partners for their time and dedication. Very helpful comments by two anonymous referees of *Party Politics* and by Fernando Bértoa, Daniel Bochsler, Ulrich Glassmann, Annika Hennl, Saskia Ruth, Zoltan Szasz, Edina Szöcsik and Dane Taleski are gratefully acknowledged. All remaining errors are my own.

1. Following Birnir (2009: 24) 'an ethnic group is defined by members of the group who consider themselves ethnically distinct from other groups in society' and where 'this identification centers on a characteristic that is difficult to suppress, such as language, location, or race'.
2. As he is more interested in processes of party system change than in individual party strategies, Coakley (2008) discusses only the entry of new parties. This article deals with the strategic choices of both new and established parties.
3. These positions are exemplary. For a substantive continuum of ethnic group demands, see Jenne (2007: 40 f.). This article assumes a rank order from more radical to more moderate positions on the ethnic dimension of party competition, but treats the substance of positions as contingent upon the context in question.

4. Hungarians constitute the absolute majority in the municipalities of Kanjiža, Senta, Ada, Bačka Topola, Mali Iđoš and Čoka and the relative majority in Bečej and Subotica.
5. Throughout this article, the term Sandžak refers to the Bosniak municipalities of Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, Nova Varoš, Priboj and Prijepolje.
6. The third largest territorially concentrated minority are Albanians in Preševo Valley (0.82 percent, Republički zavod za statistiku 2003, figures excluding the territory of Kosovo). Albanian parties have boycotted all but the most recent parliamentary elections (Orlović, 2008: 327). This article analyses the strategies of ethnic parties in party competition – parties that boycott competition do not belong to the universe of cases.
7. The history of conflict between these two parties is beyond the scope of this article. For more details, see Morrison (2008).
8. An English translation of the guideline is presented in the Appendix. The original version in Serbian can be obtained upon request. With the exception of Senada Fakić, one of three interview partners from SDP, and Samir Tandir, who represents a civic organization (BKZ), not a political party, all interview partners were members of their parties' *elite*, defined for the purpose of this research as either members of the party leadership and steering committee and/or members of parliament following the 2008 parliamentary elections. Wherever possible, several informants per party were interviewed to assess the consistency of accounts across interviews. All interviews were conducted in Serbian; translations into English are my own. All respondents consented to have their names published.
9. Elections to the minority councils only take place among the minority population, i.e. in a situation of pure intra-ethnic competition most conducive to outbidding. If the different nature of elections causes bias in strategy choice, it should work in favour of the outbidding model.
10. Positions of Bosniak parties were harder to differentiate than those of Hungarian parties that have well-developed and distinguishable autonomy concepts. According to Hadžisalihović from the Bosniak List, differences between Bosniak parties manifest themselves more in the rhetoric and concrete actions than in their manifestos (Hadžisalihović, 18/05/10, Novi Pazar). Therefore, rhetoric plays a larger role in the analysis of the Bosniak parties.
11. Two Islamic communities exist in Serbia. The Islamic community *of* Serbia is headed by Adem Zilkić and has its seat in Belgrade. The Islamic community *in* Serbia is headed by Muamer Zukorlić and has its seat in Novi Pazar. Zilkić is allied with SDA. Zukorlić used to be supported by SDP, yet is now outbidding his former political allies. For more details, see Morrison (2008).
12. However, according to a Hungarian journalist, SVM presents the party in different ways to different audiences. In the local Hungarian media, SVM tells a more radical, in the Serbian media a more moderate, story (Marton, 02/06/10, Novi Sad). This indicates that lateral outbidding can be viable as long as the public discourses remain separate. This aspect would deserve a detailed analysis of Hungarian and Serbian media beyond the scope of this article.
13. Outbidding did not guarantee universal success to the newcomers in the minority council elections. Hungarian outbidder PMN received 2.77 percent of votes, in contrast to the overwhelming success of lateral underbidder SVM, which gained 77.21 percent. Bosniak outbidder BKZ on the other hand received a plurality of 48.4 percent of votes, followed by the 'Bosniak list' (supported by SDA and BDSS) that gained 37.35 percent. 'Bosniak rebirth', supported by SDP, received 14.25 percent (Ministartstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava, 2010).

14. These findings might sound counterintuitive to readers who are more familiar with non-ethnicized party competition. Parties in a non-ethnicized two-party system are expected to converge towards the median if they want to maximize votes and gain office. Deviant choices can then be explained with reference to policy goals. However, this model stands and falls with the assumption of single-peaked voter preferences. Given a society with two ethnic groups, the outbidding model would assume voter preferences to be bi-modally distributed with peaks at the radical fringes. Deviant choices can then be explained with office goals, since office in multi-ethnic states requires compromise with members of the other ethnic group and, hence, a more moderate stance on ethnic issues.

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