



Faculty of Political Sciences

Shared School, Divided System:

How students in Jajce mobilised to prevent a new division, and what this means for beyond-ethnic movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how a youth-led coalition in Jajce mobilised to stop the 2016–17 proposal to segregate secondary schooling and what this reveals about the possibilities and limits of beyond-ethnic contention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Situated in a fragmented, ethnically structured education system in which “Two Schools Under One Roof” persists, Jajce is unusual in having retained unified secondary schools even as primary education was split. Using a dynamic social movement perspective, the study analyses how actors read political and discursive opportunity structures, framed and counter-framed their claims, signalled worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment, and produced policy and prefigurative effects—and whether these diffused or were contained. A single, illustrative case study draws primarily on semi-structured interviews with participants, supplemented by movement materials and contemporary media coverage.

Findings show mobilisation emerged at the intersection of national closure and local openings: everyday coexistence in Jajce, trusted student–teacher ties, and public performances enabled a broad youth-led coalition to raise political costs and secure withdrawal of the plan—a rare reversal of segregative policy through collective action. Yet the impact was local and partial; entrenched institutional arrangements, including TSUOR and fragmented authority, curtailed wider integration and limited diffusion. The case clarifies how non-ethnic claims can be articulated and defended in constrained settings and identifies strategic levers—and limits—for future efforts to expand integrated schooling in BiH.

Keywords: Youth activism; Social movement theory; Beyond-ethnic movements; Two Schools Under One Roof; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Jajce.

Contents

1 Introduction	1
2 Literature Review and Conceptual/Theoretical Framework	4
2A) Social Movement Theories	4
2B) Dynamic Theoretical Framework	6
2C) Social Mobilisation in Divided Societies	10
2D) Social Movements in Post-Socialist Contexts	13
2E) Social Movements in Post-Yugoslav States	15
2F) Recent Social Movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	20
3 Overview of Empirical Case	24
3A) Post-War Political System in Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	24
3B) The Post-War Education System: Fragmentation and Ethnicization	25
3C) Key Dynamics in Post-War Education: The Case of Mostar	27
3D) Jajce	29
3E) The 2016–17 school protests in Jajce and Travnik.....	30
4 Research Methods.....	34
4A) Research design	34
4B) Deriving the thematic framework.....	35
4C) Choice of methods	36
4D) Source selection.....	37
4E) Methods of data analysis	37
4F) Ethical Considerations	37
4G) Research Strengths and Limitations	38
5 Findings & Analysis.....	40
Interviewees.....	40
A) Motivations of movement participants for forming/joining movement.....	41
National-level barriers to mobilisation	41
Local-level barriers to mobilisation	45
Motivations of Jajce’s students and teachers for resisting the proposal	48
5B) Movement Strategies, Framing, and Interaction with the Opportunity Structure.....	55
i. Strengthening Local Network and Allies	55
ii. Scaling up: expanding the network of solidarity beyond Jajce	57
iii. Media Engagement and Framing	62

iv. Lobbying to draw in support from international community	67
5C) Outcomes & Impacts.....	70
i.Immediate policy outcomes in Jajce, and their limits	70
ii.Jajce as an isolated case?	71
iii.Prefigurative Impacts	72
Bibliography	78
Appendix.....	90

1 Introduction

“We asked for the obviously impossible, and that is the abolition of ‘two schools under one roof’ throughout BiH. That will not be fulfilled because our system is too complicated, and politics also has a hand in it. However, we are not giving up on trying to change something.”¹

— Azra Keljalić, June 2017

This quote from Azra Keljalić, a high school student from Jajce, captures the core tension that motivates this thesis. Azra was speaking immediately after learning of the victory of the movement she had joined in convincing the authorities of the Central Bosnia Canton to pause and then reverse the proposal to segregate Jajce’s secondary schools, which had acted as the trigger for the movement’s emergence. She spoke at the high point of the campaign, when a coalition of students, teacher allies and supporters had achieved something very rare in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): the reversal of a segregative policy through direct collective action. Azra’s reflection holds two insights at once. It affirms that collective protest can shift decisions and that acting together is worthwhile. It also acknowledges the depth of national-level constraints that protect segregated schooling, including the institutionalisation of Two Schools Under One Roof (TSUOR) and the fragmentation of authority, which make countrywide desegregation a distant prospect. After their local win, students adopted that broader goal while recognising its difficulty. For participants, Jajce was both a defence of everyday coexistence and the opening of a longer struggle to expand integrated education. This double awareness of limits and openings, of structural closure and local possibility, sets the scene for the analysis that follows.

¹ *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 20 June 2017. Original quote: “Tražili smo očigledno nemoguće, a to je ukidanje 'dvije škole pod jednim krovom' u cijeloj BiH. To nam neće biti ispunjeno jer je previše kompliciran naš sistem, a i politika ima prste u tome. Ipak, ne odustajemo od pokušaja da nešto promijenimo.” (Augustinović, 20 June 2017, para 9).

This thesis turns on a central question: How and why did a youth-led coalition in Jajce mobilise against a proposal to separate secondary schooling inside a system that largely rewards ethnic division, and what does this reveal about the opportunities and limits of non-ethnic contention in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

The empirical context is a fragmented education system with multiple authorities and ethnicised curricula. TSUOR persists in the ‘mixed cantons’ of the Federation, with no clear majority of Bosniak or Croat inhabitants. Jajce is notable amongst these mixed contexts because its high schools remained unified even as primary education was split. In 2016–17 the cantonal ministry proposed a separate Bosniak-curriculum secondary school, presented as a corrective to discrimination. Students, teacher allies and supporters organised publicly. The plan was withdrawn. The result was local and partial, yet it reopened expectations about what collective action can achieve in schools and offered a clear window onto how mobilisation works in a constrained setting.

The topic is timely and relevant. Education remains a primary site where the post-war political order is reproduced, and where young people experience the everyday effects of institutionalised division. Jajce allows us to see how non-ethnic claims can be articulated and defended in a place where cross-ethnic relationships are part of ordinary life, and where decisions are shaped at municipal, cantonal and state levels. The case also speaks to wider debates on youth agency, contentious action, and the prospects for integrated schooling in BiH.

The study uses a dynamic social movement perspective. I focus on how actors read opportunities and constraints, how they shaped meaning in public, and how their choices produced effects beyond a single decision. Political and discursive opportunity structures guide the analysis of context. Framing and counter-framing help explain recruitment, resonance and backlash. I use signals of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment to read public performances. Outcomes are considered not only as policy changes but also as cultural and prefigurative shifts that alter what people think is possible, with attention to whether those shifts diffused or were contained.

From this, three questions follow. First, how did participants understand and navigate opportunities and constraints at municipal, cantonal and state levels? Second, which networks, allies and tactics sustained the coalition and helped it signal worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment in public? Third, what changed as a result, and how far did those changes travel? I distinguish a local policy outcome from cultural and prefigurative effects, and I ask whether the result diffused or was contained, and why.

The research design is kept simple to serve these aims. I use a single, illustrative case-study that allows depth. The primary evidence is interviews with participants in the movement, supported by movement materials and contemporary media coverage. Analysis is organised around themes drawn from the theoretical framework.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on social movements, divided societies and post-socialist contexts, and presents the conceptual and theoretical framework used here, including political and discursive opportunity structures, framing and counter-framing, WUNC signalling, and types of impact. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the empirical case, outlining the history and governance of education in BiH and situating Jajce within the broader national context. Chapter 4 sets out the research methods, data and ethics. Chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis, moving from national barriers and local openings to networks, tactics and frames, and then to outcomes, diffusion and containment.

2 Literature Review and Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

This chapter sets out the conceptual and theoretical framework that underpins this thesis, drawing from literature on social movements, ‘divided societies’, and post-socialist political contexts. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), as a case study, offers a particularly rich site for interrogating these dynamics: a post-socialist, post-conflict state with an entrenched consociational power-sharing framework, and persistent ethnic divisions. The chapter places recent social movements in BiH within the broader regional and global wave of post-2008 protests, while also attending to the specific historical and institutional legacies that condition mobilisation in this context.

2A) Social Movement Theories

Conceptualising Social Movements

This section introduces the core conceptual foundations of social movement studies, beginning with definitions of social movements as a form of contentious politics, and outlining the key features that distinguish them from other forms of collective action. It then identifies the kinds of empirical questions and analytical tools researchers have developed to study social movements, particularly around the study of actors and practices of contention. Together, these foundations inform the subsequent discussion of dynamic theoretical approaches in the next section.

Drawing on Tilly and Tarrow’s (2015, p. 11) conceptualisation, a social movement is understood as “a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities.” This conceptualisation falls within the broader conceptual framework of contentious politics, which Tilly and Tarrow (2015, p. 7) define as “interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.” To study social movements, della Porta and Diani (2015, pp. 2–3) advocate for an approach focusing on a movement’s **actors** and **practices**. Social movements are

understood to have several characteristic features in terms of both their actors and practices which distinguish them from other modes of contentious politics.

In terms of their *actors*, social movements are made up of **social movement bases**: pre-existing networks of solidarity which generate participation in the movement, evolve during the lifetime of the movement, and often outlive specific campaigns and go on to play a role in future movements (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, pp. 147–9). Rather than treating social movements as expressions of fixed interests or ideologies, della Porta and Diani (2015, pp. 2–3) argue for a focus on how movements are made and remade through practice: who participates, how they organise, what tactics they use, and how they frame their demands. Social movements involve **sustained campaigns of claim-making**, distinguishing them from one-off/short-term mobilisations (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 11). Following an initial demonstration or period of contention, movement actors typically establish some form of associational structure to determine the movement's organisation, tactical approaches, and the framing of their demands (della Porta and Diani 2015, pp. 2–3).

Social movements typically employ **non-violent repertoires of contention** (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 11; della Porta and Diani, 2015, pp. 2–3). In most cases, the principal and most visible mode of contention employed by social movements is the **public demonstration**, conceptualised by Tilly (2004, p. 54) as a display of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment ('WUNC'). Through such demonstrations, movements signal their legitimacy as expressions of popular support, directed both at the public and the authorities they seek to influence. Demonstrations however are just one of many practices through which movements engage the public, articulate claims, and generate internal solidarity. Other practices include petitions, public meetings, occupation of public space, use of digital media, enactment of alternative modes of living, and direct service provision (della Porta, 2015, pp. 2-3).

2B) Dynamic Theoretical Framework

This research project adopts a theoretical framework grounded in dynamic approaches to studying social movements.² These dynamic approaches have emerged in response to structuralist perspectives in social movement studies, which have tended to emphasise structural determinants—such as political institutions or economic conditions—while neglecting the agency of movement participants in shaping their strategies and trajectories in relation to contextual conditions. As such, the key theoretical feature that these dynamic approaches share is their attempt to consider “the complex interactions between agency and structure” in explaining how social movements develop across varying contexts (Bosi and de Fazio 2017, p. 16). Dynamic approaches thus “[recognise] the agency of all political actors participating [in] contention...within their complex organization fields, emphasizing their shifting strategies as they interact with each other and adapt to their context” (ibid.).

i. Strategies

Dynamic social movement scholars have developed an analytical framework that examines the strategies and tactics adopted by movement actors, how these decisions are shaped by the surrounding socio-political context, and how this context also affects the outcomes of their actions. One key strategy adopted by social movements and analysed by social movement scholars is the process of **networking for resources**, by which movement actors draw on, develop and strengthen their networks to gather the resources (in terms of participants, organisational capacities and financial means) necessary for collective action, thereby transforming the initial, more sporadic manifestation of contention into a more sustained social movement campaign (Milan, 2020, pp. 29-30; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 14). A relevant contextual consideration here is the pre-existence of networks of solidarity which movements are able to draw from, including the size of such networks, the skills that network members

² The main dynamic approaches that I have in mind are: (1) resource mobilisation (McCarthy and Zald 1977); (2) “political process”/contentious politics (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2015); (3) strategic interactions (Jasper 2007; Jasper and Duyvendak 2015); and (4) field theories (Fligstein and McAdam 2012).

possess as a result of factors such as their involvement in prior social movement campaigns, and the degree of unity/consensus between them.

As part of this resource-gathering process, movement actors may engage in “**consensus mobilisation**” (Klandermans, 1988), where they work to generate broader support by publicising their cause through cultural events, educational outreach, or media engagement (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, pp. 158–159). In some cases, actors also engage in the **appropriation of existing networks**, strategically aligning with trusted or powerful networks or institutions to enhance legitimacy and expand their support base (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 152). Additionally, movements may seek to expand their movement through linking localised or fragmented groups through **brokerage** or by inspiring similar initiatives elsewhere through **emulation**. Both processes, if successful, result in a **scale shift** of the movement from beyond the local context to the national or regional context (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, pp. 125–126; p. 37). As movements expand, their collective identity often shifts to emphasise broadly shared features while downplaying more divisive characteristics, enabling diverse actors to mobilise around a common cause (ibid.). However, this process of broadening comes with risks to the movement, since it can (sometimes fatally) undermine the movement’s unity, or its legitimacy because of the perceived narrowness of its demand(s).

ii. Political and Discursive Opportunity Structures

In line with their emphasis on the interplay between structure and agency in explaining social movements, dynamic scholars conceptualise movements as collectives of rational actors whose decisions regarding the timing and forms of contention are shaped by their interpretation of the context in which they operate. Tilly and Tarrow (2015, pp. 59–60) refer to these contextual conditions as the **political opportunity structure**. Movement actors’ perceptions of these opportunities inform their tactical choices, while the broader political environment simultaneously influences the effectiveness of those tactics.

In addition to political opportunity structures, scholars have also highlighted the significance of cultural conditions—termed **discursive opportunities**—in shaping how movements frame their grievances and identities (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004).

Just as political opportunity structures influence the timing and repertoire of mobilisation, discursive opportunities affect the resonance and public reception of movement frames (Milan, 2020, p. 33).

iii. Framing and counter-framing

These contextual factors—both political and discursive—play a central role in shaping the framing strategies adopted by social movements. Touquet (2015, p. 392) defines frames as “the interpretive packages activists present to convince their public to participate in their movement.” Framing is a process of meaning-making, whereby actors interpret their socio-political environment to render their cause legitimate and compelling to current and potential supporters (Gamson, 1992; Benford and Snow, 2000). Typically, this begins with identifying a grievance, which is then discursively transformed into a political claim by targeting an actor or institution and linking the issue to a broader normative vision of collective goods (Tarrow, 2004, p. 153; Della Porta, 2015, p. 14). Framing is thus crucial not only for mobilising participation but also for constructing a common identity capable of uniting diverse actors into a broader coalition.

Scholars also emphasise the contested nature of framing. The political and discursive opportunity structures are equally influential in shaping the efforts of opposing media or state actors “to rebut, undermine, or neutralise” the social movement’s framing (Benford, 1987, p. 75). Social movement theorists have labelled this process counter-framing (Benford, 1987; McAdam et al., 2001; Benford and Snow, 2000). Commonly analysed tactics of counter-framing include attempts to portray social movement actors as dishonest, ineffectual, or extremist (Boscarino 2016; McCaffrey and Keys, 2000). Thus, the social movement literature underscores how movements and their targets and opponents/counter-movements engage in contest within discursive battlegrounds: for all involved agents, meaning-making becomes an iterative process, shaped by the pressures of external counter-frames and internal strategic adaptation (Benford and Snow, 2000).

iv. Outcomes and Impacts

The political and discursive opportunity structures also shape the outcomes and impacts of the movement's contention. Tilly and Tarrow (2015, p. 161) identify three broad types of impact. First are direct effects on public policy, such as legislative change or institutional reform prompted by sustained campaigning. Second are the cultural effects of participation, whereby activists' engagement in claim-making may reshape their values, practices, and sense of identity, thus contributing to broader shifts in political culture. Third are the longer-term effects of contentious participation that extend beyond individual campaigns, influencing the development of political norms, repertoires, and activist communities over time. Developing these latter two types of impact, several scholars emphasise the prefigurative impacts of contention, with the contentious action of social movements carrying the potential to model alternative futures and create new political subjectivities, re-shaping subjective perceptions of what is possible within a given context (Harrison, 2014; Milan, 2016a; Baća, 2023).

2C) Social Mobilisation in Divided Societies

The theoretical framework for this study is informed in particular by theorists applying analytical tools from social movement studies to social mobilisation taking place within empirical contexts sharing key socio-political features with BiH. Given the common characterisation of BiH as a politically and socially ‘divided’ context, the conceptual framework from literature examining the dynamics of social mobilisation in so-called ‘divided societies’ is highly relevant, and in particular in those contexts in which these divisions are rooted in political arrangements resulting from inter-ethnic conflict (Brubaker, 1996, 2004; Nagle and Clancy, 2010; Nagle, 2016; Bosi and de Fazio, 2017; Milan, 2020).

John Nagle (2016, p. 9) defines “violently divided societies” as those in which “ethnicity – or ethnonationalism – is the main dividing line.” Within such contexts, state or sub-state level nationalising projects, and institutions rooted in ethnic definitions of citizenship/belonging produce persistent grievances by privileging one ethnonational group over others, thus constructing a politics of ethnic ownership of the nation (and, in the Bosnian case, of sub-national entities) (ibid.; Brubaker, 1996). This creates a sociopolitical fault line which is exacerbated by the widely held perception that the state (or sub-state entity) is actively taking the side of its favoured ethnonational group at the expense of the other(s), which operates as a continuous source of antagonism, and undermines the legitimacy of the state (Bosi and de Fazio, 2017, p. 11).

Theorists exploring social movements and other forms of contentious action within divided contexts have elucidated several key features of the political and discursive opportunity structures within such contexts, and the impact that these features can have on the forms, strategies, framing/counter-framing and outcomes/impacts of contentious action. One key observation is that ethnic mobilisation becomes the most likely form of contentious action within these contexts. In divided societies, ethnic categories are deeply institutionalised and reproduced through state structures, elite rhetoric, and segregated social spheres (Milan, 2020, p. 3; Hromadžić, 2015, p. 10; Brubaker 1996, 2004). In contexts where the legitimacy of the state is frequently called into question by those perceiving it to be biased towards its preferred ethnic group, oppositional activities against the incumbent representatives of the state are

frequently framed by the authorities and their supporters as attacks on the legitimacy of the state itself – a feature of the discursive opportunity structure with high demobilising potential (Bosi and de Fazio, 2017, p. 11). In this way, the ‘legitimacy question’ becomes the central political cleavage, strengthening in-group solidarity and out-group exclusion, thereby allowing ethnicity and ethnic identity to retain a high mobilising potential and to constitute the central organising principle for contentious politics (Bosi and de Fazio, 2017, p. 25; Nagle and Clancy, 2010). Given the high saliency and constant reproduction of this socio-political cleavage within states that are politically configured according to an ethnoterritorial logic, violent forms of inter-ethnically defined contention also become more likely (Wimmer et al., 2009; see also Nagle, 2016, p. 17).

The converse of the increased likelihood of inter-ethnic forms of contention in ethnically divided contexts is that contentious action constituted by cross-ethnic networks and organising around non-ethnically framed causes becomes more unlikely, and more difficult to sustain when it does emerge. The space forms of politics that that cross-cut ethnic cleavages is severely restricted (Nagle, 2016, p. 185), since the political discourse is flooded with inter-ethnically framed questions (Ruane and Todd, 2017), and the strength of in-group over cross-group solidarity poses a significant obstacle to the mobilisation of a large segment of the population in a broad-based coalition around causes framed as being in the common interest (Diani, 2005; Nagle, 2016, p. 26). In political arrangements such as that in BiH where ethnic divisions are institutionalised through a system of power-sharing at the state level and ethnically defined sub-state entities, the obstacles to mass movement formation are additionally entrenched (Nagle 2016, p. 17). When non-ethnic mobilisation does emerge in divided societies, representative of nationalist parties (whose political survival is threatened by such mobilisation) can exploit inter-ethnic distrust within political discourse to delegitimise these efforts—a feature of the discursive opportunity structure with high demobilising potential (Mujkić, 2016, pp. 225–226).

Although divided societies present formidable barriers to trans-ethnic or non-sectarian contention, recent scholarship highlights how such movements nevertheless emerge and identifies the qualities and strategies that distinguish their development in these adverse environments (Touquet, 2015; Nagle, 2016; Milan, 2020). Nagle (2016, pp. 21–22) identifies

four principal types of non-sectarian movements/actors in divided societies: transformationists, who seek to supplant ethnonational identities with alternative collective identities; pluralists, who advocate recognition of multiple identity dimensions (such as gender and race beyond ethnic lines); cosmopolitans, who frame national allegiance as parochial compared to global concerns; and commonists, who promote temporary, issue-based unity across ethnic groups around shared grievances.

2D) Social Movements in Post-Socialist Contexts

This thesis also builds on a growing body of scholarship examining social mobilisation in the post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe. One strong argument for grounded empirical research on social movements in post-socialist contexts lies in the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of earlier work in social movement and civil society studies. Much of this earlier research failed to capture social mobilisation in post-socialist regimes, calling for a revised methodological approach that avoids previous biases and more accurately reflects the dynamics of civic life in these societies.

Until the emergence of a new body of literature from around 2010, social movement scholars had overlooked Central and Eastern Europe. The limited work that did exist was shaped by the so-called ‘weak post-socialist civil society’ thesis, which characterised the region as defined by political passivity and minimal associational life (see Dahrendorf, 1990; Howard, 2003; Mendelson and Glenn, 2002). This thesis attributed the weakness of civil society to the legacy of state socialism, which was seen as having stifled civic initiative and eroded citizens’ capacity for collective action (Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2020).

This academic perspective also had tangible real-world impacts through its role in informing foreign investment in democratisation in the region, leading to a donor-driven focus on building Western-style civil society through support for NGOs. The result was the widespread ‘NGO-ization’ of civic life, as external funding fostered a professionalised NGO sector that was often disconnected from local grassroots concerns and accountable primarily to international donors (Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2020). This process of ‘NGO-isation’ is now widely seen as having depoliticised civil society and suppressed contentious grassroots activism.

More recently, scholars have challenged the assumptions underlying the ‘weak civil society’ thesis. Ekiert and Kubik (2017) argue that early studies relied too narrowly on the presence of NGOs to assess civic strength, ignoring alternative forms of associational activity—many of which had roots in socialist-era community structures (Baća, 2023, p. 176; Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2020, p. 126). In response, a number of researchers have called for context-

sensitive theoretical approaches that acknowledge the specific histories and social structures of the post-socialist region (Ekiert and Kubik, 2017; Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2020; Baća, 2022). They emphasise the need to look beyond institutionalised NGOs and instead examine grassroots movements and informal civic practices.

This shift has given rise to a growing body of work mapping the “vibrant life of social movements and variegated terrains of civic engagement beyond the professionalised civic sector” (Baća, 2023, p. 176; see also Bieber and Brentin, 2018; Fagan and Sircar, 2019; Jacobsson, 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg, 2013; Razsa and Kurnik, 2012; Štiks, 2015; Stubbs, 2012). This new research coincides with what Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019, p. 126) describe as a societal 'post-NGOisation' phase in the region, marked by the rise of “domestically driven, grassroots activism opposing the professionalisation and bureaucratisation” of earlier civil society models.

2E) Social Movements in Post-Yugoslav States

As well as accounting for how earlier scholarship failed to acknowledge the presence of specific nature of social mobilisation in the post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, Ekiert and Kubik (2017) also argue that the specific legacies of different socialist regimes have shaped variations in civic mobilisation across the post-socialist region. In this regard, this thesis intends to empirically ground the social movement in Jajce within the broader context of recent social movements in the Yugoslav successor states. These states share not only a common socialist inheritance, but also very close historical, linguistic, and cultural ties—factors that foster strong cross-border influence and interconnected patterns of mobilisation.

Shared Legacy of Dissent

One important societal specificity of the former Yugoslavia, in contrast to majority of the regimes of the Eastern Bloc, is the legacy of genuine (relatively autonomous) civil society movements within the Yugoslav socialist regime, as evidenced by the influential movement of broadly Marxist humanist, anti-bureaucratic thinkers emerging out of the Praxis movement of the late 1960s, allied with the student movement emerging in 1968. Whilst initially calling for ‘socialism with a human face’, these first advocates of civil society in the region turned by the mid-1970s to the vocabulary of human rights and freedoms (Grunewald, 1992; Hall, 2003). The wider margin for toleration of religious institutions in socialist Yugoslavia than in certain other socialist contexts is also an important cultural legacy. Denitch (1994) argues that these religious institutions played a powerful and enduring oppositional role under Titoist socialism by preserving ethnonational identities and historical memory. As the socialist system collapsed, these institutions quickly filled the ideological vacuum, becoming key drivers of nationalist mobilisation and contributing directly to Yugoslavia’s disintegration into competing national projects. Given the salience of both cultural legacies, once can legitimately attempt to draw a meaningful between the social movements emerging within socialist Yugoslavia, the dissenting movements emerging during the disintegration (including grassroots nationalist movements, such as the Kosovo Serb movement: see for example Vladislavljević, 2002), and those emerging in the Yugoslav successor states.

Shared Legacy of Transition

One key aspect of the shared historical inheritance of the states of the post-Yugoslav space is their shared recent history of transition. These states experienced what Dejan Jović (2022, p. 204) calls a “fivefold transition” following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991: (1) a political transition from one-party Yugoslav socialism to multiparty pluralism; (2) an economic transition from socially owned production to a market-oriented economy; (3) a transition in statehood from one federation to several independent states; (4) from Yugoslav to national identity at the collective and individual level (in ethnic, political and ideological terms); and (5) a transition from war to peace. For this reason, the transition experienced by the Yugoslav successor states has been even more far-reaching (extending into more fundamental elements of statehood, citizenship and identity) than for post-socialist regimes elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. The extensive impact of these shared legacies on contemporary society and politics within these states is strong grounds for inductive research focusing on these states in particular, accounting for the impact of these shared features on the specific patterns of social mobilisation in the region.

Shared regime types: competitive authoritarian regimes

A further shared characteristic of the region made apparent in political science literature investigating the region lies in its contemporary dominant regime types. Most post-Yugoslav states have developed forms of what Levitsky and Way (2002) term “competitive authoritarianism”. These regimes preserve the appearance of democratic institutions—such as elections and separation of powers—while maintaining incumbents' dominance through informal mechanisms like clientelism, media control, and institutional capture (Bieber, 2018; Kapidžić, 2020a, 2020b). Tilly and Tarrow (2015, p. 75) argue that regime type influences the repertoires of contention available to social actors. In competitive authoritarian settings, formal channels of influence are often ineffective, prompting citizens to resort to street-level mobilisation and extra-institutional tactics.

Common Movement Dynamics

The significance of the influence of these shared features of the post-Yugoslav states is supported by the body of literature analysing social movements in the region which has

emerged since 2010. This literature has identified several common dynamics in the patterns, triggers, causes, strategies and framing of movements in the region.

Common Movement Patterns

Scholars researching the recent social movements in the region have identified commonalities in the patterns of their mobilisation. The key overarching pattern that most recent social movements in the region share is having been triggered by specific contextual grievances which social movements have framed as “conduits for broader social and political discontent” (Brentin and Bieber, 2018, pp. 1–2, emphasising the imperative need for fundamental political reforms. This common pattern of social mobilisation in the region indicates that while the immediate reasons (triggers) for contentious action have differed from one regime and time to the next (ranging from environmental tragedies to the privatisation of public space), the underlying causes have much in common: a widely held distrust of the dominant political regimes which have failed to protect their citizens from various societal harms (Štikš, 2015).

The overarching pattern of the movements within the region can be linked to their common experience of transition. The emergence of various grassroots movements in the region has coincided with a global wave of social movements that gained momentum after the 2008 financial crisis, targeting economic grievances such as austerity, precarity, weakened labour rights, and rising unemployment (della Porta, 2015). While in Western Europe these trends followed a period of relative economic prosperity prior to 2008 (although accompanied by creeping neoliberalisation and increasing inequality), the populations of the Yugoslav successor states had already been experiencing a prolonged period of impoverishment, deindustrialisation, unemployment, social degradation and erosion of the social safety net during the years of transition. These trends were then further aggravated by the global economic downturn from 2008 onwards (Horvat and Štikš, 2015, p. 2; Štikš 2015, pp. 1-2). Therefore, compared to creeping neoliberalisation in Western Europe, the transition to neoliberalism in the post-socialist Yugoslav successor states ‘suffers from a stronger democratic deficit, government corruption and the legacy of dubious privatisation projects from the 1990s’ (Dolenec et al., 2017, p. 1405). Trends such as the privatisation of public resources and space, the weakening of environmental protection legislation and the dismantling of the remnants of the welfare state have taken place in a context in which citizens feel like

they have little influence on the political agenda, with the process of economic liberalisation and ‘Europeanisation’ towards the final goal of EU integration being presented as without alternatives by each of the major political parties, as well as the international overseers who retain an outsized influence over the political agenda (Štiks and Horvat, 2015, pp. 4–5). Citizens have often felt excluded from meaningful political participation, as both domestic elites and international actors framed neoliberal reforms and ‘Europeanisation’ as technocratic necessities rather than subjects for democratic deliberation. This has created a sense of political inevitability, where elections changed faces but not policies, deepening public disillusionment with formal democratic mechanisms (ibid.).

In response, social movements in the region have increasingly framed their struggles as fights not only against specific injustices but also for the reclamation of political agency and democratic imagination. Rejecting elite-led reforms and the convergence of political programmes among ruling parties, these movements articulate alternative visions of democracy and social justice (Brentin and Bieber 2018, pp. 4–5). They are often prefigurative in character, experimenting with horizontal structures, direct action, and consensus-based decision-making. As Horvat and Štiks (2015, p. 4) argue, formal democracy in the region has largely enabled the mere “re-shuffling of the same political oligarchy,” prompting citizens to seek new forms of collective organisation (such as plenums) that bypass traditional party politics. These movements aim not just to protest the present, but to model the future they want to see.

Movement Types (Framing)

Those scholars investigating social movements in the post-Yugoslav space have presented a broad typology of the most common movement types emerging in the region, focusing on the movement’s framing of their cause:

i. Anti-Authoritarian and Anti-Corruption Frames

A core framing dimension across many movements involves the rejection of elite capture and systemic corruption. Social movements often portray ruling elites as predatory actors who have subverted democratic processes for private gain (Brentin and Bieber, 2018:4; Draško et al.,

2020; Staletović and Pollozhani, 2023). This anti-corruption framing is frequently paired with calls for systemic reform, accountability, and democratic renewal. Movements critique the ineffectiveness of Europeanisation in enforcing domestic reform and have experimented with grassroots democratic practices—such as plenums—as alternatives to formal institutional engagement (Milan and Dolenc, 2023, p. 578; Štiks, 2015, p. 140; Kirn, 2014).

ii. Struggles Over the Commons

Most broadly, these movements have condemned the failure of their governments to act in the common good, variously interpreted (Brentin and Bieber, 2018, p. 3). Movements have targeted the corrupt and unaccountable processes of the privatisation of the ‘commons’, referring to the natural environment, urban public space, and public utilities and institutions (Balkan Forum, 2014, pp. 24-5; Štiks, 2015, pp. 139-40; Brentin and Bieber, 2018, p. 3; Dolenc et al, 2017; Dinev, 2023; Staletović and Pollazhani, 2023).

iii. Anti-Austerity and Labour Movements

Labour-related protests have also figured prominently in the region’s post-2008 protest wave. These actions often emerge from local grievances over privatisation or factory closures but develop into wider critiques of neoliberal restructuring and its consequences for workers. While some movements demand limits to market encroachment in the public sphere, others challenge the logic of capitalism itself, drawing on socialist-era practices such as worker self-management (Dolenc, 2013; Balkan Forum, 2014, pp. 13–14).

In sum, social movements in the post-Yugoslav states are shaped by a set of shared historical legacies and structural conditions. They arise in response to a perceived failure of transition. Despite differing immediate triggers linked to contextual specificities at the state level, the region’s movements strategies and framing tend to reflect an emergent repertoire of contention grounded in critiques of corruption, neoliberalism, and democratic disempowerment. These shared patterns make the Yugoslav successor states a compelling context for studying how grassroots mobilisation adapts to structurally constrained political environments.

2F) Recent Social Movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In parallel with trends in the wider region on the Yugoslav successor states, a wave of grassroots contention through public demonstrations has emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2008 onwards. These protests have been widely interpreted by academics to constitute the first significant social mobilisation against the institutionalised ethnic nationalism of the Dayton system (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017; Armakolas and Maksimović, 2013; Bieber, 2013; Dedović, 2013; Mujanović, 2020; Mujkić, 2016; Kurtović, 2015, 2018; Milan, 2016, 2020; Lai, 2020). The dominant forms, repertoires and framing of contentious action employed by social movement actors has also mirrored in many ways the wider regional trends, with protest frames converging on anti-corruption, social welfare, and procedural fairness, while organisational forms privilege assemblies and open meetings as expressions of direct democracy.

The majority of scholarly attention has been devoted to the protests 2013 “Babylution” (JMBG) protests, and the 2014 ‘uprising’, which were the first major mass protests in post-war BiH, and have been interpreted as the first major challenges to the Dayton system (Bieber, 2013; Mujkić, 2016). The 2013 “Babylution” (JMBG) protests—read as a civic awakening organised around the denial of newborns’ ID numbers—marked a decisive turn toward non-ethnic, rights-based claims and inventive street repertoires (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017). Subsequent contention peaked in February 2014, when Tuzla’s labour-grievance protests against predatory privatisations spread nationwide and spawned “plenum” assemblies that prefigured alternative, directly democratic decision-making.

Scholars have also emphasised the ‘beyond ethnic’ nature of these protests, whose centre of gravity is based on modes of solidarity beyond ethnic belonging, such as shared citizenship and common grievances with the country’s corrupt political class. Milan (2016) shows how these cycles re-made citizenship through performative and prefigurative practices; her analyses of 2013–14 document occupations of space, mass marches, and horizontally organised forums as signature repertoires that sought to transcend ethnic cleavages. Ethnographic accounts deepen this reading. Kurtović and Hromadžić interpret the protests through the lens of “empty bellies” and social justice, foregrounding scarcity, indignation, and a popular imaginary of “the people” that cuts across ethnic lines; Kurtović’s studies of both 2013 and 2014 trace how

material grievances were translated into claims on the state and into new political subjectivities. Lai (202), in turn, emphasises practices of solidarity that reframed “reconciliation” away from elite ethno-managing toward collaborative, everyday civic action.

At the same time, authors stress BiH-specific constraints in the political opportunity structure, drawing out several constraining features of the context by reference to the fates of these recent movements:

Difficulty of garnering cross-ethnic, cross-entity support:

Another significant obstacle that the Bosnian social movements have faced is the difficulty of garnering (sustained) cross-ethnic support within the Dayton system, due to the political separation of the country into separate entities in which the majority of major decisions are made at the Cantonal and municipal levels, the dominance of ethnic group solidarity as the primary mode of political solidarity, and the dominant ‘spin’ of the ethnonationalist political elites which smears any calls for constitutional reform towards political integration as either ‘Bosniak unitarism’ or ‘Serb/Croat secessionism’ (Kurtović & Hromadžić, 2017, p. 271; Kurtović, 2018, p. 46; Jansen 2015, p. 227; Repovac Nikšić et al., 2022; Mujkić, 2016, p. 227).

In the face of this constraints, social movements have consciously developed “deeply apolitical” messaging focusing on reforms within the Dayton framework, conceived as a “necessary first step in circumventing the Dayton conundrum” (Jansen 2015:228). They have focused on socioeconomic and social justice grievances and consciously avoided the issue of constitutional reform (Kurtović & Hromadžić 2017:271).

(Reluctant/pragmatic) acceptance of Dayton system:

The 2013 JMBG protesters were forced to accept a practical resolution to the immediate trigger issue over which they had mobilised (the failure to issue JMBG numbers which had jeopardised the safety of a young child who was prevented from travelling abroad to access specialist medical treatment) that introduced further ethnic designation into identity documents. Thus, “in an ironic way the protestors brokered a more discriminatory law, which is a constant threat to any civic engagement in ethnically divided Bosnia” (Mujkić, 2016, p. 225). In the case of

the JMBG protests, the pragmatic solution the protestors had to accept simultaneously represented an acceptance that “Dayton is here to stay and must be made liveable” (Kurtović 2018, pp. 45).

The question of whether to engage the political elite

A key issue for existing social movements has been the question of whether to engage the political elite in the movements towards reform of the political system. The dilemma here is that, while engaging with the political elite may well be a ‘necessary evil’ in effecting wider and more sustained change, such a step simultaneously risks eroding the legitimacy of such movements and further jeopardising the possibility to build sustained and extensive cross-ethnic support through engaging with one or several of the ethnonationalist political parties currently in power. The importance of this dynamic can be witnessed in relation to the 2014 protests, where it was one of several important factors in the eventual dissolving of the movement and its plenums, through eroding the legitimacy of the movement which had framed itself as representing “unbribeable Bosnia” (as internal rumours began to spread that certain participants were in the pocket of the international community, or certain political parties) (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017, p. 282). The factor was again central to the “Justice for Dženan” Movement, wherein the participants had divided views over whether one of the central participants’ (the sister of the deceased) engagement with the People and Justice party could be beneficial for the movement and not simply for the party, and conversely whether the movement could effect any form of legislative change in the absence of cooperation with a political party (Repovac Nikšić, et al., 2022).

Lack of support from international community

The social movements since 2013 have also been notable for their lack of meaningful support from the international community. In response to the 2014 protests, High Representative Valentin Inzko threatened the use of EU troops in response to the movement (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017, p. 28). This kind of response on the part of the international community can be interpreted as emblematic of the international community’s prioritisation of stability at all costs, a situation that has been interpreted as working to the advantage of the ‘ethnic oligarchies’ by allowing them

to emphasise the continuous the threat of crisis in order to justify their own importance in ensuring stability (see Mujkić 2007, p. 112; 2016; Bieber 2018, pp. 345-6).

The necessity and challenge of articulating a non-ethnic mode of personhood to claim rights

Several authors have articulated the pressing need for social movements to articulate a non-ethnic/trans-ethnic mode of personhood as a necessary step in developing broad and sustained social movements (see Kurtović, 2018, 45). Some authors claim that the recent social movements have had some level of success in beginning to articulate a non-ethnic mode of personhood, for example through re-articulating narod in non-ethnic terms, or returning class as the primary mode of solidarity (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017, p. 266; Mujkić 2016, pp. 227-8). However, the difficulty of this task is reflected in the fact that social movements have found non-ethnic articulation (i.e. avoiding any mention of ethnic categories and the ethnicised system) easier than trans-ethnic articulation (challenging the foundations of the ethnicised system), and have frequently found it necessary to ‘perform ethnicity’ for example through displaying the three flags together to symbolise cross-ethnic solidarity (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017, p. 280).

3 Overview of Empirical Case

This empirical section seeks to contextualise the 2016–17 school protests in Jajce by elucidating the defining characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s post-war political system, with particular attention to the education system as a crucial arena where the legacies of fragmentation, ethnic division, and institutional entrenchment are clearly observable. Following this, the significance of Jajce as a site of contentious political and social action is addressed, before introducing the specific events of the protests.

3A) Post-War Political System in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The political architecture of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is deeply shaped by the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (‘Dayton agreement’), which established a complex consociational system premised on ethnic power-sharing.³ The country was divided into two autonomous entities—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (‘Federation’ or ‘FBiH’) and Republika Srpska (‘RS’)—with ethnic groups institutionalised as the fundamental building blocks of governance (Bieber, 2005). The Federation is further divided into ten cantons, each with a high degree of autonomy. Cantons are often dominated by one ethnic group, which influences political power and resource distribution. In ‘mixed cantons’ (those in which no single ethnic group is dominant) governance is often contested, leading to power-sharing arrangements or political deadlock. At the municipal level, control typically reflects the majority ethnic group in a given area, reinforcing ethnic divisions and shaping access to public services, employment, and education. This arrangement has solidified ethnic divisions, embedding them in the political and administrative structure, which critics argue rewards wartime ‘ethnic cleansing’ and the political elites who orchestrated such atrocities (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017, p. 267).

The political landscape has been characterised by what Mujkić (2007) terms “ethnopolis” or “ethnocracy,” where political parties primarily represent ethnic interests. Key positions are allocated through ethnic quotas, and state institutions—including education—are segmented by ethnic affiliation. This fosters a “catch within” political competition model, where parties

³ For an overview of the different models of power-sharing implemented in ‘divided’ post-conflict settings, see Nagle, 2016, pp. 15-17.

vie for dominance within ethnic blocs rather than across the entire political spectrum, often engaging in ‘ethnic outbidding’ that sidelines moderate, non-sectarian parties (see Nagle, 2016, p. 12). Such dynamics are exacerbated by the consociational, corporate power-sharing framework of the Bosnian state (see McGarry and O’Leary, 2007).

The state itself has been described as an “empty shell,” with weak central authority and pervasive clientelism (Bieber, 2005, p. 40). Political parties have leveraged control over collective resources to establish economic and political oligarchies, linking political loyalty to socioeconomic advancement (Kurtović, 2015). This clientelist patronage has rendered the state apparatus the country’s largest employer and entrenched vested interests. The international community’s role, particularly that of the European Union, has often prioritized stability over democratic reform, leading to what Bieber (2018) calls a “stabilitocracy.”

3B) The Post-War Education System: Fragmentation and Ethnicization

In parallel with the post-Dayton partitioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina into two entities (FBiH and RS) and one self-governing administrative unit (Brčko), three parallel education systems now function in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Republika Srpska, as a unitary entity, has a centralised system which runs according to the ‘Serbian’ plan. The FBiH, as a federal entity, has a decentralised system within which responsibility for education is devolved to the ten individual Cantons. Meanwhile, the self-governing Brčko District has its own education system. There are therefore thirteen separate Ministries responsible for education in BiH: one centralised Ministry in RS; one Ministry of the FBiH; one in each of the ten Cantons of FBiH; and one for Brčko District (Clark 2010, p. 346; Hemon 2012, p. 12; Kapo 2012, p. 19; Hromadžić 2015, p. 193; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2023, p. 17).

i. Multiple ethnicised curricula

Republika Srpska uses the curriculum issued by the RS Ministry of Education and Culture, and Brčko District has its own curriculum. The picture is far more complex in the Federation. Here, the Cantons with a Croat majority follow the curriculum developed by the Mostar Institute for School Affairs, and those with a Bosniak majority follow the curriculum issued by the Federation’s Ministry of Education, or their own curriculum. In the two ‘mixed cantons’

(Hercegovina-Neretva and Central Bosnia), there are separate ‘Croat’ and ‘Bosniak’ schools following separate curricula, as well as ‘two schools under one roof’ in the municipalities without an ethnic majority, where students belonging to the two ‘constituent people’ follow their respective curricula within the same school building. There are also ‘two schools under one roof’ in Zenica-Doboj Canton, which despite having a Bosniak majority at the cantonal level also contains ‘mixed’ municipalities (Clark 2010, p. 346; Hromadžić 2015, p. 43; OSCE 2018, pp. 6-7).

A feature of the separate curricula offered across BiH is their ‘ethnicised’ content. Existing research has tended to focus on the teaching of history across the different curricula, and finds that the history curricula portray an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ group dynamic which emphasises the victimhood of ‘our own group’ and minimises the victimhood of the ‘other’, particularly with reference to the 1992-5 war (Kovač, 2024; OSCE, 2023; Clark, 2010, pp. 347–8).

ii. “Two schools under one roof”

“Two schools under one roof” (TSUOR) are present in three cantons of the Federation: Hercegovina-Neretva, Central Bosnia and Zenica-Doboj. As of 2018, there were 56 schools in these three cantons operating under this system (OSCE, 2018). Each of these three cantons experienced intense fighting during the war in BiH which resulted in the substantial displacement of one or both of the previously dominant ethnic groups. As a result, there were multiple significant barriers to the return of refugees and internally displaced peoples. One such barrier was education, with returnee children in many cases being prevented from attending school, or returnee parents refusing to enrol their children in local schools, instead opting for them to attend makeshift schools in the municipality, or to attend schools outside their municipality of residence in areas where the majority belonged to their own ethnic group. In both mainstream and ad hoc schools, the content of education remained highly nationalistic and exclusionary in the immediate post-war years (see OSCE, 2001; 2008).

In this context, the international community in BiH, most importantly the Office of the High Representative (OHR), and the OSCE Mission to BiH who have a mandate for overseeing the reintegration of education, advocated for the implementation of a number of interim measures,

most significantly the 2002 *Interim Agreement on Accommodation of the Rights and Needs of Returnee Children* which introduced the practice of ‘two schools under one roof’. In the short term, these temporary measures led to returnee children again attending education in the same school buildings as their peers from other ethnic groups. However, this arrangement came with severe limitations from the perspective of reintegration. In the most extreme cases, students have no interethnic contact whatsoever, using separate entrances and/or having separate ‘shifts’ at the school, with teachers using separate staff rooms. Intended as temporary measures towards full integration of education, more than twenty years after their implementation these schools remain largely unchanged (OSCE, 2018, pp. 7–8; Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 42–3).

iii. “National group” of subjects

Another measure introduced by the 2002 Interim Agreement was the “national group” of subjects – history, geography, language and literature, nature and society (in early grades of primary school) and religion, with Article 3 of the agreement stating that regarding these subjects, “parents shall be given the possibility to opt for Entity/Canton or the curriculum of their own choice” (Clark, 2010, p. 347). One consequence of this measure was that parents opted to bus their children to schools outside of their municipality/canton/entity in order to be educated according to their preferred curriculum, thereby reinforcing the physical segregation of schools and communities (Clark, 2010, p. 347; Islamović and Blažević, 2014, p. 55).

3C) Key Dynamics in Post-War Education: The Case of Mostar

Azra Hromadžić’s (2015) ethnography of the Mostar Gymnasium offers a clear window onto the forces that have shaped post-war schooling in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a city split between Croat-majority West Mostar and Bosniak-majority East Mostar, the Gymnasium became a focal site where ethnicisation of everyday life, refugee return, language politics, clientelist interests and international intervention intersected. I set out these dynamics here because they recur across the system and help to frame the conditions that later efforts against segregation, including in Jajce, had to navigate.

i. Post-war ethnicisation of everyday life

In 1999, the Mostar Gymnasium became administratively “Croatised” under Croat political control, transforming from a secular, multi-ethnic institution into an explicitly Croat school. Symbolic markers, such as renaming the school after a Croatian Catholic figure and

implementing the Croat curriculum taught in Croatian language, signalled the ethnic claim over the school space (Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 34, 84). This process exemplifies what Brubaker (1999) terms the “ethnicization of everyday life,” where social institutions become key sites for reinforcing ethnic boundaries.

ii. Role of the international community

Refugee return was a driving factor behind international efforts to reintegrate the Mostar Gymnasium, particularly by the OHR and the OSCE Mission, which aimed to reverse ethnic segregation in education. Yet, faced with intense resistance from Croat political elites fearing the loss of ethnic control and cultural autonomy, international actors moderated their ambitions from full integration to administrative unification—allowing Bosniak students to return but maintaining separate curricula and classrooms (Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 33, 43, 60).

iii. Majority-minority politics

This resistance reflects broader majority-minority politics. Though Croats are constitutionally one of the three constituent peoples, they represent a numerical minority at the state level and within the Federation, but a majority in Mostar. This paradox fuels Croat political claims of being a “trapped” minority whose group rights and autonomy are threatened by integration initiatives dominated by the Bosniak majority at the Federation and state levels (Hromadžić, 2015, p. 35; see also Wimmen, 2004). Meanwhile, Bosniak political actors have generally supported integration efforts, motivated by the desire to regain access to school infrastructure, although their stance has shifted in response to demographic and political changes in Mostar (Bose, 2017, pp. 197–8; Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 34–5).

iv. Language politics

Language politics are central to ethnic segregation in education. The assertion of distinct “maternal languages”—Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian—reflects a post-war process of “linguistic purism” (Kordić, 2010) designed to reinforce ethnic difference. In Mostar, Croat elites justified separate curricula by invoking the need to preserve the “purity” of Croatian, particularly to facilitate access to Croatian universities, presenting integration as a threat to linguistic and cultural identity (Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 46–58).

v. Economic factors

Economic factors also play a role, as some school staff feared that integration would reduce the number of teaching positions, linking opposition to educational reforms with broader clientelist dynamics where the distribution of public sector jobs is a key means for rewarding political loyalty and maintaining the ideological obedience of school staff (Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 36 –7).

3D) Jajce

Jajce is a town in the Central Bosnia Canton, one of only two ‘mixed Cantons’ in the Federation (alongside Herceg-Neretva canton), and one of the three Cantons in the Federation with several schools operating the “two schools under one roof” system (OSCE, 2018).

During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of the local Bosniak and Croat population of Jajce fled in 1992 when the Serb-dominated JNA took control of the town. As a result, there was no direct military confrontation between local Croats and Bosniaks when fighting between Croat and Bosnian forces elsewhere in the country emerged in 1992 and escalated in 1993.⁴ In 1995, Croat forces regained control of Jajce, enabling the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) to take political control of the town, and to subsequently obstruct the return of Bosniaks and other non-Croats in an effort to retain the newly established numerical Croat majority in the town. After intervention by the OHR and OSCE, the return of Bosniaks gradually accelerated, until Bosniaks eventually again became the largest ethnic group in the town (Kurtović, 2015).

As a result of Jajce’s wartime experiences, Jajce is perceived by its local population as less divided than the territories that experienced direct military confrontation between Croats and Bosniaks, despite the emergence and persistence of political confrontations, in common with the other mixed territories (Kurtović, 2015). Unlike towns where “strict ethno-national

⁴ Initially allied against the JNA and VRS, the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) began clashing by late 1992, leading to open conflict in early 1993 that lasted until the signing of the Washington Agreement in March 1994.

‘territorial management’” dismantled shared geographies, “the infamous line of ethno-national geographic separation” did not take hold in Jajce (Stipić, 2019, p. 149). Stipić describes the town as “a big crack” or “no man’s land” within a country where codes of belonging are usually tightly enforced (ibid.). This relative absence of hard boundaries has allowed more routine inter-ethnic interaction, making Jajce “an interesting laboratory of an unusual experiment of post-war reintegration inside of a divided BiH” (ibid.).

Since the war, Jajce has also experienced substantial economic decline as a result of the privatisation and closure of its previously central industries, and a dramatically reduced income from tourism. As a result, the most desirable and secure jobs in the town are now those in the public sector and state owned enterprises, which tend to be distributed by the local political parties in reward for loyalty, a mechanisms which in turn guarantees the loyalty of a significant portion of the population to the political parties, regardless of their actual political convictions (Kurtović, 2015).

After the return of the Croat and Bosniak population to the town from 1995 onwards, the primary school system in Jajce was segregated into separate Croat and Bosniak schools. High schools however remained united, with the two high schools in Jajce operating under the Croatian language curriculum, with Bosniak students following separate Bosnian language and Islamic religion classes but otherwise attending all the same subjects/classes as their Croat schoolmates (Nansen Dialogue Centre, 2019, p. 5; OSCE, 2018).

3E) The 2016–17 school protests in Jajce and Travnik

On 1 June 2016, the Ministry of Education of Central Bosnia Canton (MECBC) announced their intention to establish a new high school for Bosniak students, following the Bosnian-language curriculum. If effect, this proposal threatened to ethnically segregate Jajce’s secondary schools. The decision was justified by cantonal education minister Katica Čerkez and supported by Jajce’s mayor Edin Hozan by reference to a petition brought by Bosniak parents complaining of discrimination against Bosniak students on the basis that they do not attend all of the “national group” of subjects, and that the diplomas issued by the schools included the insignia of unrecognised, self-declared Croat entity of Herceg-Bosna, established in parts of

BiH during the Bosnian War (Klix, 23 June 2016; Augustinović, 20 August 2016, paras 7–8; OSCE, 2018, p. 12). The existence of this petition was publicly questioned however, as it was never made public (Arnautović, 20 July 2016, paras 11–12; Tikveša, 22 July 2016, paras 8–9).

The students spoke out against the proposal for the first time on 17 June 2016, following a meeting of the Student Councils of the town's two secondary schools: High Vocational School Jajce (HVSJ) and Nikola Šop Gymnasium (NŠG) (Radio Sarajevo, 17 June 2016). On 23 June, the students spoke with the media to express their intention to 'fight' the proposal through peaceful protests and floated the option of a boycott of classes in September if necessary (Klix, 23 June 2016). They also called for an option for students to receive their diploma without the contentious insignia, to reverse this existing discrimination against Bosniak students without resorting to segregating the town's schools (ibid.). On 8 July, a group of around thirty students from Jajce held the first street protest in the town: a march behind the three national flags of BiH, Croatia and Serbia (Klix, 8 July 2016). They were supported by OSCE Ambassador Jonathon Moore, who came to Jajce to speak with the students (8 July 2016). On 20 August, the cantonal authorities announced that the proposal had been "postponed", citing "pressure" on the local community which had delayed the implementation of the decision (Augustinović, 20 August 2016).⁵ The immediate outcome for Jajce's high school students was that they would continue to go to school together in September.

In 2017, the cantonal ministry pushed ahead with their plan to establish the new school, and the town's students (as well as former student NŠG student Samir Beharić, who became an informal spokesperson for the movement) continued to speak in the media to oppose the plan and emphasise the harm it would do in Jajce (Halimović, 21 March 2017). Meanwhile, support for the students from important members of the international community in the country, as well as local allies, continued to grow. On 27 March, the students received public support from US ambassador Maureen Cormack, who came to speak with them in Jajce, as well as accompanying a group of student representatives to meetings with minister Čerkez, and Mayor

⁵ Original quote (from Minister Katica Čerkez: "Ostalo je nedovoljno vremena da bi se implementirala odluka Skupštine u ovoj školskoj godini. Lokalna zajednica, koja je imala stalne pritiske, nije smogla snage, ne znam ni sama zašto, da predloži kandidate za školski odbor i vršitelja dužnosti ravnatelja. Sada je prekasno i u ovoj školskoj godini situacija ostaje ista."

Hozan (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 27 March 2017). In May, a group of teachers from HVŠJ came together in support of the protesting students under the moniker ‘Better School’ (*Bolja Škola*), publishing a proposal for fully integrating Jajce’s high schools under a unified curriculum, which also included several proposed temporary measures towards educational integration (Inicijativa “Bolja škola”, 9 May 2017; Augustinović, 16 May 2017). On 1 June, the students were awarded the ‘Bridge to the Future’ (*Most za Budućnost*) award by 18 ambassadors to BiH.

In June 2017, the students again stepped up their protests against the ministry’s proposal. On 8 June, they sent a public letter to the ministry, questioning whose interests the proposal served given the expense of the proposal (for which one million marks had been made available from the cantonal budget) in light of the pressing need for better investment in teaching resources in the existing schools; citing the dropping enrolment rate in the town; and stressing the undemocratic nature of the proposal and its implementation (claiming that they had not been consulted, and citing threats from NŠG principal Hrvoje Jurina against his own students should they continue to protest) (Naša Škola, Facebook, 8 June 2017). On 17 June 2017, Minister Čerkez announced that the ministry had “given up” on the proposal to implement the new school (Augustinović, 17 June 2017). Further, the two remaining “national subjects” (history and geography of BiH) would be implemented for Bosniak students, alongside a choice for students to receive their diplomas without the insignia of Herceg-Bosna (*ibid.*). Explaining this decision, Minister Čerkez cited “strong pressure from the international community, such as the OSCE and US Embassy” which had made the SDA “[give] up on the new school”, a view which was also supported by Jajce Mayor Hozan (*ibid.*, paras 5-7).⁶

Following the announcement of the canton’s decision in Jajce, the town’s students pushed ahead with a protest in Travnik on 20 June 2017 against the “problem” of two schools under

⁶ Original quote, Katica Čerkez: “Stranka demokratske akcije je pod snažnim pritiskom međunarodne zajednice, poput OSCE-a i Veleposlanstva SAD-a, odustala od nove škole, tako da će se djeca upisati u postojeće. Naravno, vršen je snažan pritisak međunarodne zajednice na cjelokupnu vlast SBŽ-a, prije svega na premijera, jer su svakodnevno propitivali da se na dnevnom redu sjednice Vlade ne bi slučajno našla neka točka dnevnog reda u vezi sa formiranjem nove škole.”

one roof across the Federation (Sito-Sucic, 20 June 2017; Spaic, 20 June 2017; Naša Škola Facebook, 21 June 2017). The protest was attended from students across the country (ibid.).

4 Research Methods

4A) Research design

The central epistemic goal is to deepen understanding of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a context for contentious action. Framed in dynamic social movement terms, the project investigates “the complex interactions between agency and structure” (Bosi and de Fazio 2017, p. 16) in BiH by using the 2016 Jajce mobilisation as a lens. The analysis focuses on how actors understood their room for manoeuvre, which opportunities and constraints they perceived, and how they selected strategies that produced concrete policy effects.

A growing body of recent literature has applied social movement theory to BiH, especially the 2013 “citizens’ identity number” protests and the 2014 “social uprising” (Armakolas and Maksimović, 2013; Bieber, 2013; Arsenijević, 2015; Jansen, 2018, pp. 225–232; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Štiks, 2015; Milan, 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Mujkić, 2016; Eminagić, 2017; Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017; Brentin and Bieber, 2018; Kurtović, 2018; Wimmen, 2018; Lai, 2020; Mujanović, 2020; Repovac Nikšić et al., 2022). Work on Jajce itself (Stipić, 2019; Piersma, 2019; Nansen Dialogue Centre, 2019) highlights prefigurative meanings, media framings, and local specificities, but leaves room for an analysis that directly mobilises social movement concepts to link actors’ perceptions of opportunity structures to strategic choice and impact. This study contributes by situating Jajce within those debates and drawing implications for the national context.

A single illustrative case study design was chosen to allow depth within practical constraints. Jajce is distinctive because the movement achieved a concrete policy outcome (the shelving of the plan to segregate secondary schools) articulated in explicitly anti-segregationist terms. The case is therefore well suited to probing claims that BiH is a highly unfavourable context for mobilisation “beyond ethnicity” (Milan, 2020, p. 5) given entrenched ethnicised institutions (see Hromadžić, 2015, p. 185; Wimmen, 2018, p. 22; Piacentini, 2018, pp. 139–141, 262). It also speaks to debates on youth “passivity”, showing how and when young people act despite personal risks (see Milan, 2020, p. 147; Musić, 2011; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015, p. 15; Garić-Humphrey et al., 2021). Third, the case offers leverage on claims about the limits of mobilisation in post-Dayton BiH. Although the immediate proposal was shelved, longer-term

demands such as unified curricula did not advance, primary schools in the municipality remained segregated, and the system of two schools under one roof continues in the rest of the canton. The campaign reversed a local decision yet ran into limits when demands widened, which helps probe how authorities contain change and preserve the status quo. The case therefore enables assessment of both movement efficacy and structural constraint within the same episode.

4B) Deriving the thematic framework

The interview and analysis framework was distilled from the research question and the social movement literature already used to interpret BiH protest waves. The aim was to cover the main conceptual pillars while keeping the guide usable in interviews. Seven themes were set: motivations; aids; barriers; methods, tactics and approach; framing; counter-framing; and impact and legacy. Each theme maps to a core area of theory and to the BiH context.

Attending to aids and barriers was designed to capture the political opportunity structure (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, pp. 59–60), including pre-existing networks that formed the movement’s social movement base (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, pp. 11, 147–149) and the skills, resources and influence available to actors and allied organisations. Focusing on methods, tactics and approach traced practices of contention and public performances of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment (Tilly, 2004, p. 54; Della Porta and Diani, 2015, p. 2; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 11), and how choices were shaped by perceived opportunities, including the use of solidarities to “network for resources” and to scale up (Milan, 2020, pp. 29–20; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, pp. 125–126).

Framing and counter-framing addressed meaning-making within the discursive opportunity structure: how participants made sense of and communicated claims to elicit sympathy and articulate a broader normative vision (Touquet, 2015, p. 392; Tarrow, 2011, p. 153; Della Porta, 2015, p. 14), and how targets justified proposals and opposed the movement to mobilise public backing (Benford, 1987, p. 75; Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 626).

Impact and legacy captured effects of contention in Jajce and, more cautiously, at wider scales: political, legal, societal and prefigurative shifts (Baća, 2023; Milan, 2020a; Harrison, 2014); the post-campaign trajectory of collective actors, including links to later mobilisations (Kriesi et al., 1995; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 163); and consequences for participants (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 161). Together, the themes formed the bridge from structure to agency and from immediate outcomes to longer-term effects, and they structured both the interview guide and the subsequent analysis.

4C) Choice of methods

i. Methods of data collection

To access how actors themselves understood opportunities, constraints, risks, and tactics, the study relies primarily on semi-structured interviews with movement participants. Interviews are suited to eliciting retrospective sense-making, strategic rationales, and perceptions of constraint that are not fully visible in public statements. The analysis of interviews is supplemented through an analysis of movement materials and contemporaneous media coverage. This allows for both a triangulation of information received in interviews, and allows for greater depth especially in relation to the movement's public framing.

ii. Participant selection

A working definition of "participant" was required to capture the movement's multiple strands. The protests began with a small group of students from Jajce's two secondary schools who organised initial actions, became the public face of the campaign, and remained involved throughout. They are treated as the movement's core. Additional strands include former students from Jajce; HVSJ teachers and one social work professional who organised as Bolja Škola; and pupils from other municipalities connected through national associations and NGOs such as ASuBiH, SHL, NDC Sarajevo, and COD Jajce. Staff from these organisations who supported planning, logistics, and media outreach are also considered participants. The sampling strategy was purposive, aiming to interview at least one actor from each strand in order to reflect the movement's internal diversity and overlapping roles.

iii. Participant recruitment

Recruitment began with contacts in organisations active around Jajce in 2016–17 and proceeded through snowball sampling and direct outreach via social media. Several participants fit more than one strand. Seven interviews were conducted and pseudonymised; a summary appears at the start of the analysis chapter.

4D) Source selection

Interviews were supplemented with publicly available primary sources produced by or about the movement. These included students' and teachers' statements from Naša Škola and Bolja Škola pages and portals that carried their materials, and local-language and international media coverage with extensive interviews. A targeted search identified platforms that covered the movement most consistently; all relevant articles on those platforms were collected.

4E) Methods of data analysis

Analysis followed the thematic framework set out above. Interviews and documents were coded in NVivo using the seven themes as parent nodes. Within each, inductive child codes were created to reflect recurrent ideas and contextual specifics. Sources were grouped as interviews, movement materials, and media coverage. This allowed comparison across strands and triangulation of claims. The analysis then traced how participants described opportunities and constraints, how they framed and pursued strategies, and how they understood outcomes and legacies, keeping links back to the literature that informed the framework.

4F) Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Glasgow College of Social Science Ethics Committee. The primary risk was identification. All participants were pseudonymised, though complete anonymity could not be guaranteed given the small pool; this limitation was explained in advance and some individuals declined on that basis. Potential emotional harm was mitigated by signposting support services, encouraging participants to pause or stop interviews, and inviting correction where a question reflected misunderstanding. Several months of contextual research, including two visits to Jajce, helped reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

4G) Research Strengths and Limitations

Positionality matters. As an outsider, there is always a risk of misunderstanding. A year living in BiH, time spent in Jajce, and sustained discussion with Bosnian friends and mentors improved contextual understanding. Outsider status also brought a degree of analytical distance, while never implying objectivity can be fully attained.

There was a risk of confirmation bias given the researcher's support for anti-segregation goals. Participants might tell the researcher what they think he wishes to hear; the researcher might over-credit optimistic trajectories. This was addressed by making positionality explicit, by asking questions that invited disagreement, and by evaluating claims on their merits with reference to multiple sources. Where possible, materials were triangulated and set alongside existing scholarship.

A further limitation concerns the absence of interviews with former teachers involved in the Jajce mobilisation. Despite repeated attempts, I was not able to speak with any of the teachers who were central to events at HVSJ and within the Bolja Škola group. As a result, the analysis does not include teachers' own accounts of their motivations, constraints, or assessments of risk, and relies instead on the perspectives of other participants. This gap is partly mitigated by detailed testimonies from students who were taught by these teachers, alongside NGO actors who worked closely with them, which together offered rich evidence about how and why teachers' support mattered and how it shaped strategy and outcomes. While this triangulation helps to reconstruct the teacher role, it cannot substitute for direct teacher testimony, and may tilt the account toward student interpretations of staff actions. Future work should prioritise interviews with former teachers to round out this dimension.

A final potential limitation which became apparent during the course of the research stems from the highly fragmented political structure of BiH, which complicates efforts to generalise findings from the local context (Jajce/Central Bosnia Canton) to the entity or state level. As such, this thesis is careful not to draw broad conclusions about national political dynamics based solely on local-level observations. Instead, it explicitly reflects on the fragmented

institutional context as a constraint that shapes the political opportunity structure within which social actors operate. Recognising this fragmentation not only limits the scope of generalisability but also highlights the complex strategic environment that social movements in BiH must navigate—one that my analysis identifies as among the most significant structural challenges they face.

5 Findings & Analysis

This chapter examines how a youth-led coalition in Jajce mobilised against a proposal to segregate secondary schools within a post-war political order that normalises separation. Using political opportunity structure theory, the analysis traces how mobilisation emerged despite national-level closure, where party control over education, linguistic purism, and the TSUOR system constrain action, while local conditions in Jajce supplied openings rooted in everyday coexistence and trusted teacher–student ties. Drawing on interviews with students, teachers, NGO practitioners and local officials, the chapter moves from national barriers to local constraints, then to the motivations of participants, the networks and tactics they assembled, and the frames they used to keep the story public and raise political costs. It concludes by assessing what changed, what did not, and what these dynamics reveal about the prospects for integrated education beyond Jajce.

Interviewees

The interview sample comprised seven participants with direct experience of the Jajce case and education reform in BiH. Three interviewees were students connected to the mobilisation: Kerim, a former student of Nikola Šop Gymnasium (NŠG) at the time of the protests; Luka, a pupil at the High Vocational School Jajce (HVSJ); and Mihael, also an HVSJ student. Damir is an NGO worker from BiH employed by a Sarajevo-based organisation. Emir is an NGO worker from Jajce who works for a local NGO focused on peace dialogue. Hana, from Sarajevo, was involved in a voluntary national association of high school students during the protests and now works for a Sarajevo-based NGO focused on educational reform. Selma is an NGO worker from BiH employed by a Sarajevo-based organisation focused on educational reform.

This subsection examines why students and teachers in Jajce mobilised against the proposed segregation of secondary schools despite the barriers to mobilisation within Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war order, in which ethnic separation is codified and entrenched. Segregation is embedded in institutions and everyday life, and widely socially normalised. These national dynamics also shaped events in Jajce, where they worked against specific openings for resistance at the local level.

Using political opportunity structure theory, I show how mobilisation emerged within a national context of structural closure: nationalist control over education, teacher precarity, and the social normalisation of segregation. At the local level, Jajce's relatively integrated social fabric conflicted with these structures, creating openings for action. For students, segregation appeared unnecessary and unjust. For teachers, there were narrow but consequential opportunities for dissent.

A) Motivations of movement participants for forming/joining movement

This subsection examines why students and teachers in Jajce mobilised against the proposed segregation of secondary schools despite the barriers to mobilisation within Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war order, in which ethnic separation is codified and entrenched. Segregation is embedded in institutions and everyday life, and widely socially normalised. These national dynamics also shaped events in Jajce, where they worked against specific openings for resistance at the local level.

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National-level barriers to mobilisation

This section contextualises the national barriers that participants saw as decisive in suppressing resistance to educational segregation. They pointed to the constitutional design that privileges ethnonational identity, the reproduction of division in "divided towns," the Two Schools Under One Roof (TSUOR) system, and the ideology of linguistic separation. Together these features normalise segregation, concentrate control in party hands, and narrow the space for mobilisation at the state level.

National-level entrenchment of segregation

Participants from NGOs and youth associations stressed that segregation is rooted in Bosnia's political architecture. Damir, drawing on his organisation's work nationwide, argued:

We have learnt from our work that the divisions are so high in political structures that usually you can't do anything to change them. The political system is genuinely constructed so that you are unable to do anything. Anything you do is interpreted by the other two sides as against them.

Hana, a student leader in 2016–17 now working in educational reform, linked this to Dayton, which she sees as elevating ethnonational over civic identity:

We ended up with the idea that these three 'nationalities' [Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats] are stronger in legal form than the identity of citizens... Every institution has to have quotas...so you have people saying that they are Serbs, Bosniaks or Croats [rather than Bosnians].

For Emir, institutional design both reflects and reproduces a narrative that equates territory with ethnic ownership: "this part belongs to me; if you don't like this, go into your corner of the country."

The wartime logic of ethnic territorial ownership has become codified in post-war institutions. Dayton's consociational framework, which combines entity division, ethnic power-sharing with vetoes, and further decentralisation within the Federation, aligns political control with local majorities. In mixed municipalities, parallel governance and services persist, producing "divided towns" where education, healthcare, policing, and public space are separated along ethnic lines.

Divided Towns: everyday ethnic boundarying

In these ‘divided towns’, political divisions are reproduced in everyday space and routine, normalising separation across services and social life. Hana recalled first arriving in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, a ‘divided town’ in Central Bosnia Canton:

The whole community is really separated. On one side of the street are the coffee shops where the Croats go, and then on the other are the coffee shops where the Bosniaks go. And when we would go to visit our local teams there, the students who are part of the team would say: ‘we can’t really go to the other side.’ And then you have two healthcare providers, two police forces, two firefighters. It’s just that everything is divided.

A 2018 testimony from a school pupil from the same town added:

At school they are one floor and we are on another, outside school they have their own cafes, we have ours, they have their own side of the street and we have ours. In the last few years I really haven’t seen two or three people of Croatian nationality. Even when we want to make contact, there is some fear in us, so a lot of people still live in a war-like environment.⁷ (Sadiković, 2018, para 3)

These testimonies show more than duplicated services or separate social spaces: they reveal the internalisation of ethnic boundaries among young people. Physical separation is reinforced by a shared sense of where one “belongs” and where one does not. Over time, tacit rules of movement and association become a mental map that maintains boundaries even without overt conflict.

In this way, the geographies of divided towns reproduce the logic of Bosnia’s political and educational systems. Lines are not only institutional; they are etched into everyday consciousness, shaping what coexistence seems possible. Within such contexts, integrated spaces, and the cross-ethnic relationships they might foster, are not only rare but often perceived as abnormal, risky, and undesirable.

⁷ Original quote: "U školi oni su na jednom spratu mi na drugom, van škole imaju svoje kafiće, mi svoje, oni imaju svoju stranu ulice mi svoju. U posljednjih par godina stvarno nisam vidio dvoje ili troje ljudi hrvatske nacionalnosti. Kad i želimo stupiti u kontakt ima neki strah u nama, tako da dosta ljudi još živi u ratnom okviru."

Two Schools Under One Roof: political keystone and party asset

Everyday boundarying is institutionally reinforced. Nowhere is this clearer than in the system of Two Schools Under One Roof (TSUOR), which participants described as both a consequence and a reproduction of the Dayton settlement. Selma, reflecting on years of education reform work, called the segregated system “a great mirror of this society”:

Nobody wants to touch it deeper because it [would make] everything questionable – all the other issues of the society – because the education system is based on ethnic lines and not based on education quality. If you touch that you touch the entire structure of nationalists within this country... All three ethnicities took some part for themselves and they don't want to give up. If they give it up it means the entire ideology they are based on is diminished.

In this reading, education functions as a keystone of ethnonational politics; integration would expose the redundancy of parallel institutions and weaken the ideological basis of party rule.

Kerim extended this argument, framing schools as machinery for reproducing nationalist constituencies to argue that desegregating schools works against nationalist politicians' interests:

The whole thing about desegregation and abolishing two schools under one roof [is] not a question of implementation. It's a question of political will... These schools are the training grounds for future nationalistic voters.

Linguistic separation as an ideological barrier

Another logic sustaining segregated education is the claim that Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian are separate languages. In interviews (Selma, Kerim, Mihael), participants described this as an ideological tool that legitimises ethnic division.

Selma, reflecting on years of reform work, tied its endurance to the constitutional order:

By the nationalists it's claimed the languages are completely different from each other... It's proven that it is one language with different dialects. But in our constitution it says that we have three languages..., and that's where the misuse of those articles is happening in reality.

Her observation echoes Croatian linguist Snježana Kordić (2010), who challenges nationalist claims of distinct languages and labels them “linguistic purism.” Kordić, a co-initiator of the 2017 *Declaration on the Common Language*, argues Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian are standard variants of a single polycentric language, evidenced by mutual intelligibility.

Hromadžić's (2015, pp. 34–35) ethnography of Mostar Gymnasium documents how this claim is mobilised. Local Croat political actors justified separate curricula as necessary to preserve Croatian, while mixing was framed as a threat to identity and as practically harmful because supposed “linguistic contamination” might hinder access to Croatian universities. This latter concern was also expressed by NŠG principal Hrvoje Jurina in June 2017 (Pavelić, 16 June 2017).⁸ The appeal to linguistic purity has proven politically potent, recasting segregation as minority rights protection rather than discrimination.

Local-level barriers to mobilisation

Here I turn to the local constraints that, in participants' view, worked against the emergence of resistance in Jajce. These included HDZ dominance in municipal governance, segregated primary schools, a secondary system anchored in the Croat curriculum, party control over

⁸ Quote: “Be careful: children with a diploma from my school now take the state matura exam in Croatia without any problems, and study there. And I won't hide it - I will always defend the right of Croats to have that opportunity. If I was able to go from Jajce to Zagreb in 1978 and study without any problems, I don't see why today's children can't do the same.” / Original quote: “Pazite: djeca s diplomom moje škole sada bez problema polažu državnu maturu u Hrvatskoj, i ondje studiraju. I ne krijem – uvijek ću braniti pravo Hrvata da imaju tu mogućnost. Ako sam ja 1978. mogao iz Jajca otići u Zagreb i bez problema studirati, ne vidim zašto to današnja djeca ne bi mogla.”

principals and hiring, and the risk of sanctions for dissent. Everyday social pressure in a small community further discouraged open challenge.

Jajce: local history, divided primary schools, and Croat curriculum

Although participants described Jajce as less socially divided today than many mixed towns, they illustrated that Jajce is by no means insulated from post-war dynamics. At the level of education, the best evidence for this is the fact that Jajce's primary schools are ethnically segregated (into two separate Bosniak and Croat primary schools). Emir traced the town's divided primary schooling to the return process after Croat forces retook the municipality in 1995. He recalled "the radical Herzegovinian HDZ war-leading politicians tried to obstruct the returnee process... to convince people of the other ethnic groups to whom belongs this town." Croat return was encouraged, while Bosniak returnees faced "a lot of really criminal deeds." Local Croats who were "open and... friendly to their neighbours from other ethnic groups" were also pressured to align with party strategy. Emir linked this to "this concept that Bosnia and Herzegovina should be a confederal state among three small ethnic states." By obstructing Bosniak return, HDZ leaders could later claim Jajce for Croat-controlled territory. As the Federation consolidated after 1998, the confederation idea "dispersed," beginning "a more relaxing life for all of us here."

Although Bosniak return accelerated after 2000, HDZ retained municipal control and kept discriminatory structures, especially in education. Emir recalled that schools were administered by HDZ appointees, staffed largely by Croats, and followed the Croatian curriculum. Children were "learning more about Zagreb and Croatian hills and the Adriatic coast and the 'home country' (Croatia)" than about BiH. The 2002 *Interim Agreement on the Rights and Needs of Returnee Children* created a Bosniak primary school in Jajce as a temporary measure so Bosniak pupils could learn BiH history and geography in the same buildings as Croat peers until reintegration could be negotiated.

In practice, Emir stressed, "Bosniaks and Croats, represented unfortunately by HDZ and SDA... had to agree about integration of the school, which never happened." The two schools under one roof arrangement took hold in primary education and has persisted for more than

two decades. At cantonal level, Emir described an informal SDA–HDZ deal: HDZ held the Central Bosnia Canton Ministry of Education to protect Croat “vital national interests,” while SDA accepted this to maintain control over their schools elsewhere. The result was a locked-in segregated primary system, while secondary education, though formally unified, remained anchored in the Croat curriculum.

2016 proposal to segregate Jajce’s secondary schools

The wider political narratives used to justify segregated education in the Federation were apparent in Jajce in the 2016 plan to create a separate “Bosniak” secondary school. This was presented as a remedy for discrimination against Bosniak students, currently educated under the Croat curriculum. The HDZ cantonal education minister, Katica Čerkez, cited a petition by Bosniak parents (which was never made public) to emphasise that the proposal had support from a portion of the town’s Bosniak population (Arnautović, 20 July 2016; Tikveša, 22 July 2016).

Čerkez also justified the proposal by reference to the constitutional order, minority-rights, and linguistic arguments:

When the Austro-Hungarians came to Bosnia, they established the Bosnian language so that they could more easily rule these people. Yugoslavia did the same; introduced the Serbo-Croatian language in order to create and rule society. Now, since 1995, we have Dayton, which affirms the idea of three different peoples and three different languages... So, politics sets a model of society and creates a system to govern it. The school is there to educate citizens according to the measure of that system; at this moment divided into three national groups. (Ruiz, 12 August 2025)

This recast curricular separation, and by extension physical segregation, as compliance with constitutional rights rather than as a divisive policy, aligning with a wider nationalist narrative that presents integrated schooling as an infringement on minority protections (see Hromadžić, 2015, pp. 34–5).

Participants emphasised that the proposal also served party interests by consolidating control over leadership and hiring, mirroring primary education. Emir explained:

[In Jajce's primary schools], the principals are directly elected by the political parties. The Bosniak principal is directly elected from the SDA. And the HDZ elects the principal of the Croatian school...they are really active political members of the HDZ and SDA...And of course for those political parties this is very important. Because if you want a job, you have to be a member of my party...And then you have to do what I invite you to do.

Kerim highlighted the patronage incentives created by duplication:

Every school, every school building has two principals, double set of cleaning staff, double set of teachers, double set of administration, and they don't need it.

He also underscored the ideological payoff. Segregated schools are “the training grounds for future nationalistic voters,” where, after eight or twelve years of education steeped in ethnonational narratives, “these [students] are already ready to vote for nationalistic parties.” Looking from the perspective of a representative of one of the two dominant nationalist parties, he argued, “of course I would not want to desegregate the schools because this would not be in my interest.”

Participants pointed to material signals that the proposed “SDA school” (Emir, interview) was treated as an institutional prize. By the time the plan was announced (and as yet unpassed), a director and several staff had already been appointed, and 1 million marks allocated from the cantonal budget, after COD Jajce struggled to advocate for modest funds for equipment and practical teaching at HVSJ for a decade. For participants, the contrast underscored the political priorities behind the proposal (Emir, interview; Kerim, interview).

Motivations of Jajce's students and teachers for resisting the proposal

This section explains why students, and some teachers, mobilised despite those barriers. Participants highlighted Jajce's relatively integrated everyday life, the lived experience of

studying together at secondary level, supportive and trusted teachers, and recent protest know-how. The proposal threatened an existing practice of coexistence, which students perceived as both unnecessary to change and unjust to accept.

Jajce as less divided context

Participants agreed that Jajce's status as a less divided context than other 'mixed' towns is key for understanding the resistance of its students to the 2016 proposal. They repeatedly contrasted Jajce's social environment with that of other towns in the Federation where ethnic separation has been consolidated since the war. Hana, originally from Sarajevo but familiar with many such communities through her work with a national high school students' association, recalled her first impressions of Jajce:

When you come to Jajce, you don't really feel like you're on the wrong side or the right side depending on your nationality, or that there is a place that you are not permitted to go. It's much more intercultural rather than multicultural... Like it's not really two communities living by each other, but more of sharing and at least being in interaction with each other, which is not really the case in some other communities.

These impressions of Jajce contrasted with her earlier recollections of the time she spent in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, where students described lingering physical and social boundaries. Ethnographic work by Larisa Kurtović indicates that by the mid-2000s most cafés and small businesses in Jajce were already integrated (Kurtović, 2015, p. 5), which has remained the norm.

Participants consistently argued that segregation is less normalised in Jajce than in other mixed contexts, which they saw as crucial to the decision to protest. As Hana put it, the absence of physical division mattered because students already socialised together:

As long as the students meet and talk outside of the school, then they would ask the question: 'why wouldn't we do the same in school?'

Emir linked this relative integration to wartime dynamics. Unlike Mostar or Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, Jajce did not witness direct Bosniak–Croat fighting. Instead, the town changed hands repeatedly from 1992 to 1995, which displaced almost the entire population:

Jajce was possessed or repossessed by several armies from 1992 to 1995. So actually 98% of all the population had to migrate. Every ethnic group. So there was, especially between the Bosniaks and the Croats, no direct fighting, which helped a good returnee process after the war compared to other parts of the Federation, like in Mostar or Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, where there was even direct fighting between the different groups... Then after the war those people actually lived in an open society. There was a big will and wish to still continue living together in those circumstances they lived before April 1992.

In Emir's view, post-war political pressure persisted, including attempts by hardline Herzegovinian HDZ figures to obstruct return. Yet the absence of local interethnic warfare fostered a stronger public will to restore coexistence. Croats who were "open and friendly to their neighbours from other ethnic groups" also faced pressure, suggesting this will existed across lines. Compared with towns scarred by direct conflict, Jajce saw quicker reintegration. Emir described a "spontaneous will" that "overwhelmed this small percentage of people who wanted to keep an 'ethnically clean' Jajce," supporting a more successful return and preserving integrated everyday spaces.

Students' lived experience of integrated schooling

What most distinguishes Jajce from other "mixed" municipalities is that secondary education has remained integrated. Children attend segregated primary schools, then come together at secondary level. Most teenagers therefore experience both systems, which participants viewed as crucial to their rejection of the 2016 proposal.

Hana, who worked closely with the students, recalled the immediate reaction:

They finally met and now someone wanted to split them again. So they were like, 'no, we don't want that. We finally found each other now. You were not giving us a chance [to] before. So why would we let that happen again?'

Both Luka and Mihael recalled the experience of being separated during primary school as a traumatic one, which negatively affected the attitudes and perceptions of their young peers. Mihael explained the effect that this experience had on young people in the town, with most of the inter-ethnic fighting in the town taking place between primary school students:

Blood shedding in a nationalistic way happened only ever between little kids in a school which actually has a sort of apathy going on. Never during a time when they're mixed up.

Speaking with the media in July 2016, HVSJ student Ivica Jukanović warned of the long-term consequences, recalling his own experiences of divided primary education:

Our problem is that after 20 years they divide us, because while primary school separates us, secondary school brings us together again. There is such a rise in nationalism in primary school, and if that were to transfer to secondary school, I don't know what would happen in Jajce. It would break out into a war between Croats and Bosniaks.⁹ (Augustinović, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 12 July 2016)

These accounts show how lived experience undercut the claim that segregation would correct discrimination. Having known both systems, students saw the proposal as reintroducing a problem they had already overcome. Many framed resistance as protection of future generations, including younger siblings.

Kerim emphasised how these lived experiences strengthened the determination of the movement's core members, adding a personal dimension which bolstered their opposition to the proposal which was also informed by their awareness of the broader political situation in the country:

⁹ Original quote: "Nama je problem što nas nakon 20 godina dijele, jer na s osnovna škola nas razdvoji, srednja ponovo spaja. U osnovnoj školi je toliko porast nacionalizma i kad bi se to prenijelo u srednju školu, ja ne znam šta bi se dogodilo u Jajcu. To bi izbio neki rat između Hrvata i Bošnjaka." (Para 7)

Some of [the students] were very much even back then politically aware...they were aware of the deeper repercussions of such a decision, not only for them, but also for the generations to come. This is why they were so persistent and so pushy throughout these two years.

The fact that Jajce's secondary schools were already integrated also broadened the base of local opposition, since it removed the need to be aware of the wider political situation in the country in order to resist the proposal:

What we did in Jajce is not that we managed to desegregate an already segregated school. What we did was the prevention of the segregation of a school which was not segregated...desegregating an already segregated school is much harder...Here, this was not normalised because *we had a critical mass of students who simply didn't want to get separated from their best friends who were from different ethnic groups.*¹⁰

Thus, for all of Jajce's students who resisted the proposal, regardless of their level of political awareness, their motivation was deeply personal: staying with friends or partners, or ensuring siblings could enjoy the same integrated education they had. Thus, adopting the language of Tilly's (2004) WUNC, the integrated setting of Jajce's secondary schools fostered both the worthiness of the cause (protecting something valued), the unity of a large student body (who wanted to stay together), the numbers to sustain protests (broadening the possible motives for resisting), and the commitment to persist (since their opposition was deeply personal).

Teacher influence and support

Participants repeatedly highlighted the role of specific HVSJ teachers in shaping both the willingness and the capacity of students to resist the proposal. Their influence worked at several levels: classroom practices that encouraged openness and critical thinking, direct mentoring, and a permissive school climate that enabled mobilisation.

¹⁰ Emphasis added.

Mihael described politics teacher Zoran Ljubičić as a mentor who insisted students be well-informed about local, national, and regional politics:

Our [politics] teacher... even though he was actually paid and ordered to teach every student despite their nation or wishes about Croatia, he actually decided, 'If I'm going to teach about the Balkan states, I'm going to do it wholly...' He thought that everybody needs to be informed about their local community... he had this habit of, five minutes before the class starts, he's going to read the news, just like old preachers did when people couldn't read.

Mihael and Luka also credited Croatian Language and Literature teacher Josipa Bogić and Bosnian Language and Literature teacher Amela Kavazbašić for a flexible, integrative approach to teaching. Mihael recalled his Croatian language and literature classes with Josipa Bogić:

Of course we mentioned Croatian literature. But of course we [also] mentioned Bosnian writers, and of course Serbian ones. Because she had this approach where she knew that our writers were inspired by each other... they wrote for everybody.

This integrative approach to language and literature further undercut the rhetorical justification for linguistic separation that is often used to defend segregated schooling in BiH. In Jajce, the daily reality was that students from different ethnic backgrounds communicated effortlessly with each other in and out of school, rendering claims of mutual incomprehensibility implausible. By regularly engaging with writers and literary traditions from across the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian variants, Josipa and Amela's classes made visible the shared linguistic space the students already inhabited, and its historical continuity, reinforcing the perception that separate curricula were unnecessary and ideologically driven rather than practically required.

According to Luka, these teachers were not only intellectually open but also practically supportive once the protests began, helping to draft public statements and advising on strategy.

Selma recalled that “teachers from that school have been really great teachers” who told students “it would be a really bad idea if the school gets separated, because they didn’t have any problems with each other.”

Crucially, students also found tacit institutional backing from the school principal. Selma recalled that when students approached him about the proposal, “he was really, really shocked” and “on the side of the students, of parents and teachers,” even while facing “huge pressure from the ministry to go with those directions separating the school.” Mihael similarly remembered the headteacher as “always cooperative: ‘You kids can do whatever, I’m not gonna interrupt’... He also believed in this idea, but of course he didn’t want to get involved in it because he had a school to look after.” This bureaucratic tolerance was an important signal to the movement that they had important allies at the local level, which likely played a significant role in emboldening the HVSJ teachers who went on to publicly support the students through forming the Bolja Škola initiative.

The supportive climate at HVSJ did not emerge overnight. Selma traced it to the long-term work of Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo (NDC Sarajevo) and Centar za Obrazovanje i Druženje Jajce (COD Jajce). When NDC first began working in the school in 2009, Bosniak and Croat teachers still used separate staff rooms and students informally segregated themselves in classrooms (MacDowell, *The Guardian*, 24 December 2018). Mediation, joint projects, and teacher training helped dismantle these practices, while COD Jajce’s trips and “peace camps” connected children across schools and across the entity line. As Selma put it, NDC “empowered those teachers to speak up openly and provided them also support... and that’s I think the crucial point.”

By 2016, HVSJ had a cohort of teachers who modelled integration, offered guidance, and had the confidence and networks to back their students. For students, this meant their protest was not an isolated act but supported by trusted adult allies inside the school.

5B) Movement Strategies, Framing, and Interaction with the Opportunity Structure

Once the decision to resist was made, students, supportive teachers, and their allies had to make that resistance count within a system that typically shuts it down. This chapter examines how their strategic choices interacted with a largely closed opportunity structure, and how those choices shifted risks, resources, and incentives over time.

The analysis follows three strands. First, it traces how existing ties were mobilised and extended to support action. Second, it examines how the movement framed its claims in public and how officials responded. Third, it considers when and why external actors mattered, and what their involvement changed. Rather than cataloguing events, the chapter focuses on mechanisms: how choices about allies, messages, and venues opened space for action, and how authorities sought to close it.

i. Strengthening Local Network and Allies

This subsection shows how local ties inside Jajce supplied the first resources for action. Students drew on trusted teachers, NGOs, and media platforms to turn intent into organisation, guidance, and visibility. These relationships helped overcome inexperience, limited access to decision-makers, and the risk of being dismissed.

From the outset, the students were not acting alone. The movement grew out of interpersonal networks already in place in Jajce: a small group of students and former students from Jajce with campaigning and media experience; trusted teachers who offered crucial support behind the scenes before stepping forward publicly; local organisations that strengthened the link between Jajce's students, connected them to a wider, country-wide network, and opened channels to international actors; and sympathetic local media able to keep the story live. This ecosystem addressed three stubborn obstacles for a youth-led movement: inexperience, limited access to decision-makers, and anticipated dismissal by officials. With this network, the students could move quickly, speak clearly, and be heard.

Much of the groundwork pre-dated 2016. Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo had been working at HVSJ since 2009, mediating among staff and unwinding informal practices of separation. COD Jajce connected pupils across school lines through trips and peace camps. Former students described these programmes as formative.

Inside HVSJ, sympathetic teachers were already modelling a more open school culture in their classrooms (see previous section). The same teachers then offered quiet practical help once the protests began: drafting texts, and familiarising students with how the cantonal political system works. Students repeatedly named three figures: the politics teacher, Zoran Ljubičić, who “kept [us] informed” about institutions and tactics (Mihael, interview); and the language and literature teachers, Josipa Bogić and Amela Kavazbašić, who helped shape messages and public letters. The principal, Zdenko Ištvančić, also mattered. Although under heavy pressure from the ministry (Selma, interview), he “fought for us in a kind of bureaucratic way” (Mihael, interview), signalling space for student activity on school grounds without repercussions.

The network also included a crucial bridge between the local initiative and national visibility: former student and activist Kerim. Drawing on the connections and experience he had gained whilst working for COD Jajce and through his involvement in earlier campaigns (including local environmental mobilisations against small hydropower plants), he argued for a strategy that would conserve limited student energy for the on-the-ground organising while amplifying their reach through media and external allies. Reflecting on this strategy, his reasoning was shaped by what school-age organisers could and could not do: they did not yet have “media contacts, diplomatic contacts, [or] international organisation contacts,” so others in the network did that work in the background while students stayed front and centre. As he put it, the team leaned hard into narrative and press strategy because those were the levers most available to them:

Out of this 100% of strength that people perceive came directly from the students, I would say 70% of that was media pressure that we generated, and we generated on purpose. We knew whom to tackle, where to tackle, how to contact media, how to be present in the early morning TV shows, late night TV shows, debating the mayor, debating politicians in prime time, [and] involving the international community to support us publicly as well.

Reflecting on the role played by Kerim, Luka emphasised his bridging role in opening channels to local authorities, NGOs, and international actors. “He is a man who knows everything, knows everyone, and was the greatest help to Jajce,” Luka said, noting that Kerim used his high level of influence and connections to contact powerful allies and “get them involved.”

Local media provided continuity, helping to keep the story alive, sustaining local and external interest in the story and thereby maintaining consistent pressure on the cantonal authorities. Luka stressed its importance of this platform:

From the media, the one that helped the most was Jajce Online. The person who actually runs Jajce Online, Edo, he worked day and night for us...He was publishing something about us on the Jajce Online portal every single day — just so people wouldn’t forget, so the passion wouldn’t fade, so people wouldn’t lose interest.

Taken together, these local relationships lowered personal risks for pupils, filled experience and access gaps typical of youth-led initiatives, and gave the campaign continuity between set-piece moments. Teacher backing and the principal’s permissions reduced participation costs for HVSJ students; local NGOs translated intent into reach and practical support; former students handled the media and diplomatic work that current pupils could not; and Jajce Online sustained attention. This local network formed the base on which the movement could build its network and reach beyond Jajce.

ii. Scaling up: expanding the network of solidarity beyond Jajce

Movements grow in power when their network and reach grow beyond their immediate base. Scaling up widens audiences, raises costs for opponents, and builds resilience when local pressure alone is not enough. This subsection shows how the Jajce students expanded support across municipalities and why that mattered.

A major structural barrier that limits the potential of movements to scale up beyond the local context in BiH is the fragmentation of institutional responsibility within a highly decentralised political system (Mujkić, 2016). This question is particularly acute in education, where responsibility is decentralised not only to the entity level, but further to the cantons in the Federation. For any protest movement seeking to address an education policy decision, this creates an immediate legitimacy hurdle: why should someone from one canton protest about the policies of another? Hana explained how this dynamic works to provide an opportunity for elites to delegitimise cross-cantonal movements:

If I from Sarajevo come to Travnik and come to their Ministry of Education as a school student [in Sarajevo], the first thing the minister would say is: ‘Why did you come to me? You shouldn’t come to me. You’re from Sarajevo. You have your own minister. Go to them. Why are you coming to my place to tell me what should be changing in my own canton? That should be done by students from that canton.’

This logic contains protest inside administrative borders and encourages parallel, smaller struggles rather than a visible, linked campaign. The problem is compounded by the country’s transport infrastructure, especially across the entity line, which imposes a practical ceiling on solidarity visits. Selma put it plainly:

The mobility between the cities is very, very bad...For someone from Republika Srpska to come to the Federation — it’s really difficult [by public transport].

The movement overcame these constraints by activating personal and organisational ties that pre-dated 2016. Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo, Schüler Helfen Leben (SHL), and the Association of Secondary School Students of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ASuBiH) had connected pupils through peace camps, exchanges, and trainings, creating both political awareness and friendships. Mihael recalled of NDC Sarajevo’s director:

She never slept a whole night through because she always was on her feet...trying to connect as many children as possible...She always tried to make these trips where people from Jajce are going to meet people from Sarajevo...She always tried to create this big network.

In May 2017, SHL held their annual youth conference in Jajce, which significantly strengthened the local students' ties with students from elsewhere in the country, who became actively involved in supporting Jajce's students. Selma reflected on this decision:

We decided to come with 100 other young people to Jajce and to support the students there... we made this one initiative where young people... send a letter to the ministry... And the ministry was overwhelmed by those letters from young people.

By the time of the Travnik protests in June 2017, this network had matured into a ready-made solidarity infrastructure. When the Jajce students called for support from their peers across the country, they were not appealing to strangers, but to people they were already personally connected with. This transformed the framing of participation: instead of "interfering in another canton's politics", travelling to Travnik was an act of solidarity with friends under pressure. This helped to remove any doubts on the part of those students travelling to Jajce. Meanwhile, the logistical constraints stemming from the country's poor transport infrastructure were overcome through SHL's support in arranging and funding transport (and food) for the students travelling to Jajce.

At the same time, scaling up required that Jajce students remained visible ownership of the movement by continuing to attend the protests in large numbers. Without clear ownership by those most affected, politicians could dismiss the protest as outside interference. Hana made that point directly to the Jajce students: "If the students from other communities come, they are only there to support you." Without their presence, the attendance of students from outside of Jajce "wouldn't really make any sense." Maintaining the attendance of large numbers of students was not straightforward. After the 2016 protest, students at NŠG were threatened with expulsion if they attended further protests. Students also received death threats (Mihael, interview), and parental pressure to withdraw. One student's mother, a teacher, lost her job after a her daughter briefly appeared on television. Before Travnik, some students discussed pulling out for fear of renewed reprisals.

Hana recalled persuading the Jajce students that without their presence, the solidarity of others “wouldn’t really make any sense,” because it was premised on supporting *their* struggle. This was not an easy ask, given the risks, but by early 2017 the students had another layer of protection: high-profile international allies. US ambassador Maureen Cormack and OSCE mission head Jonathan Moore had both openly supported the Jajce students for months, attending meetings with the Central Bosnia Canton education minister and speaking to the media on their behalf. Their visibility reduced the scope for local authorities to retaliate without political cost. As Emir put it, these figures were “constant and supportive of students,” and their backing “restricted the space” for punitive measures.

At HV SJ, the principal’s quiet but consistent signalling of support emboldened students to keep participating. As Mihael put it, he “fought for us in a bureaucratic way” and “was always cooperative... He also believed in this idea.” This reduced the perceived personal risk for HV SJ students, especially in contrast to their peers at Nikola Šop, where the principal’s open hostility had a chilling effect on participation.

The movement adopted a clever tactic to ensure that some NŠG students could still attend the Travnik protest without risking identification. They decided to collectively wear masks depicting the poet Nikola Šop, whose name the school bore. Mihael explained:

We needed some of the children from the Gymnasium Nikola Šop [to attend]...they can’t show their faces on camera, and there’s gonna be plenty of cameras. So...wouldn’t it be funny if we all wear a mask of Nikola Šop’s face...so we can all say ‘we are all Nikola Šop’?

This served multiple purposes: it allowed fearful students to participate anonymously, reframed the decision as a collective symbolic act rather than an individual act of fear, and created a visually striking, unity-focused image for the media. As Hana reflected:

Even those who were not afraid...decided to do it because then it’s a bigger message if the whole group was like that...It was more like the whole group

decided to go with the face of the person who their school is named after... So that's how we overcame that whole barrier.

The masks, coupled with the slogan “we are all Nikola Šop”, turned a potential weakness into a strength — a humorous yet pointed critique of the authoritarianism implicit in the threat to expel peaceful protestors. Mihael remembered it as a “moral boost...suddenly everybody wanted a mask!”

The nature of the support from the NGOs, which was student-led and behind the scenes, was also important. By allowing the students' to retain ‘ownership’ of the movement, these organisations avoided taking the limelight away from the students themselves and increasing the potential for the cantonal authorities to portray the students as manipulated and illegitimate. This approach also allowed movement actors space to consider the risks of their involvement and decide on how best they could support within their own personal constraints. Selma summarised the pragmatic approach of the organisations involved in supporting the students:

We are always asking... ‘what do you need?’... They said we want to make some kind of protest... And our advisors went always in the direction of course, speak with your teachers, speak with your parents, speak with your school principals and tell us how we can support you.

Taken together, these elements neutralised the institutional barrier of fragmented responsibility. Pre-existing interpersonal and organisational networks reframed cross-canton participation as solidarity rather than intrusion. NGO logistics removed material barriers to turnout. International backing reduced personal risk for those whose presence conferred legitimacy. Protective tactics enabled vulnerable students to participate visibly yet safely. In combination, they created a temporary opening in a political opportunity structure that is usually tightly closed to cross-canton mobilisation and allowed a local dispute to register as a wider public test of segregation policy.

iii. Media Engagement and Framing

Aware of the limits of a youth-led effort with few high-level contacts, the movement concentrated the majority of their scarce resources on media engagement. The aim was simple: keep the story alive, win public backing, and raise costs for the canton by drawing in national and international attention. This subsection examines how students and supportive teachers framed their case and why those choices worked.

Dividing friends

Students argued in immediate, everyday terms. They already learned and socialised together, and the plan would break up real relationships among classmates and close friends. Speaking in the first summer of protest, HVSJ student Tarik Šehić warned that enforced separation would “create nationalism... [and] dull [future students],” while “now we hang out normally,” and conduct between peers is “a matter of home upbringing” (Slobodna Evropa, 20 August 2016). The same message appeared on the streets in Travnik in June 2017 with chants of “To school together” and banners such as “Embargo on coexistence” and “It’s time for education” (Slobodna Evropa, 20 June 2017).

Students took this frame directly to officials. Kerim recalled a meeting where a Croat student confronted Jajce’s mayor, Edin Hozan, about being separated from his Bosniak girlfriend: “How dare you segregate me from my girlfriend?... You guys who are now trying to segregate us, you all went to school together. And now you’re trying to separate us... for what?” The point was historical as well as personal. Divided education was not the norm in Jajce, including for the politicians now advocating it.

Behind the scenes, this human-centred approach was deliberate. As Kerim put it, the team pushed stories that would travel furthest: “emphasising these kind of human-centred stories brought additional weight... we really use media leverage... on purpose.” Such stories needed no specialist knowledge of Bosnia’s politics, which made them effective for national and international media and helped draw outside support that raised pressure on cantonal actors.

Against all segregation

In a 30 May 2017 statement, students called Two Schools Under One Roof “a form of segregation,” linked it to “a political system that constantly led to further divisions,” and warned that Jajce risked becoming “the 58th” case (Naša Škola, Facebook, 30 May 2017). Their 8 June letter framed interests plainly: “What is the essential need for establishing a new school, or rather, whose interests are being represented by the competent decision-makers?” (Naša Škola, Facebook, 8 June 2017).

That harm was articulated most clearly in their concern for those who would come after them. Having lived separation in primary school, students argued that enforced division cultivates nationalist reflexes early. One former student said in 2016 that primary school separation had produced “a rise in nationalism”; if extended into high school, “I don’t know what would happen in Jajce” (Augustinović, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 12 July 2016). After hearing of local success on 17 June 2017, they linked Jajce to a wider problem: “not just a fight for high schools in Jajce, but a fight against segregation in education” (Naša Škola, Facebook, 17 June 2017).

Segregation as a ‘bad investment’

From the outset, students argued priorities as well as principles. In their 8 June 2017 letter they warned that the canton’s plan would drain scarce funds into duplicate administration while quality was already falling, and they set out a different way to spend public money:

The number of students expected to enrol in the first year of high school this year is approximately 90... The government plans to spend over one million KM on equipping the new school and funding new staff... which essentially creates an unnecessary dual administration. The core needs of high school students are to attend modern, technologically equipped schools with improved methods of delivering the curriculum. (Naša Škola, Facebook, 8 June 2017)

The same pragmatic line ran through their public messaging. In Travnik, students chanted “To school together” and carried banners such as “Segregation is a bad investment” and “It’s time for education” (Augustinović, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 20 June 2017). On the day of the rally,

one organiser criticised the minister for backing a plan that would “unnecessarily deprive a million marks” from renovating existing schools where “students only see test tubes... in textbooks” (Beharić, *Buka*, 21 June 2017). The argument was clear: if the goal is better schooling, spend on equipment and teaching, not on two principals’ offices.

Students embedded that logic in a wider critique of how education money is used. Participants had already noted that HVSJ struggled to secure modest funds for practical teaching and equipment, while one million KM could be mobilised rapidly for a school that did not yet exist. The students’ emphasis on duplication tied a moral argument to an efficiency claim that non-specialists could follow.

The frame was not only negative. Students and teachers also put forward concrete alternatives. As Selma recalled, when asked what they would do with a million KM, the students proposed investments aligned to the town’s economy and to student needs: “boost Jajce as a city of tourism... build a dorm for students from outside... It was a clear vision of the city’s future, compared to politicians’ aspirations to separate everything.” The same pragmatic language appeared in media comments. One student argued that ruling parties used “identity and language” to justify control over schools, while “the local government should create conditions for us to stay and live in this city. Many of our fellow citizens have gone to earn a living where they don’t even need this language” (*Radio Sarajevo*, 17 June 2016). In a context of depopulation and youth emigration, the fiscal case became a demographic one: pouring money into a new segregated school diverted resources from the things that might actually keep young people in Jajce.

Teachers in the Bolja Škola group translated the budgetary critique into an implementable proposal. Their open letter rejected both division and stasis in favour of a unified school built on a common core, learning outcomes, and inclusion, cited the state Framework Law, and laid out a staged path the canton could adopt (Inicijativa “Bolja škola”, *Školegijum*, 9 May 2017). Rather than debate identities in the abstract, they specified how to comply with law and improve quality within a single school, including options for national-subject classes and a legal basis for HVSJ to operate as an “experimental school.” In effect, they provided an

implementable alternative for Jajce's schools that represented a much better investment than further segregation.

This bundle of messages did several kinds of work at once. First, it connected the policy to everyday consequences. The “million KM” line became shorthand for a wider critique of cantonal governance: underfunded classrooms, shortfalls in practical teaching, and a tightening labour market that pushes students to learn German before graduation. Second, it answered a tactical problem. When officials tried to infantilise the protest with lines like “go to the disco,” the students talked budgets, curricula, and enrolment trends. They looked less like naïve idealists and more like the only actors making costed, workable proposals about improving education and keeping young people in the town. Third, it travelled well. One did not need expertise in Bosnia's constitutional set-up to grasp that duplicating principals and staff for ninety first-year pupils made little sense. That accessibility helped draw national and international media, which in turn increased pressure on cantonal politicians.

Crucially, the critique was always paired with alternatives. Students called to reinvest in equipment, align programmes with Jajce's tourism economy, and implement a unified school within the existing legal framework. Because the argument combined a clear diagnosis with a feasible plan, it was harder to dismiss them as “just kids,” and harder to defend an expensive duplication that few outside party structures could justify.

Undemocratic/imposed

From the beginning, students framed the canton's plan as something done to them, not with them. In their 8 June 2017 letter they objected to being “manipulated... through non-transparent surveys” and recorded what was happening at Nikola Šop Gymnasium: “the right to express personal opinion has been denied... principal Hrvoje Jurina forbade giving statements [or] support... Students have been intimidated with various punishments, all with the aim of preventing any uprising” (Naša Škola, Facebook, 8 June 2017). The sense of imposition was both top down, adults over children without consultation, and external, a decision taken in Travnik and delivered to Jajce.

The same dynamic played out in person. When students gathered at the cantonal ministry in Travnik, the minister's response became part of the story. As they reported, "over 200 high school students... were outraged" when Minister Katica Čerkez told them to "go to the disco" and accused them of being "a mechanism of the international community" (Naša Škola, Facebook, 21 June 2017). Selma, who accompanied the students, recalled that the minister "hardly accepted a meeting... was not really cooperative... [and] tried to discourage them." Students answered with procedure: they published their own consultation, an HVSJ petition showing overwhelming opposition, and asked to be admitted to the next cantonal assembly session (Jajce Online, 21 March 2017; Naša Škola, Facebook, 21 June 2017).

At school level, institutional contrast made the "imposed" frame visible. HVSJ's principal "fought for us in a kind of bureaucratic way," signalling space for pupil speech on school grounds. At Nikola Šop, students faced explicit threats of punishment and even expulsion for public involvement, which shaped who could appear on camera and who stayed away. Organisers turned that constraint into a message. To protect NŠG pupils who wanted to stand with their peers but feared consequences, they proposed that everyone wear the face of Nikola Šop and march under the line "we are all Nikola Šop." As Mihael explained: "We needed some of the children from the Gymnasium Nikola Šop [to attend]... they can't show their faces on camera... Wouldn't it be funny if we all wear a mask of Nikola Šop's face... so we can all say 'we are all Nikola Šop'?" Hana described how the tactic became a collective choice rather than a cover for a few: even those unafraid to show their faces put the masks on, so the line between protected and unprotected disappeared and the visual became a statement of unity. The effect was double. Practically, it shielded individual pupils from retaliation. Symbolically, it made the heavy-handed threats look absurd: children asking to stay in the same school had to hide their identities, while attempts to police speech appeared as petty authoritarianism.

Hana described how the tactic became a collective choice rather than a cover for a few: even those unafraid to show their faces put the masks on, so the line between protected and unprotected disappeared and the visual turned into a statement of unity (Hana, interview). The effect was double. Practically, it shielded individual pupils from retaliation. Symbolically, it made the heavy-handed threats look absurd: children asking to stay in the same school had to

hide their identities, while a principal's attempt to police speech came across as petty authoritarianism.

By insisting on consultation, documenting intimidation, and staging anonymity as solidarity, students shifted the debate from abstract identity to democratic process and children's rights. The geography of the claim mattered. Reminding observers that the decision originated in Travnik and would be lived daily in Jajce raised the reputational cost of imposing a settlement over local objection, justified taking the protest to the cantonal capital, and made the students' demands to be heard, to be counted, and to be allowed to stay together harder to dismiss.

Put together, the frames did three jobs. They rooted the case in lived experience ("we already live and learn together"), named segregation as harmful and unnecessary, and turned the debate to priorities and fair process. That helped the students look like the adults in the room: petitioning, offering a workable plan, and asking to be heard. Because the message was concrete and easy to grasp, it spread quickly, brought allies in, and raised the political cost of pushing through an unpopular plan.

iv. Lobbying to draw in support from international community

With national coverage growing, the students and their allies set out to turn visibility into leverage by courting international backing. The logic was strategic: as Selma put it, "our politicians are always in fear of the international community," so winning public support would be a "good tool." They pursued a dual track of public signalling and private lobbying designed to raise reputational costs for cantonal officials and reduce risks for pupils and staff. Crucially, they framed their appeals as enforcement of BiH's own laws and court rulings rather than outside interference, and held representatives of the international community to their own rhetorical commitment to ending segregation, pressuring them to transform this into action.

One major obstacle that the movement were contending with in opting for this strategy was the unclear and confused positioning of the international community in the country over the issue of TSUOR. Selma argued that the OSCE, though formally tasked with educational

reintegration, had shifted after high-profile setbacks, most notably in Mostar, from pursuing genuine integration to endorsing “administrative unification,” where schools merge on paper and remain divided in practice (see Hromadžić, 2015, p. 43). Several interviewees stressed a long-standing gap between strong pro-integration rhetoric and limited concrete action. Selma was blunt: “the international community doesn’t have a vision, doesn’t have an idea, doesn’t have people who can implement it.” She also noted that international actors were “deeply divided” over their role in the country. Within this ambiguity the movement saw an opening. International organisations and embassies were looking for a credible success story. The students could offer one, but only if support went beyond “photo opportunities” and translated into sustained pressure. The NGOs and teachers therefore kept steady contact, asked for specific actions, and used public visibility to nudge international partners from statements to involvement.

A key tactic was to anchor every ask in domestic law and court rulings. This positioned international actors not as outsiders, but as facilitators of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s own standards. In public statements and private meetings, movement actors reminded both local politicians and diplomats that the proposal contravened the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education and the 2014 judgment of the Supreme Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which found the practice of Two Schools Under One Roof to be discriminatory (Inicijativa “Bolja škola”, *Školegijum*, 9 May 2017; Kerim, interview). The message was direct: pressing the canton to withdraw was not external interference, it was support for implementing domestic law and court decisions.

These strategies yielded visible returns. As Emir put it, the media and lobbying work “was crucial to get [the support of] OSCE, and the US, German and other embassies.” The OSCE Head of Mission, Jonathan Moore, publicly condemned the plan and urged withdrawal, framing it as contrary to inclusion and to the will of students, and coming to Jajce in June 2016 to meet with and show his support for the students (*Klix*, 8 June 2016). The US Ambassador, Maureen Cormack, met the students in March 2017 and, crucially, helped open doors in Travnik. Selma described this as providing “the assist,” arranging and accompanying meetings with the ministry so pupils could speak for themselves, on the record, and in the room, with

visible diplomatic backing and media present (Selma, interview; Mihael, interview). This visibility signalled that the outcome mattered beyond the canton.

Participants also stressed that some of the most powerful moments happened out of sight of the media and students. Kerim recalled a closed-door exchange in which one ambassador made the line unforgettable: the minister would “segregate these schools only over my dead body.” Diplomatically, public statements were measured; privately, the message was plainer. Quiet pressure signalled to cantonal actors that pushing through the proposal would bring reputational cost; visible visits to Jajce and meetings with the students told principals that reprisals would be noticed.

For Emir, the strongest evidence of impact came from party dynamics at the top. He was informed that Jajce’s Bosniak mayor received a direct instruction from Sarajevo:

I know that the call for SDA Mayor Hozan, came from Bakir [Izetbegović, President of the SDA and then Bosniak Member of the Presidency of BiH], directly from Sarajevo—an order that they should quit this request to have a new secondary school... because even at the Sarajevo level it looked really bad that the Bosniak side... now looked like the bad guys, [that] they want separation.

Read together, these elements help explain how international attention became leverage. Public endorsements from figures like Cormack and Moore, the participation of OHR, and consistent embassy traffic raised the political cost of inaction for cantonal leaders. The same attention reduced personal risk to pupils and staff by signalling that expulsions or sanctions would not pass quietly. The outcome was not structural reform of the education system, but it was decisive in the moment: the proposal was withdrawn, and, by Emir’s account, the instruction to retreat came from the top of the SDA.

Two limits are nevertheless clear. First, international support reacted to a locally led campaign that had already defined the narrative and assembled allies. The students and teachers set the agenda, and international actors followed. Second, the effect was bounded. Attention helped to

stop the immediate plan in Jajce, but it did not by itself resolve the broader pattern of segregated schooling elsewhere. Even so, at the pivotal point of decision, the movement made international attention work for them by framing the ask in law, sequencing outreach with media traction, and insisting on student voices in the rooms where decisions were made.

5C) Outcomes & Impacts

This subchapter assesses what the Jajce campaign achieved within Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and discursive opportunity structures. Following Tilly and Tarrow (2015), it distinguishes three layers of impact: direct effects on policy in Jajce, cultural effects on participants and local practices, and longer-term shifts in repertoires and networks. Building on Harrison (2014), Milan (2016a), and Baća (2023), it also foregrounds prefigurative effects, asking whether the campaign's performances modelled alternative futures, created new political subjectivities, and widened perceptions of what is possible.

i. Immediate policy outcomes in Jajce, and their limits

The headline policy outcome was clear: no new segregated secondary school opened. After a year of pressure, students announced on 17 June 2017 that the mayor had informed them the plan was “withdrawn” and would not proceed (Naša Škola, Facebook, 17 June 2017). The canton's education minister later confirmed the withdrawal (Naša Škola, Facebook, 21 June 2017).

The reversal came with targeted changes inside Jajce's two secondary schools that addressed concerns raised by parts of the Bosniak community. Students could choose the emblem on their matriculation certificates, including an option without the Herzeg-Bosna coat of arms (*Avaz*, 17 December 2017). Optional history and geography classes aligned with the Bosniak curriculum were introduced so that pupils could take a “national group of subjects,” while core teaching remained together (Naša Škola, Facebook, 21 June 2017). A Bosniak deputy principal was also appointed. Participants viewed these adjustments as partial answers to issues cited in the proposal's justification (Emir, interview). The minister coupled these steps with rhetorical commitments, signalling readiness to establish a working group on longer-term education

reforms in the canton, including pupils and sector experts (Naša Škola, Facebook, 21 June 2017).

Set against these gains were clear limits. Although Minister Čerkez pledged to submit, within seven days of meeting the students in June 2017, a request for complete abolition of the decision to the cantonal assembly (Naša Škola, Facebook, 21 June 2017), participants stressed that no repeal was adopted. As Kerim later put it, this was a pause rather than a formal reversal: the Assembly never rescinded its earlier decision, and “the politicians never completely gave up the idea” (Kerim, interview). Luka worried authorities were waiting for “a generation that is susceptible to being divided, meaning that as soon as they see it’s possible to divide schools, they will attempt it again, sooner or later” (Luka, interview). For both, keeping the story public remained essential. Kerim framed continued media work as a deterrent: “the message for [politicians] is if you try to do that again there is a frontline that you will be faced with.”

The more ambitious, longer-term elements of the Bolja Škola proposal were left untouched. There was no move toward a single or common B/C/S curriculum, and no formal restructuring from the Croatian plan to an integrated BiH plan. Primary schools in the town remained segregated. The shelving of the proposal was therefore an important victory, but further structural change toward fully integrated education in Jajce has remained elusive.

ii. Jajce as an isolated case?

Reflecting on the relevance of the outcome in Jajce for the prospects of educational integration in the rest of the country, participants stressed the factors that make Jajce a unique context within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kerim stressed the key distinction between prevention and desegregation in more divided settings where secondary schools are already split:

I have to emphasise that what we did in Jajce is not that we managed to desegregate an already segregated school. What we did was the prevention of a school which was not segregated...We need to make a border between that because desegregating an already segregated school is much harder because these already segregated schools are deeply normalised within the society and population.

Emir highlighted a further constraint: a “wise manoeuvre” by cantonal elites that kept the outcome isolated in Jajce.

Emir explained the active role that the cantonal elites played in limiting the impact of the movement to Jajce. Although higher-level actors saw Jajce as “peripheral,” the success there “made a lot of headache,” since it risked setting a workable precedent. According to Emir, HDZ leaders chose a containment-by-exception approach by supporting “experimental school” status for HVSJ so the arrangement would remain a one-off:

A friend of mine who is in the HDZ told me they got instructions from the headquarters through the Minister of Education to allow Jajce to have this experimental school status, just to isolate the Jajce case from the rest... [Central Bosnia Canton Education Minister Katica Čerkez] was for it to give this to Jajce just to isolate the case of Jajce from the rest of the municipalities who are functioning in this segregative way very well up to date.

Under Article 37 of the Central Bosnia Canton Law on Secondary Education, “experimental school” status is a legal exception that lets the ministry authorise a school to try a different model or curriculum outside the standard framework. Emir described Bolja Škola’s support for this as a pragmatic compromise. It kept students together and addressed concerns among Bosniak parents, which explains why local actors backed it as a temporary solution. At the same time, it fenced the change within HVSJ and within Jajce. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s post-war experience shows how temporary fixes can become permanent. For Emir, this helps explain why “eight years later, nothing concretely happened in the Federation.”

iii. Prefigurative Impacts

Change is possible

One of the strongest symbolic effects was the simple lesson that change is possible. As Kerim put it, in Bosnia it can feel “engraved in stone” that what politicians decide is final, so “there is no... purpose in fighting it.” The win in Jajce “busted” that myth. It also signalled a warning to would-be dividers elsewhere: there is now “a kind of non-formal movement” and “if you try to do that again there is a frontline that you will be faced with.” That not only sends a message

to political elites, but also to grassroots actors, who saw in Jajce that there is a network of actors ready to mobilise when called upon. His own reaction captured the shift in expectations: when OSCE phoned to say the plan was off, the first person he called was his mother, who had told him they would never succeed.

Others read the moment similarly. Emir described it as “the first democratic win in post-war Bosnia” by a grassroots movement. Similarly, Mihael argued it showed “that somehow people can stand up against politics; if enough people rise up, politics is powerless.” Damir put a finer point on the target: the students had achieved a victory against the most powerful tier of government in the Federation: the cantonal level. Together these reflections show why the result mattered beyond policy detail. It reset what seemed thinkable: that a youth-led, locally rooted campaign, speaking in everyday terms and backed by a workable plan, could not only survive official belittling but compel a decision-maker to change course.

Continuing normalisation of protest

Selma linked Jajce’s impact to a wider opening of civic space since 2013–14. Earlier mobilisations reduced fear and made demonstrations feel possible: “you need a few examples of protests to encourage people to go to the street... from 2014 to 2020 there were lots of protests... people were less afraid.” In that context, the Jajce cohort looked like “rock and roll children... They have an idea. They want to change something,” and their win “proved that if you stand up for your rights you can also be a winner in the end.” The result affirmed that resisting is worthwhile.

Normalisation of cross-cantonal protest

Jajce also helped to normalise something rare: cross-cantonal protest. By drawing pupils from other regions to a Jajce-led action in Travnik, the movement framed educational segregation as a country-wide problem rather than a local quarrel. Pre-existing ties through NGOs and student associations made participation feel like solidarity with friends, not outside interference, and logistical support from those organisations lowered the costs of travelling. Selma stressed the symbolic effect: students elsewhere saw the Jajce cohort as “really role

models... people look at them and say, ‘wow I want to be like them as well.’ They have been like rock and roll children... They have an idea. They want to change something.” The result was a visible, legitimate presence from multiple municipalities that destigmatised protesting outside of one’s own canton about an issue affecting the whole country.

The power of movement participation to deepen political awareness

Many students joined out of personal loyalty and local concerns. Through organising, they gained a clearer view of how education policy works and how segregation is reproduced. The process of drafting letters, meeting officials, and speaking to the media turned immediate grievance into a broader political literacy. In that sense, participation in local protest became a pathway to critical engagement with system-level questions. This practical political education makes future engagement more likely.

A message to domestic political actors

Participants believed these signals registered with political elites. Kerim and Selma both pointed out that, since 2017, there have been no further attempts within the Federation to create new segregated secondary schools. Keeping the story alive has communicated a practical deterrent: there is a broad youth network ready to mobilise again, and the political costs of renewed segregation would be high.

6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to understand how a youth-led coalition in Jajce mobilised against a plan to separate secondary schooling inside a system that largely rewards ethnic division, and what this reveals about the opportunities and limits of non-ethnic contention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Read against the literature on divided societies, political and discursive opportunity structures, and dynamic approaches to social movements, the findings point to a simple but important claim. Mobilisation was possible not because national structures became permissive, but because local social fabrics and trusted intermediaries created actionable openings that actors could recognise, frame and use.

The analysis speaks back to three strands of scholarship. First, accounts of political opportunity structures in post-Dayton BiH often emphasise constitutional design, fragmentation and party control as closing the space for non-ethnic mobilisation. The Jajce case confirms that closure at higher levels is real, but shows that local conditions can offset it enough to force retreats by cantonal authorities. Second, work on discursive opportunities suggests that meaning work is consequential in divided settings. Here, a civic and pragmatic frame centred on a shared school proved more resonant in the town than ethnicised counter-frames about cultural protection or administrative necessity. Third, debates on prefigurative politics sometimes treat it as aspirational. In Jajce, prefiguration was practical. Mixed organising, joint statements and visible cooperation did not only advocate integration. They modelled it in public, shifted expectations and made renewed separation riskier. The case therefore refines existing theories by showing how local openings, disciplined framing and credible public performances can generate bounded wins within an unfriendly national environment.

The thesis posed three questions. The first asked how participants understood and navigated opportunities and constraints at municipal, cantonal and state levels. Participants read the context as layered. Nationally they expected little from formal channels, given the normalisation of separate curricula and the persistence of TSUOR. At cantonal level they anticipated limited responsiveness and a tendency to justify separation as a technical fix. At

municipal level they saw risk tied to party influence and social proximity, but also saw opportunities in a town where secondary education had remained shared and cross-ethnic friendships were routine. They acted where risk seemed manageable and leverage real. They kept the story public, used procedures that officials could not easily dismiss, and framed the dispute as a civic question of equal access to one school. They prepared for counter-frames that would re-ethnicise the issue and answered with concrete proposals that addressed stated grievances about national-group subjects and diploma practice, as well as proposing implementable long-term alternatives.

The second question asked which networks, allies and tactics sustained the coalition and helped it signal worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment. The coalition drew strength from simple but dense ties. Teacher allies offered quiet guidance on timing and institutional pathways. Local organisations supplied continuity and contacts. Former students bridged to youth groups in other towns and to journalists. Public actions were chosen to be orderly and visible. Petitions, demonstrations, open letters and meetings with officials were sequenced to raise reputational costs for proceeding. Media work kept pressure steady between peaks. The frame stayed consistent and pragmatic. The movement recognised the limitations of the international community and treated international actors as witnesses and amplifiers: grounding requests in domestic law, leveraging public and private pressure to raise costs for cantonal officials, pushing for sustained support through consistent external engagement, and accepting that support would be helpful yet bounded and ultimately responsive to a locally owned campaign. This mix lowered the threshold for participation, protected participants, and made it harder to cast the campaign as disruptive or partisan.

The third question asked what changed as a result, and how far those changes travelled. The immediate policy effect was clear in Jajce. No new segregated secondary school opened. Adjustments inside the unified schools addressed the proposal's formal triggers, including provision for national-group subjects, choice over diploma insignia and a leadership arrangement that recognised the town's composition. These steps removed the stated rationale for separation. The limits were clear as well. The earlier cantonal decision was not repealed. Primary schools remained segregated. There was no move toward a single or common B, C, S curriculum. Officials effectively contained the outcome by treating Jajce as an experimental or

exceptional settlement rather than as a precedent. Diffusion beyond the town was modest. The episode travelled more as a warning to officials and as encouragement to peers than as a policy model adopted elsewhere. Alongside policy, there were cultural and prefigurative effects that outlasted the decision. Student-led action on a civic frame became thinkable, ties among young activists and supportive teachers widened, and expectations shifted about what is possible in a mixed town.

These findings sharpen our understanding of the research puzzle. Non-ethnic mobilisation in BiH is unlikely but possible. It flourishes where local relationships and intermediaries can offset national closure long enough to make inaction costly for cantonal actors. It is durable only when actors keep the story public, maintain a civic and pragmatic frame, and continue to monitor and hold to account. Scale remains the challenge. Fragmented authority, clientelist incentives and institutionalised separation produce veto points that turn local wins into fenced exceptions. The Jajce case shows both sides at once. It is a real achievement that blocked a new division and made a shared school visible. It is also a bounded achievement that relies on continued vigilance more than structural reform.

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Appendix

Confirmation of Ethical Approval (University of Glasgow)



Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

College of Social
Sciences

Notification of Ethics Application Outcome – UG and PGT Student Applications

Application Details

Undergraduate Student Research Ethics Application Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2024/192/CEERES

Applicant's Name: Robert James Curtis

Project Title: Social mobilisation 'beyond ethnicity' amongst the first post-conflict generation in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Application Status: **Fully Approved**

Date of Review: 30/07/2024

Start Date of Approval 30/07/2024 End Date of Approval 31/12/2025

NB: Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.

Recommendations (where changes are required)

Where changes are required by reviewers all applicants must respond in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee and provide this as the Resubmission Document to explain the changes you have made to the application as well as amending the documents. **Changes to the application form or supporting documents should be highlighted either in block highlight or in red coloured text to assist the reviewers.**

All resubmitted application documents should then be provided.

Approval Subject to Amendments means that the applicant can proceed with data collection with effect from the date of approval, but amendments must be fulfilled.

Amendments Subject to SEF should be submitted to ethics administrator.

If your application is rejected a new application must be submitted to the ethics administrator. Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document provided as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.